

FOUR EXTRAORDINARY DAYS OF THE YEAR

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Astrology's ancient roots and early beginnings were very closely connected with our (human) natural curiosity and our ability to observe the stars and planetary objects in the skies above us. Watch, observe and also draw some important conclusions from their movements and positions. The underlying reasons for our interest in what goes on in the heavens above had initially a lot more to do with practical concerns related to nature's timings. Understanding the annual cycles and seasons and knowing the optimal dates for when to prepare the soil and when to sow the seeds often translated into a more abundant harvest, more food available for our tribe or our local community. Astrology helped us to find and to understand the invisible link between the movement of the sun in the skies and between the cycles of nature here on Earth.

The progress of human life on Earth over the millennia resulted in our growing detachment not only from nature itself but also from our reverence for its natural beauty all around us. Days and nights turned into working hours and sleeping hours. Days of the week slowly lost their deeper meaning and their order of activities based on their names closely connected with the ancient Roman or Greek gods. Months became just a practical way to measure the passage of days, also losing their primary connection with the lunar months which followed the phases of the moon. Our view and understanding of the annual cycle of 365 days has also been reduced to more ordinary concerns and practical activities which help stimulate our consumers interests and drive up sales of mass-produced goods, based on our needs and wants of the moment. Longer days have become synonymous with summer vacations and long overseas flights to other continents, BBQ season and other outdoor activities. Grass seeds, lawn mowers, hanging flower baskets, ice cream, suntan lotion, shorts, slippers and mosquito repellents. Shorter days with dark mornings and early sunsets usually mean the beginning of colder weather with more consumer spending on Christmas gifts and toys, followed by months of poor driving conditions and the necessities of clearing the snow from our vehicles and driveways. More sales related to winter clothing, cold & flu medications, windshield washer fluids and winter tires for vehicles and ice melting salt for our sidewalks and driveways. Our awareness of either the days or nights growing longer may have remained somewhat stronger in our minds but reflected mostly in our growing tiredness with the outgoing season and our anticipation of either more summer fun in the sun or more winter sports activities and a week off work between Christmas and New Year.

When viewed through the lens of western astrology the annual cycle of our trip around the sun becomes a lot more closely connected with the varying amounts of the sun's energy which reaches us in the form of light and warmth. Sun's energy remains constant but the Earth's hemispheres (regions either above or below the Earth's equator) receive different amounts of light and energy throughout the year, which corresponds with the four seasons. We may have forgotten about and have become mostly disassociated from these changing flows of energy but nature around us still responds accordingly to

these quarterly changes. Four Extraordinary Days of the year refer to the two Solstice days and two Equinox days which divide our annual cycle of 365 days around the sun into the four seasons.

WINTER SOLSTICE - the shortest day of the entire year which usually falls on December 21 (Dec 20 or 22 in some years). The sun will rise in late morning and set in early afternoon on this day. Having reached one of the two extreme points in its annual cycle, the sun now sits very low in the sky, offering us barely 9 hours of daylight in areas around Toronto's northern latitude of 43-44 degrees. Its usually strong light and warmth weakened and humbled by the night forces of darkness which, by contrast, reach their maximum length on that day. For some of us this day marks the final chapter of the sun's 12-month long journey heralding the beginning of winter. For others, it's the end but also the beginning of the annual cycle, the day when we simultaneously witness the "death" of the sun god and we begin a new cycle of daylight being "reborn".

Our personal willpower, our sense of individual importance and vitality are also at their all-time low on this day, diminished and unable to draw their full strength from the otherwise radiant sun rays of spring and summer seasons. Prior to this day, when the sun travels through the ever-optimistic sign of Sagittarius (Nov 22 till Dec 21), our spirits get temporarily lifted and our hopes for the return of light and warmth briefly rekindled. These expectations will invariably run into a reality check in late December and early January, when the jovial spirits of gift-giving and the fun of merry-making give way to the harshness of winter weather conditions and many cold and dark days ahead of us before the springtime's return.

Some saddened and some encouraged by this prospect, we may choose to gather together and seek the assistance of other people, realizing that we can now accomplish a lot more in groups and teams as the power of an individual's activity is at its lowest point and won't regain its usual might until the first day of spring. Social gatherings and holiday celebrations can bring others and us closer together and help elevate our communal status and position when we choose to take on additional responsibilities, accept commitments, build professional relationships and embrace the ideas of **sharing, belonging and cooperation**.

Social commitments in winter season can give us a renewed sense of purpose and importance but can also pull us away from our own affairs and take away a good chunk of precious time that we could be otherwise devoting to other activities. As the sun begins to slowly rebuild its presence in the skies and daytime begins to increase by more than a couple of minutes a day, we can utilize our social power and position to gain an important advantage point. Shared responsibilities and commitments can bring about appreciation and gratitude that we can turn into profitable social investments. Favours that we grant to others will eventually benefit us in one way or another. If we follow the heavenly advice of the sign of Capricorn, we will recognize the importance of long-term planning, preparation, patience, social integration and the slow but steady progress needed to accomplish our goals.

The magic of securing our personal freedom and independence down the road comes from fulfilling our obligations and delivering on our commitments so we can free ourselves from them as the winter season comes to an end at the Spring Equinox (March 20-21). If we master the art of this process, we will gain an additional insight and make a deeper connection with that great feeling of the weight being lifted off our shoulders, both literally and symbolically, as we shed the many layers of our usual winter garb and replace them with the light-weight and short-sleeved spring attire. As springtime arrives, we can change our focus and our scope of activities in accordance with the seasonal clock of nature.

From December 21 onward, in parts and areas of the world where we do experience the four seasons of the year, we can observe a slow transition away from longer nights and shorter days with nighttime gradually losing its advantage and daylight steadily growing stronger minute by minute.

During the winter season, sharing, commitments, belonging, social responsibilities and group participation are the main activities through which we could increase our sense of self-importance and our opportunities to shine and to steal the spotlight.

What we can witness on March 20-21 is a significant increase of daylight as it finally overcomes the nighttime in its quest for our attention. This dramatic shift in energy level can often bring some higher temperatures and brighter, warmer days. Even if nature could be a little slow in responding to this trend in our immediate neighbourhoods we should be able to tap into this source of high energy and find more than enough enthusiasm and initiative for any new daring adventure, from spring cleaning and de-cluttering of our living space into getting our backyards and gardens ready for spring and all the way to shopping for new fashions, a new car, a new house, or hitting the gym or jumping right into a new challenging project at work or at home with courage, bravery and gusto.

On the day of **SPRING EQUINOX** (March 21) we arrive at that mystical moment of a fleeting balance when day and night are equal in length. The increasing amount of daylight that has been on the rise since December 21-22 finally catches up and becomes level with the nighttime. An important turning point in our annual journey marking the starting point for the days to grow longer at an increasing rate.

An increase in solar energy, light and warmth available to us and nature waking up from its winter hibernation will be reflected in our increased drive for **independence**, for **freedom** and for **individuality**. Looking after our own needs and pursuing what we want for ourselves will be fashionable and chic again. People born under the signs of Aries, Taurus and Gemini will be starting to feel alive and enjoying themselves, sensing that their time under the sun has arrived, once again, to support them in their strive for more independence and freedom from the entanglements of the winter season. As the nature wakes up from months of hibernation and the plants and flowers begin to re-emerge from the soil and reach upwards to grab more sunlight, we also begin to feel the sudden urge to act and to explore. Our feelings and urges may range from daring and mischievous (Aries) all the way to curious, inquisitive and talkative (Gemini). We may try to reconnect with nature or just appreciate the vibrant colours, the smells and the bright, sunny days during the sun's journey through Taurus. Whatever we may end up doing we may be a lot more spontaneous and excited about our prospects for the upcoming weeks and months.

June 21 - the day of the **SUMMER SOLSTICE** which heralds the beginning of summer season in the Northern Hemisphere bringing us the maximum amount of daylight - an event commonly recognized as the longest day of the year. This maximum of daylight can be symbolically linked with and expressed as a peak of personal independence, a demonstration of a **creative potential of an individual**, free from any entanglements or heavy social commitments, independent of the good opinion of the others and able to pursue his or her personal dream, vision or idea.

Symbolically, we have been climbing up an invisible mountain trying to reach its peak as our vantage point for getting away from our binding commitments and the burdens of our many responsibilities, both personal and social. We want to fully enjoy these months of our engagement with the great outdoors, with being closer to nature, with spending more time in our backyards and our gardens. Our creative urges and potentials, our cravings for more freedom and enjoyment can now be more freely expressed through hiking and biking adventures, road trips, weekends at the local amusement parks.

The sun entering the sign of Cancer on the first day of summer can underlie our ability to spend more time with our family and kids while taking a couple of weeks off from work for some great vacation getaway. Halfway through the summer season we reach the sign of Leo which reminds us that it can be wonderful and enjoyable to be playful and creative, to spend some time showing off our competitive spirits and our great skills while engaging in summertime games or while entertaining our family and friends with our musical talents or by hosting a great garden party.

Summer Solstice is celebrated worldwide with feasts, bonfires, picnics and traditional songs and dances. On a personal level we can celebrate the beginning of summer season with any one of our favourite outdoor activity including gardening, camping, hiking, biking, connecting with nature and stargazing at night. This peak of personal self-expression on June 21 will be followed by a gradual lessening of the powers of an individual at the expense of a slow but steady increase of social interactivity, of a rising need to belong, to integrate, to connect with and to eventually serve others. Summer solstice begins our season of fun, enjoyment, exploration and travel, a way for us to interact with other people while still insisting on our terms of interpersonal and social engagement. The last weeks of summer are a reminder that, as we accept more duties and responsibilities and become more socially active, we may need to learn the art of social cooperation and collaboration with others.

FALL (AUTUMN) EQUINOX, along with the Spring Equinox and Summer/Winter Solstice days completes the four extraordinary moments in our annual trip around the Sun. While we experience the Solstice points as two extreme days of respectively - the longest amount of daylight and the longest amount of darkness - Equinoxes could be viewed as mid-points between the above extremes - two precious moments when the Universe is transiting through a balance point while the movement away from one extreme and towards the other finally gains a significant advantage.

As we witness the end of the summer season on September 21-22 we also welcome the beginning of the fall. The long, warm and sunny days of late June, July and August, with their early morning sunrises and late evening sunsets have been losing ground more noticeably since late August and early September while the dark hours of the nighttime have been steadily increasing their presence. The carefree and light-hearted season of fun, games, vacations, weekend getaways and playful creativity underlined mainly by an individual's drive for freedom and independence gradually introduced the increasing need for sharing and belonging. As the amount of daylight and solar energy available to us in the northern hemisphere begins to decrease, the seasonal theme slowly shifts into a **relationship-building phase**. If we choose to dance to the rhythm of nature, we will spend the early part of the fall season either forming new alliances and partnerships or rekindling the existing ones. As the fall season takes over, our individual drive and our need to follow our unique agendas and personal plans has to be replaced by our willingness and our readiness to cooperate, to work together and to seek assistance and support of others. In some ways we need to learn, yet again, how to relate to another person, how to establish and maintain fairness and equality in all our relationships. If we manage to successfully navigate through the early stages of human relations, we will then need to learn how to trust others so we can shift our relationships to the next stage. To put it more into intimate relationship terms: if we play our cards right in the fall season we can look forward to some warm and mutually rewarding cuddle up time with our sweethearts and darlings and a heart-warming feeling of doing something pleasing for others.