

VENUS Part 1 - Queen of Heaven and Earth



"Magnificat" Sandro Botticelli (1483)

***On July 23rd 2023, Venus disappears from the evening sky and returns
on August 17th 2023 as the Morning Star.***

In ancient Sumeria the planet we call Venus was revered as a personification of the Goddess Inanna, hailed as 'Queen of Heaven and Earth'. The myth of Inanna is a poignant story of the soul maturing from personal to transpersonal Love, through self-confrontation and loss. It is an allegory of the visible movements of the planet, and also describes the meaning of Venus in astrology. To marvel at the splendour of Venus poised graciously in the night sky, radiating increasing brilliance before disappearing from view, is indeed to contemplate the poignancy of transience, and the inevitability of loss. We need then to arise early to greet her re-appearance...if we are not watchful in the pre-dawn hours we may not notice her gentle morning return, and fear that she has gone forever.

The planet Venus in astrology is about value, of self and others. It concerns what we find worthwhile, what we value, appreciate and seek to attract into our lives. Thus Venus also signifies relationship, and represents the energy of Eros or connection, attraction and pleasure, harmony, beauty and joy. Venus addresses how we handle losing these precious experiences and qualities, and how we might defend against allowing them at all. Every 18 months or so, Venus begins a retrograde cycle, where she appears to reverse direction, disappears from view, makes a conjunction with the Sun, reappears and then turns direct. During these times we are given the opportunity to plumb the depths of our relationships, finish unfinished business, release the past and renew our capacity for love. Love matures in synch with this cycle.

The story of Inanna

Inanna has plucked a single tree from the chaotic floodwaters which mark the beginning of times. Day and night she cares for it, in a lonely vigil, longing for her consort and her throne. Inanna duly becomes Queen, but only after she has received her spiritual heritage from her father in the form of qualities needed to fulfil her role. She also has to stand firm against her father when he tried to take back his gift to her. Eventually Inanna is introduced to Dumuzi, the humble young shepherd who will be her husband. At first she rejects him, but relents as he proudly pleads his own case. There follows an ecstatic union of the young Queen and the shepherd, who thus becomes god-king and takes the throne beside her. Inanna departs for the Underworld to witness the funeral rites for Gugulanna, the 'Bull of Heaven', the husband of her sister, Erishkigel.

She is stopped at each of the seven gates leading to Erishkigel's abode, and must surrender the symbols of her worldly power. Her crown, necklace, breastplate, measuring rod and finally her robe must all go until she stands naked before her distraught sister. This symbolizes energy moving down through the seven major chakras in a process of purification. Our worldly accomplishments are a hindrance on this inner journey and must be relinquished. At the base chakra, the root, lies our deepest sense of despair, for here resides the densest illusion of our spiritual isolation, and all our incomplete grieving. It is the place of inconsolability, where we hold to familiar grief rather than release ourselves into the Void of Unknowing.

Erishkigel fixes her 'Eye of Death' on Inanna. She is killed and hung on a peg to rot. Meanwhile, Inanna has taken the precaution of asking her maidservant to send help if she does not return. The alarm is raised. Enki, the god of Wisdom and the Waters comes to her aid, with little creatures made from the dirt under his finger-nails. They slip unnoticed into the Underworld and approach Erishkigel, to witness and echo her lamentations, affirming her suffering. The call and response of compassion eventually softens her heart, and she offers a gift in exchange for their kindness. Immediately, they request the body of Inanna, upon which they sprinkle the waters of life. Inanna lives!

Return and redemption

As Inanna prepares to leave the Underworld, she is told she must send a substitute. She exits surrounded by a cloud of demons, looking around in horror. Who shall she condemn to the Underworld? Her children? Her faithful maidservant? She cannot. Then she sees her former consort Dumuzi occupying the throne which he gained through their union. He is oblivious to her suffering. Inanna fixes her 'Eye of Death' on him, and he flees into the desert, but eventually the demons catch up with him and he succumbs to his fate. A great wail goes up as Inanna mourns the loss of her husband by her own doing. Then Inanna sees Dumuzi's sister, beside herself with grief, and her heart is touched. She may not reverse her choice, but she decrees that although Dumuzi will spend half the year in the Underworld, he may return to Earth for the remaining half. The cycle of destruction is broken, vengeance is tamed and forgiveness can begin. The purified energy rises and Inanna becomes Queen of Heaven, ennobled by suffering and loss.

The astrological process

Because the Earth is not in the centre of the Solar System, planets sometimes appear to slow down, pause and back-track in their orbital pathway. This phenomenon is common, but also marks out particular phases of the planet's energy movements as paralleled within the human soul. When a planet is appearing to go backwards, this motion is called 'retrograde' and the normal motion is called 'direct'. Retrograde motion tends to favour interiorisation of consciousness, a time for reflection, inner healing, meditation, and the cultivation of stillness.

In 2023, Venus at 12°12' Leo enters the process of this 'Retrograde loop' on June 19th, near the Summer Solstice (Northern Hemisphere), or the 'standing still' of the Sun! (She passes the same degree at which the Station Direct occurs on 04.09.2023.)

This resonates with the beginning of Inanna's descent into the Underworld. A previous 'superior' or 'exterior' conjunction with the Sun occurred on October 22th 2023, which we can see as Inanna's union with her consort Dumuzi. This occurred in the final degree of the sign of Libra, a fitting symbol and herald for the transformative impact of this part of the journey, facilitated by their relationship.

The inner development of this Leo cycle includes the recognition of the 'King' or 'Queen' energy, and how it is directed in our lives: how do we handle our own sense of authority and creativity, and the aggression that arises if it is thwarted? Inanna-Venus reaches her highest position in the sky on June 4th 2023, gradually descending to the horizon until she disappears on August 08th 2023. Since December 02, 2022, Venus has been visible as the evening star, and on July 09th 2023 reaches her maximum brilliance – Inanna in her prime, Queen of her land, her temples, bearer of high office, authority and title.

There are approximately 7 weeks from her highest point in the sky (04.06.2023) to when she turns retrograde (23.7.2023). This parallels Inanna entering the Underworld through the 7 gates or chakras. Likewise, she is visible for approximately 7 months or 7 New Moons. We see a holographic repeat of this occurring: from the retrograde point on July 23 2023 there are 21 days (3x7) until the retrograde conjunction with the Sun on August 13th 2023. This symbolizes the meeting with Erishkigel, an 'ego-death' occurring in the depth realms as we encounter that which obscures our inner light. Our ancient griefs surface: the inconsolable, the ignored, the denied, the shamed. The 'Eye of Death' is also that which enables us to see with uncompromising clarity what is true. The penetrating focus is unrelenting and purifying.

The days after this conjunction are precious, as Inanna hangs on the peg and Erishkigel's distress is gently witnessed by the mourners. This is the time to 'sit with' ourselves and sense the movements within our own soul, engaging as little as possible with external relationships. We bear witness to our own soul until Venus reappears as the Morning Star (August 17th). Inanna is revived by the waters of life, and she emerges

from the Underworld. She returns to life after her sojourn in the Underworld, but with yet another soul-task to undergo. The mourning of Erishkigal for her lost husband is echoed now in Inanna's grief over the loss of Dumuzi, by her own actions. The decree which condemns Dumuzi to the Underworld is modified, and his sister Geshtinanna will alternate with him, sharing the requirement to go down when called. Inanna's heart is softened by grief.

This is a powerful parable of how the hardness of heart that is occasioned by unreleased grief can serve as a precise trigger for more destruction, punishment and cruelty. History is created by such a mechanism, all too obvious in these times we are living in. The story also shows the way the cycle may be broken – this is perhaps its most significant element. Paying attention to our own grief helps to soften the heart, making it less likely that we will invoke the 'law of talion', doing to others what was done to us, or creating the same suffering around us that we (unconsciously) feel within us.

**Venus signifies relationship
and represents
the energy
of Eros**

At the time of the Interior Conjunction in the cycle of Venus, this image of the 'Eye of Death' also refers to the 'death' of the old self-image or self-description, in order that new energy may enter, and profound change occur.

We are infused with the qualities of the sign in which the Interior Conjunction occurs (July 25th 2023 at 28°36' Leo), and this develops through the year and reaches fruition at the next Exterior Conjunction (June 04th, 2023 at 14°29').

The orbit of Venus

Because the orbit of Venus is very regular she goes retrograde once every 18 months, and every 8 years returns to almost exactly the same place at the same time of year to repeat the cycle. The mathematics is precise, elegant and inspiring:

$8 \times 365 = 2920$ (8 years for the cycle to repeat in the same place in the zodiac)
 $5 \times 584 = 2920$ (5 cycles of Venus, each taking 584 days to complete)

Each time retrogradation occurs, we are connected back to the same period exactly 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48 and 56 years ago. The unfinished business from those times may gather and return to consciousness, as we are helped to let go, forgive and move on. Merciful clarity arises, sometimes following shocking insights, sometimes arriving quietly like a mother watching a sleeping child. These retrograde loops are times of profound inner movement, and precious times of healing.

Venus always spends 40 days retrograde, mirroring the 40 weeks of human gestation and the archetypal '40 days in the wilderness'. Also, there are approximately 40 weeks (9 months) between the two different conjunctions of Venus and the Sun. The retrograde zones, when plotted around the zodiac circle, make a five-pointed star, which symbolizes the power of the higher mind. This star can be drawn without lifting your pencil off the paper – try it! Indeed, intentions 'drawn' during these times are infused with great significance and power. The five-pointed star represents the 'higher mind' because it references the mental frequency which is not divisive, seeing everything in adversarial terms. Rather, it connects 'heaven and earth' in appreciation and experience of the physical plane of existence, and also more rarefied states of consciousness. Here, the mind seeks a unity which includes differentiation.

The entire process lasts from June 19th 2023 until October 07th 2023. These two dates represent the edges of the portion of the zodiac over which Venus traverses, to and fro, as she turns direction twice before moving on.

Every time Venus is retrograde we get an opportunity to review unconscious decisions and intentions we may have unwittingly set in motion, fuelled by suffering and misunderstanding. We may then re-set them in the light of consciousness, made wiser by accepting both love and loss.

The degrees where Venus stations move backwards through the zodiac at a rate of 1° - 3° every 8 years). Note also that in 2023 the degree where Venus turns Retrograde (23.07.2023 at 28°36' Leo) is near the current position (00°09' of the Fixed Star Regulus, 'Coeur de Lion' or the 'Heart of the Lion', one of the 'Royal Stars' of the Persians. This star is associated with prestige, power and authority, but like all the 'Royal Stars', it has a 'fatal flaw' attached to it which may mean a downfall from grace and favour. With Regulus, this is vengeance, a powerful emotion which drives us to 'get back at' people who have wounded our pride, or to 'show them' if we feel rejected or under-acknowledged. Rigorous examination of our motives is required here, lest the unconscious 'roaring lion' within drives us to exceed the limits of our capacity or our destiny, or contaminates our actions with envy, jealous and vindictiveness.

We are infused with the qualities of the sign in which the Interior Conjunction occurs (Leo in 2023), and this develops through the year and reaches fruition at the Exterior Conjunction Gemini, 04.06.2024).

Venus-Sun in Leo

What are the qualities of Venus-Sun in Leo? As the Sun rules Leo, this is a powerful combination. The qualities of grandeur, glory, creativity, authority and strength are bestowed if we are willing to receive them in humility and service. Venus in Leo goes for what is bright and shiny, but being Retrograde is realistic, knowing that 'all that glitters is not gold'. This Venus expects a lot, gets a lot, and is no stranger to loss and disappointment, also able to remain heartfelt, even in the midst of emotional suffering. Faithful in friendship and loyal in love, Leo brings out the generosity of Venus, signifying the maturity that comes from embracing both the dark and the light sides of relationship. We are initiated into a heartfelt and reflective interiority which is mature enough to recognise and include our areas of bitterness, regret, indignation and a desire for vengeance ... without acting them out on others.

Narcissism

The nature of 'narcissism' is often discussed as a pathology, which indeed it can be. The 'narcissistic personality' is unable to attune to the reality of anyone else, is oblivious to the thoughts and feelings of others, demands to be the Centre of the Universe and may even become violent if we deviate from the behaviour he/she has 'prescribed'. However, lest we dismiss this dynamic as 'only' a pathology, let's take a deeper look. Narcissism may perhaps be considered as a 'case of mistaken identity', where the ego and its archaic structures usurp the direction of what is a genuine urge within the soul to 'individuate'. To follow the unfolding of one's individuality will inevitably lead us to recognise that the precious spark of Divine Light that we carry within us is a minuscule portion of the Great Light which upholds and underpins the whole of Creation. This is a humbling, awe-inspiring, experience, and one which 'puts us in our place' ... as servants to the master. Not a slave, an enemy, or a usurper, we are to serve that Greater Light, even when it reveals to us our own Darkness.

Reflecting on your own horoscope

Note the place in your own horoscope where this conjunction will occur. The house will give you a clue as to the 'task list' being presented, and you can engage the generosity of Venus in Leo to initiate creative projects, make amends in relationships where necessary, and to engage in some 'house-cleaning of the heart'. Be honest with yourself. What might you be neglecting to do, or to say, or, more interiorly, to 'see' and understand? What needs your attention in your life? How may you better align with your deeper sense of values and purpose there? How to better be the 'King' or 'Queen' in your own life? Where might you not be taking responsibility where you need to?

Attune to the energy of the Sun. Study its position on your horoscope ... read about it, track the Progressed Sun and how it expresses its themes in your life, meditate on the symbol, allowing your intuition to speak to you. At Sunrise and Sunset, contemplate the deeper meanings of the Sun, the luminous Centre, symbolising The Source ...

And take the opportunity around the Solstice (June 21st), to feel into this 'standing still' of the Sun. It is a powerful point during the year, of stillness, alignment, Light and Space ...

Finally, a prayer from the Sufi tradition:

*Towards the One,
The perfection of Love, Harmony and Beauty,
The Only Being.
United with all the illuminated souls
Who form the embodiment of the Master,
The Spirit of Guidance.*

ENDNOTES

See 'Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: her stories and hymns from Sumer' by Samuel Kramer and Diane Wolkstein, Harper and Row, NY, 1983. The story was pieced together from stone tablets stored in various museums world-wide.