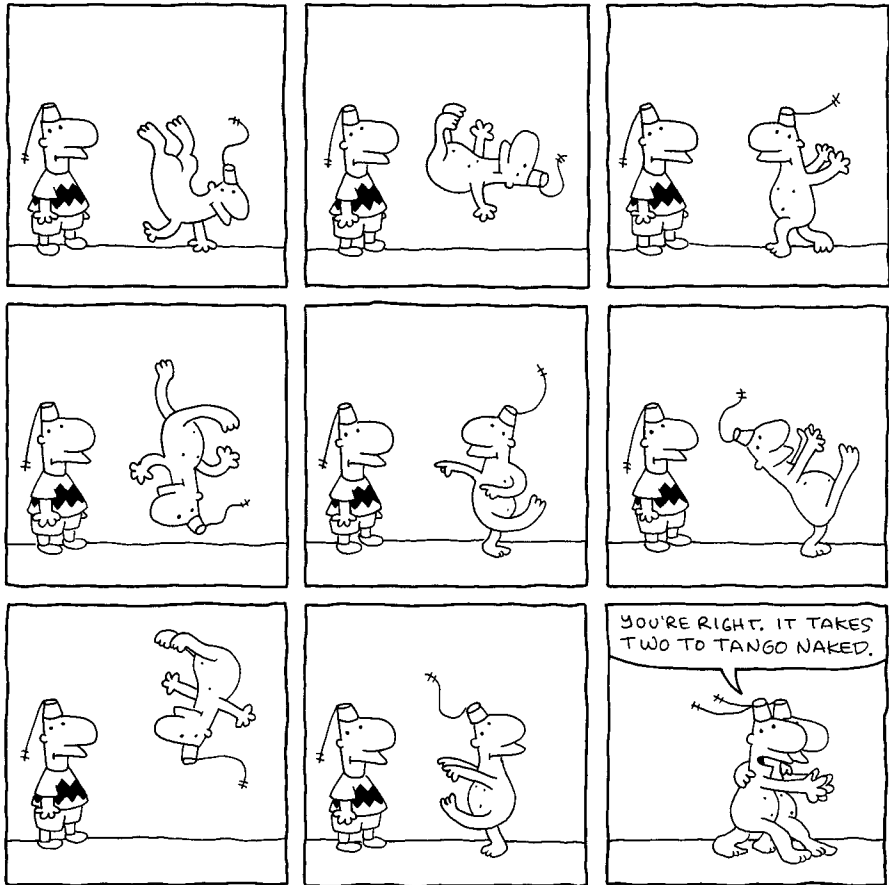


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free will astrology

BY ROB BREZSNY

ARIES (March 21-April 19): During a morning hike in the hills, I scavenged for omens to use in your horoscope. Nothing pertinent appeared until I was headed home. While rambling down a trail from the top of the ridge, I spied the back of a man moving towards me. It took me a while to realize he was walking up the hill backwards. As he passed me, I heard him giving himself a pep talk. Later I told my 13-year-old daughter Zoe about this scene, seeking her insight about what motivated him to engage in such an odd mode of travel. To my surprise, Zoe said she'd done it herself. It's a psychological trick that helps make a steep ascent easier: You stay focused on how much you've already accomplished rather than being overwhelmed by the heights that are ahead of you. I recommend that you try this yourself, Aries.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): How long do you want to live? Before you answer, remember that thousands of scientists are engaged in research to crack the code of the aging process. They will ultimately make breakthroughs that could allow you to be healthy and vigorous for many more decades. In the meantime, the astrological omens suggest this is a perfect moment to meditate on what you can personally do to promote your own longevity. What habits of mind and body can you cultivate that will keep you forever fresh? And now I drink a toast to your coffin, Taurus. May it be fashioned of lumber obtained from a hundred-year-old cypress tree whose seed will be planted this week.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): "If there is anything I'm trying to incorporate into my strategy of governing, it's a willingness to make mistakes, a willingness to try new things," San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom told AP writer Lisa Leff. "I'm probably as proud of my failures as I am of what someone deems my successes." I suggest you emulate Newsom's approach in the coming weeks, Gemini. Don't bother with timid experiments that you feel tempted to apologize for; don't mess around with half-assed tinkering. Rather, be candid and humble as you try daring changes that may or may not work.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): "Religion is like a knife," Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu told Msnbc.com. "When you use a knife for cutting up bread to prepare sandwiches, a knife is good. If you use the same knife to stick into somebody's guts, a knife is bad." Let's use his idea as a seed for your horoscope, Cancerian. Are there any aspects of your spirituality that are rooted in anger, hatred, or intolerance? Are there other aspects that move you to see the best in everyone and do what you can to promote their welfare? From an astrological perspective, it's a perfect moment to be totally honest with yourself as you take an inventory of the nature and effects of your religious inclinations.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Here's the first draft of the horoscope I wrote for you: "You may find yourself stumbling through a kind of haunted-house situation, complete with stairways that lead nowhere, mazes lined with distorting mirrors, and gargoyles that breathe fire." After having a potent dream that's too complicated to go into here, I rethought the meaning of the astrological omens and altered your oracle to read as follows: "You may find yourself wandering through a fun-house situation, complete with stairways that lead you to invigorating mysteries, labyrinths lined with mirrors that help you take yourself less seriously, and protective gargoyles that will scare away menacing demons."

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): To be in maximum alignment with the cosmic trends, go to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and commune with the painting "Peach Tree in Blossom" while sipping peach blossom wine and thinking deep thoughts about the parts of you that are like peach blossoms. Here's another possibility: Travel to a place where actual peach blossoms are blooming and meditate on why the Chinese consider this flower the most auspicious of plants. If you can't manage either of those actions, Virgo, please at least find images of peach blossoms on the Internet and gaze at them as you muse fondly of the delicate young aspects of your life that most need your love and care.

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LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Fairy tales are full of characters who suffer loss and hardship for trying to be something they're not. If they ever change their ways and accept the truth about themselves, their luck improves dramatically. It's interesting, then, to contemplate the fact that our culture adores film and TV actors, who specialize in pretending to be someone other than who they really are. Do you buy into our collective obsession, Libra? If so, I urge you to cut way back in the coming weeks. You need to be careful about exposing yourself to all influences that might encourage you to be something you're not.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Burning Man, the annual festival in the Nevada desert, is experiencing a crisis. Some long-term supporters are unhappy about the direction it has taken in recent years. Chicken John Rinaldi told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that it used to be a joyfully chaotic jubilee of surprising art, but lately has turned into a mindless party and "giant group hug - a petting zoo for overweight people in their mid-40s." At the next Burning Man in August, Rinaldi hopes to restore what he sees as its radical mission. Is there a comparable development happening in your life, Scorpio? Has an institution or ideal you've held dear begun to decline or lose its way? I bet there is. So what are you waiting for? Go out and fix it; redeem it; revive its glory.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21):

Pulitzer Prize winner Annie Dillard counsels aspiring authors to hone their chops by immersing themselves in scenes that aren't right in front of them. "Write about winter in the summer," she says. "Describe Dublin as James Joyce did, from a desk in Paris. Willa Cather wrote her prairie novels in New York City; Mark Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn* in Hartford." Even if you're not a writer, Sagittarius, I suggest you do something similar. Identify a time in your past that has always mystified you or rendered you dumb. Dive into those memories with the intention of making them sing for you; rethink all the perplexing moments until you transform them into a beacon.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Are you familiar with the revolution that was hatched on a toilet? Famed theologian Martin Luther (1483-1546) didn't suffer from writer's block so much as chronic constipation. He formulated "The 95 Theses," the tract that launched the Protestant Reformation, while sitting on a stone commode in his home. Be inspired by Luther, Capricorn: Turn a place where you feel limited into a power spot. You don't have to be feeling peppy and chipper in order to light fires under everyone's butts, including your own.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Austrian Prince Pal Antal Esterhazy (1786-1866) was renowned for his extravagance. Roaming across Europe for decades in a constant state of vacation, he squandered his stupendous fortune. In one infamous stunt, he removed a priceless Titian painting from its frame and had it made into the lining for his coat. In bringing this to your attention, Aquarius, I don't mean to imply that you're as profligate as Esterhazy. But there is a way in which you're being as casual with one of your valuable assets as he was with his Titian. Fix this glitch, please.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Who could have predicted that the quest for chemical-induced erections would help stem the extinction of endangered species? Since the advent of Viagra, Asian men have cut way back on their demand for traditional aphrodisiacs like harp seal penises and reindeer antlers. The wild animals in possession of these body parts are no longer hunted so relentlessly. With this as your point of departure, Pisces, meditate on unleashing a similar synergy in your own sphere. Is there any pleasure you might pursue in a way that will send ripples of benevolence into the world around you?

HOMEWORK: What if you didn't feel compelled to have an opinion about every single hot-button issue? Try living opinion-free for a week. Report results to www.freewillastrology.com

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