THE NEW AGE OF AQUARIUS

by Terry Hart

When Does It Begin?

In their famous 1966 hit musical Hair Gerome Ragni and James Rado tell us that the New Age begins ...

When the moon is in the Seventh House
And Jupiter aligns with Mars
Then peace will guide the planets
And love will steer the stars
This is the dawning of the age of Aquarius
The age of Aquarius
Aquarius! Aquarius!
Harmony and understanding
Sympathy and trust abounding
No more falsehoods or divisions
Golden living dreams of visions
Mystic crystal revelation
And the mind's true liberation

If only it were that simple!
The zodiac is based on the great circle known as the Ecliptic which is the apparent path of the Sun around the Earth, i.e. the Earth’s orbit. The problem is that circles don’t have beginnings or endings so to measure anything you need to establish a reference point. Because the Spring Equinox started the year, ancient astrologers chose this time as their reference point. On approximately the 21st of March each year the Sun’s path crosses the Equator. Astronomers call this the Vernal Point (VP) and astrologers call it 0 degrees Aries for it from this coordinate that the twelve signs of the zodiac are measured. Originally it coincided with the constellation of Aries but due to a phenomenon known as the Precession of the Equinoxes it has gradually been slipping backwards against the background of the fixed stars so that it is now in Pisces and about to enter Aquarius. This retrograde movement of the VP is caused by the Earth slowly wobbling on its polar axis like a spinning top. It takes about 25,920 years for the VP to complete one revolution of the zodiac (variously named the Great, Precessional or Platonic Year) so that each “month” or age lasts 2,160 years.

Another effect of the wobble is to change the direction towards which the North Pole points. At the moment the nearest star to which it points is the Polaris (Ursae Minoris) but by 7000 AD it will be Alderamin and in 14000 AD it will be Vega. In 3000 BC it pointed at Thuban. In other words the north pole is slowly tracing a circle around the Ecliptic’s north pole.

One of the most important points to grasp is that the twelve equal 30 degree signs of the zodiac and the constellations of stars bearing the same names are not the same thing. The constellations are of unequal size and overlap. For example, the constellation of Pisces spans 39 degrees.

So, technically speaking, the Age of Aquarius begins when the point of the Vernal Equinox precesses into either the equal 30 degree division of the sidereal sign of Aquarius or the unequal sidereal constellation (morphomaton) of Aquarius but because of disagreements about the original starting point a variety of dates have been given ranging from 1750 to 3000 AD.

It is easy to select events and trends which support your favourite theory. For example, some astrologers believe that we entered the New Age 250 years ago:

1750 Start of the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions
1762 Publication of Rouseau’s Social Contract
1775 The American War of Independence
1776 The famous 4th of July American Declaration of Independence proclaimed the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness
1781 Discovery of the planet Uranus (modern ruler of the sign of Aquarius)
1782 James Watt patented his steam engine
1783 First successful human air flight in a balloon by the Montgolfier brothers in Paris
1789 The French Revolution with its ethos of “Fraternity, Equality and Liberty”
1791 The publication of the influential The Rights of Man by Thomas Paine

These Aquarian trends have continued up to the end of the 20th century as exemplified in the following:
- the scientific and technological revolution
- the growth of democracy and republicanism
- the League of Nations
- the United Nations
- the Declaration of Human Rights
- the abolition of slavery
- the World Health Organisation
- revolutionary socialist states as the Soviet Union
- Kibbutz
- NATO
- Global communication
- the Internet
- The EEC
- computer technology
- breaking barriers such as travelling faster than the speed of sound and escaping the Earth’s gravity
- the decline of religion
- the growth of atheism, agnosticism and humanism.

Accepting the 1750 start date means that Piscean age began at a time when the gentle religions of Buddhism and Taoism were flourishing and is in keeping with this introverted ego denying sign.

The History of the Idea

Although the precession of the equinoxes has been known about since its discovery by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus in 139 BC, it is only in comparatively recent times that it has been given significance by western astrologers. The earliest reference appears to be in The Textbook of Astrology by A.J. Pearce which was published in 1879. It was then popularised by the Theosophists and Rosicrucians and later by Alice Bailey via her Arcane School but it was not until the counter-culture years of the 1960's that the idea became really fashionable.

Predictions for the New Age

The myths surrounding the Age of Aquarius fit into a western concept of apocalyptic millenarianism: the expectation of an imminent catastrophe followed by a new age of peace and human happiness. According to this view we might be heading for:
- an age of scientific rationalism
- world government
- the abolition of war
- the establishment of a Utopia based on brotherly love
- group consciousness
- a metaphysical leap in global consciousness
- an age dominated by the head rather than the heart
- a rapid increase in the rate of change
- networking
- exploration of outer space giving us a greater awareness of the global community and humanity as a whole
- people will think of themselves as citizens of the world

If New Age ideals inspire enough people to work harder to achieve the goals of peace and equality then the predictions made for this age could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Dark Side

“Newagers” believe in the power of positive thinking and therefore tend to stress Aquarian virtues rather than vices. What is often glossed over is that Aquarius is no more a sign of sweetness and light than any other! It is an astrological axiom that no sign of the zodiac is better than any other sign: they all have a role to play as successive phases of evolution and they all have a dark as well as a light side. Evidence of the darker side of Aquarius have been two world wars, atheistic communist tyrannies such as the Soviet Union, the Arab-Israeli conflict and wars in the Balkans and former states of the Soviet Union. International terrorism is yet another reflection of this. Aquarians love humanity but dislike individual people. Societies organised along the lines described in George Orwell’s 1984 or Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World are indicative of less desirable Aquarian characteristics. There needs to be a balance between Aquarian collectivism and Leo individualism.

It is often said that there is no change without pain and the nature of Aquarius is such that we may expect many dramatic upheavals as the old gives way to the new.

Planetary Alignments

Many people make much of the large planetary alignment due on 3rd May 2000 when the seven traditional planets (Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) will all be in the sign of Taurus activating the Fixed Cross that was formed at the time of the August 1999 Solar Eclipse. Whilst I don’t wish to diminish their significance, such line-ups are not as rare as some scaremongers would have us believe! They don’t necessarily signify spectacular and catastrophic events. The last time these seven planets were all in the same sign was from the 3rd - 5th of February 1962 when they were all in the sign of Aquarius. Some astrologers believe this marked the start of the Aquarian Age. The last major alignment on this scale was on 11th January 1994 when the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Uranus and Neptune were all in the earth sign of Capricorn. Amongst other phenomena this coincided with the Californian earthquake.

Does the New Age Really Matter?

The astrological ages form a vast backdrop against which we live our lives. The assumption behind a lot of New Age philosophy is that we should try to align and live our lives in accordance with the prevailing Zeitgeist. At the individual human level the changes will be imperceptible and may only be fully appreciated with hindsight by historians thousands of years hence. The New Age is important because we believe it to be so. Our collective expectations and aspirations could make it a self-fulfilling prophecy but what we need to do as individuals is probably no different than at any other time in the history of humanity: the core teachings of the world’s great religion’s are applicable throughout every age.

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