

Ceres, the Universal Earth Mother

by Marcha Fox

Astronomical Description

Ceres is the largest of the main belt asteroids and was the first to be discovered on January 1, 1801 by Giuseppe Piazzi, who was making a star catalog at the Observatory of Palermo, which he founded. Shortly after Ceres' discovery, she disappeared behind the Sun, but was "rediscovered" on paper by Carl Friedrich Gauss, who devised a method for calculating an object's orbit from only three accurate positional measurements. She was subsequently relocated on January 1, 1802 by Heinrich Wilhelm Olbers in the position calculated by Gauss. Olbers later discovered the asteroids Pallas and Vesta. Ceres is part of the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter and orbits the Sun every 4.6 years. Her diameter is 955 kilometers and she is just barely visible to the naked eye, but easily seen with binoculars.

Mythological Background

Ceres was the Roman goddess who was originally known as Demeter to the ancient Greeks. She was the daughter of Saturn and Rhea and was swallowed by her father along



with her sisters Vesta and Juno, as well as her brothers, Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto. After being freed by Jupiter, these gods and goddesses became the ruling family of ancient Greece. Her gift to humanity was grain and as such was known as the goddess of agriculture and the harvest. Thus, she was the one who provided nourishment for humanity and was worshipped as such. She was also the mother of Persephone, a beautiful maiden, with whom she was exceptionally close. Together, the pair watched over the Earth and allowed it to provide its abundance throughout the year. This mother and daughter were so enamored with each other, however, that all suitors were rejected, as the two didn't want to be separated. This, of course, did not go over too well with some of the gods who thought Persephone was pretty damn hot, particularly those nice ankles of hers.

One day Persephone was wandering in the Nysian fields and became fascinated by the hundred-bloomed narcissus. She picked one of these lovely flowers and was enveloped in its seductive fragrance when the earth opened up beneath her. She was immediately

seized by Pluto, god of the Underworld, who had been lusting after her for quite some time, wanting her to become his bride and queen. As soon as he descended below with his prize, the earth resumed its previous state, leaving no sign that anything unusual had occurred.

It didn't take long for Ceres to realize her daughter was missing. For many days she refused to eat, sleep or bathe, but instead wandered about with flaming torches, trying to find her daughter. She eventually encountered the crone goddess, Hecate, who told her to discuss the matter with the Sun god, Helios, who saw everything. Helios told her of the abduction, which had been executed with the approval of Zeus, with whom Pluto had conspired to take Persephone as his bride. Ceres was not only devastated but enraged at the betrayal and, disguised as a mere human, wandered the earth for a while to avoid associating with any of the gods of Mt. Olympus. She acted as a nanny for the son of King Celeus until she eventually revealed her identity and ordered a temple and altar to be built for her.

Ceres retired to her temple, where her mourning for Persephone continued. As her grief turned to anger, she cursed the earth such that nothing would grow, neither crop nor fruit of any kind, imposing famine and starvation on mankind. The people prayed to Zeus for relief, who realized that if the humans all died there would be no one left to worship the gods. The gods attempted to reason with Ceres, but she refused to listen or show any mercy unless her daughter was returned to her. Eventually, Zeus relented and sent Hermes to the Underworld to demand Persephone's release. Persephone had likewise been in mourning and fasting, refusing all food and drink. Pluto agreed to let her return, but deviously offered Persephone several pomegranate seeds to quench her great thirst prior to her departure. Not knowing that the pomegranate was the symbol of sexual consummation, Persephone partook, which confirmed her marriage to Pluto. This is a good reason why young women should pay better attention in school, because sometimes it's what you don't know that bites the hardest.



When Persephone returned to the surface, she and her mother had a joyful reunion. However, when Ceres found out that her daughter had consumed the pomegranate seeds, she realized she'd been tricked, since Persephone was still married to Pluto. She reinstated her curse of the earth and the gods were basically back where they started. Eventually, Zeus proposed a compromise, that for each pomegranate seed she'd eaten that Persephone would spend a month in the Underworld as Pluto's bride. The remaining months could be spent on earth with her mother. Thus, each spring Persephone emerges from the Underworld to rejoin her mother. At this time, the earth comes alive with vegetation and the harvest is allowed. In the fall, however, when Persephone must return to the Underworld, Ceres once again commands the earth to be barren, until Persephone's return the following spring. Ceres, like so many goddesses, was one vindictive woman and it wasn't a good idea to mess with her.

Astrological Implications

Astrologically, one thing indicated by Ceres' placement in the horoscope will be which area is most important in regard to parental nurturing and the kind of lessons to be derived from the mother-child relationship. For example, if Ceres is in Aries, being allowed and encouraged to be independent will be important as well as being commended for their drive and energy. In Taurus, being comfortable and provided for in a material manner will prevail. Gemini would imply the need for mental stimulation; Cancer, the need for a significant amount of attention and nurturing; Leo, to be the center of attention; Virgo, for perfection and being of service; Libra, strong relationships and fairness; Scorpio, sexual expression; Sagittarius, a strong belief system and worldly knowledge; Capricorn, ambition and status; Aquarius, friends and being part of a group; Pisces, transcendence and fantasy. It also can indicate the manner in which a person will nurture others in adulthood.

The lack of nurturing or encouragement in these areas from one's mother will drive them to seek such elsewhere and if it's blatantly missing or contradicted, it can cause significant emotional trauma and potential identity crises as the person will know there is something missing in their life, but probably won't be able to identify exactly what. The basic tenets of self-esteem are related to early nurturing which, if absent, has repercussions that can take a lifetime to overcome, if ever. Remember that Ceres cuts both ways, as a parent and a child. We also tend to replicate that with which we grew up; patterns established in our childhood tend to reappear with our own offspring in one way or another. Parents also can project their own aspirations or fears onto their children, causing various frustrations for all concerned.

Thus, Ceres tells much about a person's experience and relationship with their mother, particularly if the charts are compared of both mother and child. Transits of Ceres will introduce events represented by the themes in the Ceres/Persephone myth or bring past issues to the surface for resolution. I have yet to see a client who is having "mother issues" who doesn't have something going on involving Ceres in their natal chart transits. Nearly everyone has "mother issues" of some description from their past, and these transits stimulate situations that force us to confront and resolve them.

As the goddess of agriculture, Ceres can also indicate a "green thumb," love of gardening, or strong interest in food and its preparation. Likewise, if negatively aspected it can be indicative of eating disorders, particularly if food was used during childhood as a punishment by its withdrawal or as a reward. Thus, Ceres can lend astrological clues to a plethora of weight and body-image disorders. On a more positive side, a person's interest in food, from its growth to preparation, can be found in Ceres placement. For example, someone with Ceres in Sagittarius may be inclined to nurture those from other cultures or may have a propensity for preparing international cuisine.

Ceres also relates to separations and the subsequent sense of loss. It defines grieving style and how a person will deal with their pain. It can also relate to secrets between mother and child; neither person ever entirely knows the other, regardless of how close

they may think they are. No matter how much a child loves his or her mother, at some point the need to grow up and seek a mate is likely to arise. This does not mean that they love their mother any less, only the need to progress beyond the role of a child. On the other hand, those that never leave home or are inordinately attached to their mother can also be indicated. Separations and estrangements from one's mother, no matter what the cause, are also to be found in one's natal chart as well as transits of Ceres throughout the signs, houses, and aspects to the other planets. The more attached we are to someone or something, the more likely we are to be faced with a separation at some point as the energy invested will energize its polarity as well. Frequently, it is only through letting go of something that we allow something new and invigorating to come into our lives.

Sharing of a loved one is another principle in the Ceres myth. In essence, the stereotypical "mother-in-law from hell" could easily be a woman who cannot share her child. Ceres - Pluto aspects often indicate those who will have to share their children with ex-spouses and often undergo ugly custody battles or family kidnapping experiences. If these individuals don't learn to share, they'll inevitably have to face either the burdens of single parenthood or perhaps be denied access to their offspring entirely. On the other hand, Ceres can impart strong parenting and nurturing capability that allows an individual to assume the role of both parents comfortably.

On the darker side, such things as child abuse and abductions can likewise be reflected in Ceres' placement and transits. Of course the ultimate separation is death, as represented by the Underworld. This is something that everyone has to deal with, sooner or later. Unlimited grief and mourning at a certain point becomes self-defeating and hinders our growth. This is another lesson Ceres is wont to convey.

The richness imparted to a Natal Chart through Ceres is indeed worth consideration, particularly if a person is having difficulty with any issues reflected in the Ceres myth. A trained astrologer can interpret Ceres' placement in the Natal Chart and subsequent transits, yielding clues to the issues at hand. In some cases, for deep-seeded issues, the client will be referred to a trained psychologist to work through those things that go beyond his or her own capability to resolve alone. If Ceres is retrograde in a Natal Chart, as typical of retrograde planets, the energy will be internalized and not expressed as easily, which can complicate any other issues associated with natal aspects or transits.

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Marcha Fox has a bachelors degree in physics from Utah State University and has worked at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas for over 20 years. She began studying astrology over twenty years ago with the intent of debunking it and instead became convinced of its credibility and astounded by its accuracy. She is currently an advanced student pursuing her diploma from OCA. The mother of six children and grandmother of (currently) 15, she has had a statistically significant sampling of astrological test subjects within her close perusal for many years. Much to the mortification of her offspring, some of these long-time observations are documented in her sign write-ups.

As a physicist she is deeply aware that the most profound questions in the universe are yet unanswered. When those answers are found, she believes that the truth and mechanism of astrology will be among them. She has worked with the space shuttle in a variety of capacities ranging from engineer to manager

for most of her career. As that program fades into the sunset she hopes to do the same and focus her sights on a new career in astrology. Marcha is a Capricorn with a Virgo rising and Gemini Moon. She welcomes your comments at astrogoddess@ValkyrieAstrology.com.

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