

**PLANET: SATURN****SIGNS: CAPRICORN; AQUARIUS****Glyph:** ♄

**Key words and qualities:** Form; structure; laws; “author”-ity; focus; boundaries; discipline (being a disciple); responsibility; the capacity to respond appropriately to time’s demands.

**Color:** Indigo

**Metal:** Lead

**Physical body affinities:** Spine; bones; teeth; skin; the structure and boundary of the body; the body’s center of gravity (the will center), located right below the navel.

**Day of the week:** Saturday (“Saturn’s Day”)

**Festival:** Winter solstice (also called “Saturnalia”)

**Way of honoring:** Get a job—or, rather, create a job. Saturn says, “He who hesitates gets bossed.” Either we work with our Saturn or someone else will. Also, we can honor Saturn through introspection. Solitude is the cure for loneliness. Saturn asks the question “Whose movie am I in?” then reminds us to reassume directorial control by inhaling our authority back from the world.

**Shadow, when not honored:** Depression; inertia; fear; claustrophobia. When Saturn has us down and it feels like we’re doing resistance training in life, Saturn says, “Literalize it by lifting weights.” If we’re off rhythm, Saturn tells us to drum our own rhythms. We can also make use of deep, rhythmic breathing as a way of finding our center.

# SATURN

♄

## THE POWER OF DEFINITION

*I Must Create a System  
or be enslaved by another Man's  
I will not Reason and Compare  
My business is to Create!*

WILLIAM BLAKE

The Saturnalia, the ancient world's often orgiastic carnival celebrated at the winter solstice, was a societal ritual of casting off the constraints of the previous order. At this time the Greeks loosed the chains from statues of Saturn. On this longest night of the year, the old order was sacrificed, unbound, and a period of timelessness was celebrated out of which the new order would be born.

Saturn, known by the Greeks as Chronos (or Time), is the farthest planet from the sun easily visible to the naked eye. Saturn thus demarcates the boundary between the visible and invisible.

The planet Saturn is bounded by a unique ring system that has been a source of wonder for its symmetric beauty since Galileo first gazed upon it through his telescope in 1610. Ringmaster and Ring-leader, Saturn's province includes time, boundaries, laws of limitation and definition, form, structure, and authority.

We begin with Saturn because he presides over the new year and new beginnings, as well as being the god who defines our terms and our tasks.

### THE INNER AUTHOR

*Authority* contains the word *author*. To accept the responsibility of being the authors of our own lives, we must reclaim our authority. Saturn often gets a bad rap from people who know a little or even a lot about astrology and associate this god with hardship, fear, and loneliness. But those negative associations are merely symptoms of fending off rather than embracing the Saturn part of ourselves, of not honoring the god properly. Fear is a symptom of loss of authority; when we give away our authority, we *should* be afraid.

We give our authority away all too readily—to our father, our employer, our lover, the cop, the state, and even the random cuckoo person. A friend tells the story of a scene she witnessed in New York: a man was wandering along a crowded subway platform approaching people, not violently, but in a crazily emphatic way. He would stare at each one intently (perhaps he was a Scorpio), saying to one person, “You’re out!” and to another, “You’re in!” As he went from person to person declaring them “In!” or “Out!” it was clear that everyone was really hoping he or she would be declared “In!” We have a vestigial tribal dread of being deemed an outcast, of not being chosen for the team. If our desire to fit in is so strong that we will give our Saturn away to a random crazy street person, what about the random crazy political leader? The word *idiot* comes from the Greek word *idiotis*, meaning “one who blindly abdicates personal well-being to the public domain.”

Saturn is the part of us that is the casting director who inherits the conditioned script from family and culture by which we unwittingly cast people in the movie of our life. The script tells us how things are, how the world works, and what we can expect. The idiot within hires unsuitable lovers, incompetent policemen, abusive

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bosses, and other guaranteed failures. These oppressive figures appear to act independently of us. Because we cast them in our drama, however, they really function according to the inherited scripts, which constrict our expectations. And expectation has everything to do with outcome. Self-possessed Saturn, by contrast, liberates us from our complicity in other people's usurpation of our authority.

## SATURN IN YOUR BIRTH CHART

The position of Saturn in your chart records the quality of your earliest encounter with authority. Think of your father's beliefs, spoken or not, about what is or is not possible in life, and how he made you feel. Have you had subsequent relationships, under different guises, where similar conditions prevailed?

If a woman had an overbearing, tyrannical father who had little respect for her creative autonomy, a template is formed whereby her inner casting director will unwittingly hire similar men as lovers. This casting director will send forth a casting call: "Seeking energetically depressed, tyrannical men who will sabotage my creative drive and judge all my creative impulses to be unrealistic and impossible." At a certain point of critical despair (the technical term is that one has attained the profound state of "had it"), that woman will declare, "I am writing this role out of my movie! Henceforth, I am casting for self-sufficient, emotionally supportive, pragmatic dreamers who adore me." Only when we have become exasperated enough to see the irony that we are complicit in our servitude can we break the chains of patterned expectation.

Traditionally, men have often "hired" women to live their spiritual lives, while women have "hired" men to enact their ambitions. These relationships are neither conscious nor enlightened, and while they make no one happy, for centuries they have nonetheless been proffered as templates of conformity. We now aspire toward much more fun models in which every man works on his own spir-

itual relationship to life and every woman lives out her own ambition. Living through other people, whether our children or our lovers, will ultimately lead to a melodrama at some point. "What do codependents see when they die? Someone else's life flashes before their eyes."

Rewriting our personal scripts builds up the spiritual muscle tone we need to participate in rewriting the culture's collective script. "We used to be unconsciously casting for immature, unimaginative leaders motivated by greed and expediency to play the role of our political leaders. But now we are writing that role out of the movie. Henceforth we are casting for women and men embodying and motivated by long-term pragmatic vision and ingenuity for the good of the entire community, yea, unto the next seven generations of unborn!"

A daily experimental meditation for all of us would be to catch ourselves expressing an undesirable "reality," such as, "I'm overwhelmed by all the emotional responsibilities in my life," and restate it as if you had already solved the problem: "I *used to be* overwhelmed, *but now* I attract sufficient grace and support from the gods that my previous burdens have become sources of joy and renewed enthusiasm." Remember our first Visionary Activist Principle: Imagination lays the tracks for the Reality Train to follow.

Saturn says that we will encounter any inner issues we shirk, or qualities we refuse to possess, outside ourselves in a form we might not like so much. Without our inner authority, outer authority will direct us: "He who hesitates gets bossed." It is crucial to bring Saturn issues into consciousness so that we do not jeopardize our self-determination in a conflict with external authority. If we do find ourselves in such a situation, the extent to which we have not dealt with our Saturn issues will determine the frightening or burdensome ferocity of the encounter.

Challenging external circumstances drive us inward to make an appointment with Saturn to rewrite the script. "How do you want

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your life story to proceed?” inquires Saturn, the inner author. If we do not go inward willingly, then Saturn will reach up and yank us down forcefully. The involuntary yanking downward is very often experienced as depression, but is instead a reminder not to live life by default.

## EARNING INSIGHT

Saturn has traditionally been called “the dweller on the threshold,” or “the ring-pass-not.” These monikers refer to the scary initiatory ordeal each of us must undergo in which we encounter all that holds us back or keeps us fearfully obedient to a life of oppressive limitation. Usually, the catalyst for this transformation is an experience in which we break a rule, violate a taboo, or otherwise disobey the tribal elders.

Years ago I traveled with a group through the Yucatán Peninsula. We arrived at Chichén Itzá late at night on the dark of the Moon, and passed the locked gates of the pyramid site on the way to our hotel. Everyone else went to bed, but I strolled past the gates once again and found that now they were mysteriously unlocked—a clear invitation to break the rules. I groped along the path in complete darkness until suddenly the Great Pyramid loomed above me. Even though climbing it was prohibited, I felt compelled. My heart was pounding as loudly as I had ever heard it. At the top, hot gusts of air were being exhaled through the monstrous mouth of the temple portal at the apex. Remembering the teachings of Carlos Castaneda on his own apprenticeship in dealing with spooky invisible forces (basically Mexican *feng shui*), I kept trying to find my right spot on which to perch. One particular spot was way too scary, so I moved to one with a more tolerable level of dread. There I stayed through much of the night. As I descended, I was full of exuberant confidence that filled all of the previously fearful pockets of my life. “Nothing can stop me now!” my previously terrified heart exulted.

Later, speaking with our guide, I described the ascent and the particular point on the summit that had been way too scary. An otherwise extremely rational scientist-scholar, he paused and said that on that exact scary spot, some weeks earlier, a fellow Mayan scholar had stood and playfully called out, invoking Chac, the Mayan god of lightning. Suddenly a dark cloud moved swiftly toward the pyramid's summit and a lightning bolt struck the man dead as he stood in the midst of a throng of tourists.

The initiatory ordeal is by definition a solitary experience that leads us to self-reflection. Solitude, Saturn's sacramental activity, is the portal to the magical realm where power larger than us resides. Very often when we are alone we feel most connected to everything. Time spent alone allows us to "consider" our lives, to align the inner gods with the outer gods of the cosmos, to disentangle ourselves from the phantasmagoria of seductive distractions.

Without reflection, we become as vulnerably off balance as if we were sleep deprived. The resulting lack of clarity is what predisposes us unconsciously to hire other people to play out parts of our lives. As Carl Jung said, "The highest, most decisive experience is to be alone with one's own self. You must be alone to find out what supports you, when you find that you can not support yourself. Only this experience can give you an indestructible foundation."

Rather than helping us fend off loneliness, Saturn encourages us to embrace it. We live in an antireflective culture, where much of what passes for entertainment is merely a distraction from the terror of being alone. We manufacture "pandemonium," which originally meant "making a lot of noise," in order to drive away the scary parts of our psyche, our demons. But partying will not cure loneliness. Solitude is the cure for loneliness; like cures like.

Saturn teaches that the initiatory ordeal of pushing through dread precedes self-possession. The spiritual traditions of many cultures require a time of arduous solitude as a necessary prerequisite to self-knowledge. I once spent a week alone in a Tibetan retreat

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cabin, fasting on nothing but roasted barley tea. Even though I was on a Zen meditation retreat (the cabin had been borrowed from the Tibetans), each night I was visited by remarkably vivid Tibetan demons. I accounted for this by the fact that previous solitary inhabitants had been skilled in the remarkable Tibetan Buddhist discipline of potent imagining. I had inadvertently borrowed their residual demons as a means to experience my fears.

By the end of the week I found myself rocking back and forth in a manner I had previously only associated with mental patients (who may very well be unconsciously practicing traditional spiritual disciplines without a context of guidance and meaning). Upon subsequent reflection, I understood that I had traveled way out there, and that the rocking was a way of rocking myself back into the rhythmic embrace of the cosmos. In both of my initiatory ordeals, if I had not leaned into my fear, but had turned around halfway up the pyramid or left the cabin in the middle of the week, I would have felt disappointed and crazed.

## HITTING ROCK BOTTOM

Saturn says not only that insight must be earned but also that breakdown precedes breakthrough. On another occasion, while camping in the Mexican rain forest, I experienced a night of profound vision (“All really is One—what a relief!”) only after undergoing an extreme ordeal. I had spent weeks in the freezing cold jungle followed by the most amazingly dramatic illness, which included Olympic-class projectile vomiting among other feats. While recovering, I had crawled under a tree, where I was eaten alive by chiggers. I now like to think, “Ah, good fun and well worth it. But while I *used to* have to earn insight through arduous physical hardship, *now* I can glean profound insight from lying on the beach.”

It is hard work to break free of the constraints of suppressive orthodoxy, a.k.a. the Reality Police. Right before a change, we encounter all our obstacles to that change. This is known as a “sun-

set effect”: as a pattern goes down, it glows most vividly. Just before people are ready to change, they often thrash around, saying, “I’ve already worked through these issues, so why am I dealing with all of this again?” The answer is, “These issues are coming up again because you’ve *almost* resolved them.” When you feel this intensification coming on, remember Saturn’s motto: “Things are so hard, I must be almost done.”

Humbling experience is often a gift from Saturn, who loves to remind us that it is a long road from insight to full mastery. I have done readings for innumerable big-time spiritual teachers, and have yet to meet a person who has fully mastered or embodied his or her own teachings. On my radio program, *The Visionary Activist Show*, I invite anyone on who has a piece of the puzzle for co-creating a more loving and ingenious world. After one guest’s visit, I received a number of letters requesting me to “screen my guests for know-it-all arrogance.” I responded by saying that this would be an impossible task, and that neither I nor any of my guests were meant to be exemplars, but rather that we—listeners and guests alike—are all aspirants.

Saturn says there is no shame or blame in landing hard, as long as we acknowledge that we have been thrown by the spirited horse of our own teaching. Undaunted (or medium-daunted), we dust ourselves off, regain a sense of humor, then remount—in order to dive again.

Saturn advises us not to resist emotional currents, but swim with them. Joseph Campbell said the only advice he would ever give is, “If you find yourself falling—dive!” This expression originates in the story of James Joyce and his daughter, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic. He took her to all the great healers of Europe, to whom he said, “She’s not mad, she’s a genius like me, exploring the unconscious.” When they finally arrived at Jung’s doorstep, he basically said to Joyce, “You’re a genius—she’s nuts; the difference is, you’re diving, she’s falling.”

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A kayaker friend told me that in the Potomac River there are dangerous currents, known as “keeper currents,” which go from the surface of the river all the way down to the bottom. If you fall into one, the natural response is to struggle against it to come back up for air. But if you fight it, you will drown. The only way out is to go all the way down to the bottom and come up with the current on the other side. Very often, dealing with dark moods is like falling into a keeper current. You want to struggle out, but Saturn says, “No, you’re in a keeper current. Go all the way down and you’ll come up the other side.” You need faith to do this because sometimes the bottom is quite far away. If you have not touched bottom, you begin to worry. Maps and philosophical systems can be reassuring navigational guides.

One of Saturn’s essential maps and quirky navigational guides is the Gurdjieffian level system, which is an amusing model for characterizing what is or is not possible. In this system, down is up, and is definitely the way through the dark and the terrifying into freedom and clarity. Created by Gurdjieff, a Capricorn teacher with a strong trickster streak, it starts with “negative 6,000 consciousness,” which is primitive, superstitious belief. Up one level is negative 3,000, which is community belief, group mind, conventional thinking, consensus reality. The next level up is negative 1,500, called King Ego: “I’m a unique individual who has been to Esalen, and therefore I no longer have to obey the dictates of the group.”

Rising another level is negative 768, called “theoretical mastery,” in which the initiate succumbs to the illusion that he or she has theoretically mastered entire cosmologies of how the universe works. The next level is negative 384, the domain of depression. One says, “God, I was so pretentious. I thought I knew everything in these previous states of existence, but now I just feel bleak and empty. Life sucks.” Near the top is negative 192, suicidal panic. This is close to breakthrough. The last negative state, negative 96, is complete remorse, the realization of having stingily refused the generous

offers of the universe to play. One says, “Oh my God, I’ve really blown my life.”

Finally the soul arrives at the next level, zero—“Ah, clarity!”—the perception of how things actually are. Then we ascend into the positive levels, where we are agents of laws (read “planets”) rather than subject to them. It is in these upper clear realms that we are capable of creating prophecy rather than living prediction. Gurdjieff’s (read Saturn’s) crucial joke is that the negative numbers refer to the number of Saturnine laws or constraints upon imagination to which we are subject when we are vibrating at that level.

The implications of Gurdjieff’s levels are wonderful. One joke is that we are not meant to believe in his system, because that would put us right down at the bottom of it, at negative 6,000. Another implication is that theory tends to degrade into belief. One generation’s negative 768 insight becomes the next generation’s negative 3,000 belief. This also occurs when you take on somebody else’s original work without doing your own. A Tibetan scripture says, “Knowledge must be burned, hammered, and beaten like gold. Then one can wear it as an ornament.” We must never uncritically, hence passively, receive teaching of any kind, let alone “spiritual teaching.”

Finally, we accommodate or descend to the level of the company we keep. We all know that after spending time with certain people, we feel as if much less is possible. We sentence ourselves to voluntary prison when spending time feels like serving time.

We go up and down these levels all day, but we tend to have a home base. This system allows us to become aware of where we are, and by doing so, we are immediately granted the power of the clear zones. Acts of attention put us on the express elevator to transcendent clarity and amused confidence. In the “company town” model, where you have a full-time job that you hate and are so depleted and exhausted that all you can do when you get home is order pizza and turn on the television, three thousand laws are always limiting what is or is not possible for you.

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Fast food is negative-3,000 food that drugs us into consensus reality. During the Gulf War, which I bitterly opposed, I indulged in a Big Mac for the first time in twelve years. For about two hours afterward I had no problem with our foreign policy.








Anything, including astrology, can be practiced on any level. One can go to an astrologer and get a negative-6,000 superstitious, fear-inducing reading or a negative-3,000 conformist reading, or a negative-1,500 predictive reading. The reason predictions are unpredictable is that they completely depend on the level on which they are staged. This is why Visionary Activist Principle Zero exhorts: "Believe nothing, entertain possibilities." Even if, because of some fluke, something we believe happens to be true, we are still giving our Saturn away. If we believe in the truth, but we have not earned it through our own work and observation, we are still limited by negative-6,000 superstitions or negative-3,000 group-mind social edicts.

Another of Gurdjieff's pranks is that as one goes up the scale toward clarity, one is actually becoming more psychotic. Negative 384 is depression; negative 192 is suicidal panic; negative 96 is remorse. The next time a friend or client calls up and says, "Oh, I'm so depressed," you can respond, "That's fantastic! Stay with it! Suicidal panic, remorse, then you're home free!" Of course, these upper levels are dynamically unstable, and you do not want to stay there alone for too long. We need the convivial support of our community to survive breakthrough.

The level chart demonstrates why we cannot judge another person by simple rules of outward conformity. Someone may be eating her steak in a reverent, clear manner, while another might be viciously, self-righteously chewing his tofu in a state of negative 3,000, simply because everyone around him is eating tofu. Saturn reminds us that it is the inner intention that determines the level of limitation.

The real secret of the Saturnine level chart is that in the upper levels of clarity we playfully move between being the agents of the gods and being their transparency in the unique way that only each one of

## GURDJIEFFIAN LEVEL SYSTEM

	24 12 3	} Co-creation/Being Agents of the Gods		
	0		Clarity	
	-96		Remorse	
	-192	Suicidal Panic		
	-384	Depression/Everything Sucks		
	-768	Theoretical Mastery		
	-1,500	King Ego		
	-3,000	Societal Mind		
	-6,000	Superstition		

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us can offer. This is the goal: to live in the upper realms, where full creative participation and service to life is possible. The more time we spend at a particular level, positive or negative, the easier it is to return there. Food, music, friends, films, entertainment, and books all encourage a particular level by their vibrational hum. Harlem minister Reverend Ike reminds us that “you don’t owe it to anyone to talk negative talk with them. Which is why I tell you all every now and then, change your phone number. People ask me if I ever go back home, I say, ‘Hell, no, I haven’t been there in years.’” This Saturnine level map encourages us always to consciously choose the literal and psychic nutrients that support a desirable level of creative freedom.

## B E I N G C O O L

Saturnian success in all aspects of life is contingent upon accepting self-responsibility. The Yoruba word from which we get our expression “cool” originally meant “responsible.” The concept of “cool” popularized by jazz musicians is actually identical to the Yoruba usage. “He’s a cool cat” meant “he’s cool-headed; he takes care of what he should tend.” We will return to this all-important concept of “cool-headedness” in Mercury’s chapter. Mercury governs the head, and in this respect it is interesting to note that the alchemists referred to Saturn as *Mercurius senex* (Old Mercury). Saturn says it is a cultural imperative to restore “cool” to its original definition and overcome the part of ourselves that is resistant to being “cool,” that says, “Uh-oh, might get something done.”

Carl Jung was cool. Someone once asked why he did not take the psychoactive plant substance mescaline, to which he replied that his reluctance was not a moral one. He felt that diving into the unconscious always bestows upon us new tasks and responsibilities, and that our dreams and intuitions bestow upon us a sufficient amplitude of assignments. He said that in the unlikely event that he felt he had completed all that his unconscious had already assigned him, then he would take psychoactive plant sacraments.

Saturn's tough reputation is accounted for by its infliction of pain on those who try to avoid its dictates. Unlived tasks, especially the unfulfilled responsibilities of living one's dream, can poison the psyche.

A cultivated Saturn is, on its highest level, the Teacher who has the ability to respond appropriately to any circumstance. Saturn's qualities are weight, seriousness, form, structure, and heaviness. The word *guru* in Hindi comes from the root *gur*, meaning "heavy" or "weight." The word *heavy*, as used in the 1960s, meant "really substantial, having weight." Saturn is the guru, the self-possessed cool-headed person who takes care of responsibilities.

Saturn is the container of our lives, comprising all of our responsibilities, all the things we have signed up to do—the children, the work, the projects. Saturn makes a complete orbit every twenty-eight to thirty years, changing signs every two and a half years. So two and a half years is an important interval, as is one-quarter of twenty-eight, since it makes a 90-degree angle (a square) to itself. We have all heard about the "seven-year itch." Saturn prompts you to reassess your commitments every two and a half years in a minor way, every seven years in a big way.

Reassessment occurs when we wake up in the morning and reflect, "Well, here's me and there's my life. Do they match?" The degree to which they do not match creates an irritant, like a grain of sand in an oyster. Dissatisfaction is an uncomfortable but necessarily for change. Playful work begins with the intention to create a more appropriate life. External guidance can be useful, as long as we never surrender our Saturn to the predictions of a counselor, an astrologer, or an analyst.

### THE THEATER OF EFFECTIVE MAGIC

A client of mine was so depressed that her therapist wanted her to take antidepressants, whereas her acupuncturist wanted her to be treated with needles. So she asked me, her astrologer (not for want

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of a staff was this person down in the dumps), which course she should pursue. We went back and forth for some time, examining both options but going nowhere, when finally Saturn, speaking through me, said, "Actually, it doesn't matter! If you define and clarify your intention, then either course of action will be effective or else the appropriate path will become clear and unconflicted. Concentrating on 'which' or 'how' is a big distraction, and only serves to amplify quandary and paralytic angst."

We had her ritually declare her intention to be healed, by saying it, writing it down, burning the piece of paper, and taking the ashes away with her to scatter in the river. Some months later she called to say that the ritual act had really set her life in motion. She had pursued neither course of therapy offered by the professionals, but had devised her own. Having thrown out many elements of her deadweight past, she was bopping away on her life course and feeling quite splendid.

Saturn says concentrate on what, not on how. Clarify and focus. Then declare your desire to the universe through ritual—remember Principle Number Four: "The only way the gods know we're asking for help is ritual." For our purposes now, we will define ritual as any physical act, be it mundane or theatrical, that we imbue with invisible intention. We can merely sweep the floor, or we can sweep out the past as we sweep the floor. The ritually expressed intention magnetizes us to external opportunity in accord with our desires.

Neuroscientists have found that brain cells fire not just upon action, but immediately upon formation of an intention. Saturn is the part of us that sets our intentions, that gives us the power to focus and define our boundaries, our terms, and our purpose. Through intention, we begin to grow the form in which that intention will be realized from inside out, rather than having it externally imposed.

Saturn says, "There are no arbitrary impediments." All obstacles are intended to catalyze us to experiment with different parts of our

psyche that we would not explore unless compelled. In times of extremity, we will try things we might not think of in less demanding situations. When all else fails, try magic.

Because it represents structure, Saturn is reflected in our dramas with our spine, bones, and teeth, as well as with our skin—our boundary. The spine is the literal and symbolic arena in the body where all of our experiences of feeling supported (or not) are enacted. People often experience lower back pain when they encounter any loss of support, especially the death of their fathers or economic dread. Part of physical healing requires opening to other modes of support. We must ask for help from the realm of the invisible, often the spirit realm of ancestors and dreams.

One way to perform a Saturn ritual is to enact the metaphor physically. For example, innumerable traditions have “unbinding rituals.” The Yoruba suggest that you tie a cord loosely around yourself, imbuing it with the symbolism of the current restraints you wish to shed. The cord is tied in such a way that it drops as you raise your hands. Houdini may be thought of as a high priest of Saturn, as he took this ritual to amazing extremes.

Saturn teaches the art of mundane physical magic. If you’re feeling constrained, tie yourself up—and escape. If you’re feeling weighed down, lift weights. Saturn transits can make you feel as if God’s knee were on your chest, or as if you were doing resistance training with weights on. Eventually, you will reach a point when you unstrap the weights and realize how strong you have become.

We feed Saturn when we actively choose our focus. Saturn says, “The truth of what we worship is what we spend our time on,” regardless of what we say is important to us. A friend of mine says she never clips coupons, because it’s a trick to get us to worship industrialism. When we do not consciously choose our focus, we get mugged by myriad distractions—time theft.

## CAUTIONARY TALES: EATEN BY SHADOW

One of the pitfalls of reclaiming our authority is the temptation to become authoritarian. Tyranny, rigidity, and insecurity are symptoms that indicate we have been eaten by the shadow side of Saturn. When we're out of touch with our inner rhythm, we lose our sense of confidence, flexibility, and humor.

The tarot card associated with Saturn is the Devil (Saturn's shadow devolves into Satan), which depicts a devil who has two Adam and Eve figures in chains. The chains are loose, however, so the people can take them off at any time, once they realize their true situation. The devil, Saturn, makes a hand gesture resembling the Vulcan salute, which means "All that you see is all there is."

Each tarot card has an emotional attribute; the Devil's Saturnian quality is mirth, and his jokes are manifold. The chains are loose—we can take them off! The visible world is but a tiny proportion of reality—ha, ha! Laughter breaks the trance of bondage and elicits liberation. One of the most serious teachings of Zen Buddhism is to get up every morning, stare in the mirror, and roar with laughter.

Saturn says that humorlessness is one of the early warning signs of conforming to the Reality Police. Swami Beyondananda (a.k.a. comic philosopher Steve Bhaerman) reminds us that we live in a culture that suffers from irony deficiency. A humorless atmosphere arises when we have become rigid because of not doing our inner work.

A Jungian analyst friend and I were looking at a photograph of a potter who was making beautiful, large, feminine, womb-shaped pots. My friend said, "Mmm, careful of that guy. He's very rigid." I said, "Why do you say that?" "Look," he replied, "he's working on the outside with these beautiful feminine forms, and unless he's really working on himself, it's going to constellate the opposite, a kind of inner rigidity."

If we are antiauthoritarians, we fight against tyrants, but very often this act will constellate the tyrant in us. We might even say that in the 1960s, activism failed because of an inattention to inner work. People who were antiauthoritarian became tyrannical and authoritarian. All who seek to create a better and more just society—whether we are inner-city activists, environmentalists, or feminists—risk becoming the animus-dominated new patriarchy. In fighting against something, we can become humorless, a symptom of loss of Saturn: “Uh-oh, almost lost my sense of humor.”

Another useful metaphor for Saturn comes from sociologists who shot videotapes of people walking down the street. They then took these clips into prison where they showed them to muggers and asked them which people they would choose to mug. The muggers replied that they would mug the ones who walked in an arrhythmic or uncoordinated manner.

There are many ways of getting mugged, not just on the street. You can be mugged in a conversation, in a relationship, or at work. The telltale sign is loss of one’s authority and sense of self, a feeling of being off balance. Saturn is our ballast, our basic center. In fact, this god lives in our real center, the psychic uterus, right below our navel.

The word *hysteria*, derived from the Latin word for uterus, addresses this Saturnine issue of loss of center. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says, “Women being much more liable than men to this disorder, it was originally thought to be due to a disturbance of the uterus. . . . Former names for the disease were *vapours* and *hysterical passion*.” A therapeutic colleague once described hysteria as occurring when one enters a world that is not of one’s own definition. The process begins with detachment, which becomes loneliness, which becomes hungry yearning. Hungry yearning tilts us off balance so that we easily fall into someone else’s game, where we then thrash crazily like a hooked fish. Thrashing crazily could be

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called the predominant symptom of the late twentieth century. But flailing is actually a healthy reaction to an unhealthy situation, as when a fish attempts to become unhooked.

Historically, hysteria has been observed most frequently in women who have had to live in worlds defined by men. But now the masks have come off, and thrashing crazily is available to both sexes in recognition that neither is in a world of its choosing.

In the Saturnian domain, to heal from this loss of balance or center, one has to become the opposite of arrhythmic—to become self-possessed of one's own rhythm. When we are suffering the symptoms of loss of Saturn, characterized by feeling vulnerable, frightened, or depressed, then we must regain our internal rhythm. If not, our frustrations will be forced deep within, where they will become toxic and eventually erupt in other domains, such as health. So, we drum, dance, lift weights, train, and breathe—slowly, deeply, rhythmically.

Whenever we are trying to resolve something, the god of rhythm advises: pulse. Put tension and attention on the issue, but then take it off. For instance, while intimate relationships certainly have their own tensions, sometimes they become a repository for the tensions and dissatisfactions of other parts of life. How do we tell the difference? If we just lean on the challenging issue and repeat, "Should I stay in this relationship or not, should I stay in this relationship or not . . .," nothing can move. Saturn tells us to pulse instead. Ask the question, "Should I stay or leave?" then take the pressure off and go to some other part of life. When you return, ask yourself, "Is the relationship the source of the dissatisfaction, or merely the repository of all my misery?" Ask questions that enlist Saturn to help you define your life.

Each of us has a unique rhythm. The essence of effective body work or meditation is reestablishing the body's pulse, getting the body reacquainted with its own rhythm. Saturn work is solo work

because we have to go alone and undistracted on an inward journey to find our unique pulse. Saturn is the part of our psyche that keeps the beat, playing bass in the band, several layers beneath the busyness of the world.

### TRY THIS AT HOME: INHALING YOUR AUTHORITY

A temporal-cultural (as opposed to eternal) truth is that very few people are honored, validated, or approved of by their fathers. Saturn in our chart invites us to give up that wired-to-fail yearning for external approval (a yearning disability). Why not make a magical commitment to yourself right now that you are willing to give up seeking the approval of your father (or anyone you may have hired as a stand-in) by the time you finish reading this chapter.

Saturn says it is good to set ourselves small tasks like this. Carlos Castaneda's colleague Taisha Abelard remembers being given an assignment by her teacher. She was to go off by herself, into a cave where she was to remember every erotic encounter she had ever had, and to inhale back in her authority from that encounter. This is very Saturnian, to ask, "To whom did I give away the capacity to feel good about myself?" and to inhale that power back in.

Breathing exercises and meditations are found in all cultures, reminding us that we have the capacity to choose where we place our attention and on what we spend our time. The root word for breath and spirit in many cultures is the same. Breathing is the bridge between the conscious and the unconscious, between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. We breathe without thinking about it, but we can also control our breathing.

Take a deep breath. Inhale your authority, calling it back from the wild reaches of past disbursement. Exhale, feeling relieved and calm. Taking back your Saturn does not deprive any other person of something that they need. Carrying other people's Saturns around just weighs them down and gives them a grouchy swagger.

## S A T U R N

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Imagine taking a golden knife (Saturn's scythe, a curved knife symbolic of harvest, death, and rebirth) and cutting any cords that are attached to your center, right below your navel. Follow those cords to the people who are leaning too heavily on you, and cut the cords of dependency at their end, too. See those people standing strong and radiant on their own two feet.

The Chinese art of *ch'i gong* provides us with the coordinates of the center. Imagine a vertical line from the base of your spine to the crown of your head. Now imagine a horizontal line from the small of your back straight through to just below your navel. Place your attention at the point where these two lines intersect. This is a place where there is never any fear.

Because the color associated with Saturn is deep blue-violet, imaginatively inhale deep blue-violet as you center. Inhale this color into an imagined circle surrounding you. Here you are self-possessed, inwardly focused, gathering your wits, autonomous, resetting your rhythm. Return to this slow, deep, rhythmic breathing whenever autonomy and courage are desired.