



VENUS, GODDESS OF LOVE AND BEAUTY

Part One

by Carolyn Joyce, M.A.

“Make love, not war” was the rallying cry of the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s. “All you need is love” the Beatles sang. Anti-war protesters gathered for “Love-ins” in parks and on university campuses. The post World War Two baby boom generation, as it came of age, rebelled against their parents by refusing to support the war in Vietnam, racial prejudice, and patriarchal values. We now take for granted all the sweeping, then radical social changes that the 1960s and 1970s ushered in to North America, and, indeed, to worldwide culture and values. Women took their place in the workforce, schools became racially integrated, and we took an interest in creativity, self-expression, art, sexual expression, and peace.

After the bursting forth of spring, after the first sign of the zodiac, Aries, ruled by Mars, the god of war—we move to the second sign, Taurus. Taurus is the first of two signs ruled by Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. And, truly, the antidote to war is love—it is through love that we connect to one another, and to the planet earth our home, to our own bodies and to our values and culture and creativity—rather than to killing each other. Because Venus rules both Taurus and Libra, and because Venus is one of only two female deities in our ten planet western zodiac (leaving out the asteroids for now) I will be talking about Venus for more than one column.

We have ten planets that constitute our zodiac, ruling twelve signs. Venus and Mercury rule two signs each. Out of the ten planets, only two represent the Divine Feminine, the Goddess, the female principle or *anima*. And, Venus is a very different archetypal energy than that of the Moon. It is important not to lump together the two goddess planets, Venus and the Moon. Out of the ten planets, there are five personal planets (including the luminaries, Sun and Moon); two trans-personal planets; and three outer/universal planets. The personal planets consist of Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus and Mars. These five inner planets are the key archetypal points of reference and energy-patterns in the natal horoscope. Western astrology is primarily Sun-centered; in Vedic astrology the Moon is the major point of reference.

In western astrology, we can construct a chart placing the Sun on the ascendant, if the birth time is not available. For chart interpretation, western astrologers look closely at the five inner planets: their sign, which indicates element and modality; as well as their relationships to one another. In approaching the birth chart, we first of all examine the kinds of energy present in the overall chart formation, the ascendant, the angles, and the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus and Mars. These are essential keys in revealing the symbolic meaning of the natal horoscope.

Since these five personal planets are seminal in chart interpretation, it is of utmost importance that we have as much understanding as possible of just what it means when we talk about each planet. We say, your Venus is in Pisces, opposite Mars in Virgo—but what does that actually mean? I have tried, in the previous two columns on Mars, to give a more vivid sense of who/what Mars represents and what martian energy consists of.

We continue to live in a world that is increasingly dominated by war, terrorism, anger and violence. Mars is alive, well, and thriving, as destruction abounds in these initial years of the twenty-first century. Peace on earth seems to be an ever-increasingly impossible goal to achieve. But peace is a state of being, a condition—not an archetypal energy. Peace is a goal we can set our sights toward—but the route to peace lies only one way, and that is through love. Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, is the counter-point, antidote, and opposite of Mars. In fact, as I mentioned in my Mars columns, Mars and Venus did make love and bear children—one of whom was named *Harmonia*. Harmony, or peace, only comes when Mars and Venus are coupled, conjoined, in consort—i.e. in balance with each other.

So let us now turn to Venus/Aphrodite, in the hope that the more we can learn about love and beauty—the forces of civilization and peace and living in harmony—the less our world will continue to rush forward into the terrible martian energy of war, violence, hatred and destruction.

Venus symbolizes our need for love, beauty, sensuousness, physical and aesthetic pleasure, relationship and values. Love and relationships can be the greatest force for healing and meaning in life. However, heartache and heartbreak often accompanies the experience of love—how can we relate in a healing and transforming way to others and to ourselves, through the power of love?

Aphrodite is the Greek name for Venus. Venus/Aphrodite has indeed been a very beloved goddess (remember how even the parents of Mars loathed him?), as described in **The Goddess Within**: “No goddess was ever so well loved as the goddess of love herself, Venus/Aphrodite. And no goddess has been so well represented in all the arts. Ever since she first stepped from the waves on her celebrated scallop shell, artists have painted and sculpted her, poets have extolled her beauty, and lyricists have composed melodies for her.”

The quote above refers to the birth of Aphrodite, as depicted most famously in the painting by Botticelli, “The Birth of Venus”. Aphrodite is a complex deity, in that there are actually two accounts of her birth. The one we are all most familiar with is that of *Aphrodite Urania*. According to myth, Saturn (Chronos) killed his father Uranus (Ouranos) by cutting off Uranus’ genitals and flinging them into the sea. Saturn did this because although Uranus (Sky God) and his wife Gaia (Earth Goddess) had many children together, Uranus didn’t like a lot of his offspring and he stuffed them back inside his wife’s womb, ie, back down into the earth. Myth has it that Aphrodite was born out of the sea’s foam and the castrated genitals of her father, Uranus. She floated in to land, perched on a scallop shell, to the island of Cyprus. From the first moment that Aphrodite came ashore, people were drawn to her incredible beauty and they loved her.

“‘Golden’ was the most frequent epithet used by the Greeks to describe Aphrodite —it meant ‘beautiful’.....*gold/honey; gold/speech; gold/ semen* are linguistically connected, symbolizing Aphrodite’s deeper values of procreation and verbal creation. She was associated with doves and swans; with flowers, especially roses; with sweet fragrances and fruits, especially golden apples; and sensual passion-red pomegranates...”

The second version of Aphrodite's birth is more pedestrian than the first, her dramatic floating into land upon a seashell, although it is worth noting that her name, Aphrodite, literally means "foam", relating her to the sea-birth. The other birth makes her the daughter of Zeus and Dione. In this version, Aphrodite is known as *Aphrodite Pandemos*—or Aphrodite of the people. And, indeed, this second Aphrodite is also accurate, as Aphrodite/Venus was and has remained a much beloved goddess of the people. These two birth accounts indicate the dual nature of Aphrodite, as does her rulership of the two astrological signs, Taurus and Libra.

Aphrodite, as goddess, was an enormously powerful force—there were many, many temples to Aphrodite and temple priestesses. Her popularity continued into Roman times, as Venus was a central goddess in the Roman pantheon, although they were more cynical about love, for example Ovid's **The Art of Love**, seeing the obviously artful sides of seduction. But there remain two great mysteries in life—love and death—what the Greeks call *eros and thanatos*. As individuals, we only experience the mystery of death once (!) but we do experience the mystery of love in several versions during a lifetime. There are more cults around love than around any other human experience. We continue to long for love, in almost every culture, and Venus continues to be an alluring force in human life. Aphrodite, for the Greeks, held greater power than did Mars—the only greater force than love is death itself. Love does not just mean 'romantic' or 'erotic' love—we can love another person, a child, a spouse, a creative project, a place, or God.

In Plato's great work, **The Symposium**, love is depicted as originally consisting of two beings, who become split in two. As split beings, we humans spend our lives continually in search of our other half—our soul-mate, so that we can become one, perfect being. Without love, we are incomplete. Freud postulated that two great concepts supported and drove human life: that of work and pleasure—ie, meaningful productive activity, and love. We have song lyrics that say "love makes the world go round!" Venus symbolizes our feeling function, our centre of relatedness, our ability to live in our bodies, in the world, and to make connections between ourselves and others, as poet John Donne said, "no man is an island." It is Venus/Aphrodite who draws us together, pulls us out of isolation and into embrace, desire, longing, and contact.

Aphrodite, as an ancient goddess, symbolized both the 'civilizing' and beautifying parts of love, as well as the irrational and powerful aspects of love. Love is an enormous force and, by its very nature, love cannot be controlled by will. Love is a force larger than the individual's willpower or decision, whether it be romantic, idealized love; sexual, erotic love; spiritual passion and sublimated love; projected, obsessive love; or mutual, transformative love.

Aphrodite was the goddess of love much admired and worshipped by the ancient Greeks. However, Aphrodite was not all 'sweetness and light'--in fact, she was not a predictable ortameable goddess and was indeed a force to be reckoned with, and the ancients knew it was important to be in awe of Aphrodite and not to take this goddess and her powers for granted. As Ethel Person writes in **Dreams of Love and Fateful Encounters**, "While it is true that love can be an agent for personal growth and change, it is also a loose cannon on the deck of human affairs. Because of its intensity, love has the capacity to disrupt social norms and conventions...romantic love may come in direct conflict with ordered society." She goes on to say: "Plato bequeathed to us the original western conception of love, that through love one seeks the other half of one's soul, in order to form a union that will make us whole again. But it is also in Plato that we encounter Socrates' cautionary admonition:

As wolves love lambs, so lovers love their loves. Ambivalence about love has ancient and honorable roots.” And so, next time, more on the nature of Aphrodite, and the roots of her seductive, powerful and ambivalent force. Copyright Carolyn Joyce, M.A. 2002

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Carolyn Joyce will be lecturing on “New Passions: Experiencing Venus in Scorpio” at Insomniacs Cafe, Montreal, on November 16th, hosted by Astrology Montreal.

She will participate in a two-day lecture and workshop, entitled “The Terror of Mars, God of War: Can We Marshall the Martial God?” in Ottawa, March 17 2003, for the Jung Society of Ottawa. Carolyn Joyce will lecture on “Mercury: God of the Crossroads” in May 2003, for the C.G. Jung Society of Montreal.

She is currently writing material on Venus for a co-authored book with Anne Massey; and working on a book **Archetypes in Astrology: Living Your Birth Chart**.