

Vesta, the Eternal Flame

By Marcha Fox

Astronomical Description

The asteroid, Vesta, was discovered by German astronomer, Heinrich Wilhelm Olbers, on March 29, 1807. She resides in the main asteroid belt, has a diameter of 503 kilometers, and an orbital period around the Sun of 3.63 years. Vesta's basalt-like surface has a very high albedo, or reflectivity, and a spectral curve which resembles that of achondrite meteorites. It's the brightest of the main-belt asteroids and barely visible to the naked eye in clear dark skies.

Mythological Background

Vesta, or Hestia to the ancient Greeks, is best known as the goddess of the hearth and keeper of the sacred flame. In Greek mythology, Vesta was the first born of Cronus (Saturn) and Rhea and the last to be reborn when Zeus (Jupiter) freed his siblings from Saturn's stomach. Vesta chose to remain a virgin, refusing to marry either Apollo or Poseidon. Considering some of the men she had to choose from, this was not rocket science. Every home as well as the central public hearth in every city contained a shrine to this goddess, who watched over the family and state. Roman priestesses whose duty was to tend the sacred flame were known as vestal virgins.

Fire was not only essential, but sacred to the ancients. Whenever the Greeks emigrated to foreign lands, they brought a portion of their home fire with them as a link to their homeland. Similarly, women leaving their family at the time of their marriage brought part of the fire from their mother's hearth to their new home. The Romans built a temple dedicated to Vesta which had her eternal fire at its center, believed to ensure the safety of the Roman Empire.



Six of the most beautiful and noble maidens were chosen as divine servants, *i.e.* the vestal virgins, to tend the sacred flame. This service began at age six. They took vows of chastity and celibacy which were in force for the duration of their 30 year service. Upon its completion, they were allowed to leave and marry, though apparently not many did. If a priestess allowed the fire to go out, she was severely whipped. Anyone who broke the primary vow of chastity was not only whipped but entombed alive in a subterranean crypt. Due to the strictness of their vows and limited lifestyle, they earned tremendous respect and enjoyed many privileges in Rome. Unlike other women, they were free

from paternal control and could own their own property. In return for their righteous service, they were given great reverence, respect, and honor.

In spite of the strict enforcement by the Romans of the vow of chastity, Vesta's origins in pre-Hellenic Greece were of a much different nature. Their primary deity was the Great Mother Goddess who was personified by the Moon and represented by the sacred flame, which symbolized the *kundalini* fire and secret powers of sexual transmutation. While the women who tended these fires were known as virgins, this was not because they were sexually chaste, but because they were unmarried, thus belonging to no man. They participated in various rites of a sexual nature and gave themselves to strangers as an act of divine service. In other words, their *raison d'être* was not only to keep the home fires burning, but largely associated with ritualistic sex. Of course the symbolism between fire and passion is far from subtle as well. Needless to say, in today's world these women would not be associated with virgins in any way.

Astrological Implications

Astrologically, Vesta contains elements of both Virgo and Scorpio. Virgo is represented by Vesta, the virgin, and Scorpio is associated with sex and passion. In the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian cultures, these two constellations of the Zodiac were connected and represented by a serpent. As the cultural norm became patriarchal, Libra was placed between them in the portion known as "*the Chelae*," or claws of the scorpion. If you think about that, there's some serious irony there, that this region became Libra, representing relationships and marriage. Somehow I feel as if Peg and Al Bundy could relate.

As a combination of Virgo and Scorpio, Vesta is a prognosticator of devotion on one hand and obsession on the other. She is also an indicator of attitudes associated with sex, particularly those at a visceral and subconscious level, which are not confined within the bounds of a traditional or monogamous relationship. This is the realm of sexual fantasies and desires that are far outside the bounds of polite society. Subconsciously, these desires are not seen as promiscuous, *per se*, but rather as a ritualistic act of service. Social norms, however, can instill a strong sense of guilt in spite of the inner drive a Vesta-type individual possesses to engage in numerous sexual exploits. In negative aspects, Vesta can influence the opposite behavior as well, such as sexual repression, fears, or the inability to share oneself with others or maintain close relationships. Similar challenges at expressing these energies could result if she's retrograde.

The ability to concentrate on a specific task or goal is also influenced by Vesta's placement. In fact, the Latin word for hearth is *focus*. This ties in closely with the Virgo work ethic and meticulous approach to problems of any sort.

Vesta can convert sexual energy to a solid commitment and dedication to one's work and often operates in this fashion in those who dedicate themselves to spiritual or service-oriented quests, such as certain religious orders. Similar energy conversions are also in effect in the pursuit of enlightenment. In a less dramatic fashion, Vesta also influences

the path one should take to fulfill their *dharma*, or life's mission, without which they can become frustrated and unfulfilled.

In synastry, or astrological compatibility, aspects between Vesta's placement in the natal charts of the individuals involved with either the placement of their partner's Vesta or other planets indicates the nature of their sexual relationship, attraction, and what their expectations or deepest desires regarding an intimate relationship may entail. For example, contact with planets like Venus or Mars will intensify sexual attraction while contact with planets such as Saturn can cause excessive reserve or even coldness.

In other words, Vesta's meaning in astrology is every bit as complex as her roles were in different cultures, all of which reflect the power the life giving forces of sexual transmutation have in each of our lives.

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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-five 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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