

## **My Favorite Metaphysical Tools and Toys To Help You Find Your Way In 2006**

Happy New Year!

Well, it's that time again. As is usual in January, I am seeing a lot of folks who are doing goal setting and strategic planning: clarifying their intentions for the coming year. And it is always such a mixed bag. On the one hand January brings you a chance to start over, but on the other you do have to carry forward whatever is unfinished.

It is for that reason that the month of January was named after the Roman God Janus, the guardian of doorways, gates and portals. As such, he was the patron of beginnings and endings. Janus had two faces, one on the front and one on the back, which meant he was forever looking in two directions: forward and backwards. What I think is the most relevant about that is that in order to move forward appropriately, you do have to stay clear about where you have already been, how that worked out and how it felt.

Regardless of where your path has been and is going, there are some things that can make your journey a little smoother, more comfortable and hopefully even more fun for you. I call them ***Tools and Toys***. Because this is this time of year, when we are all talking about those sorts of things, it has become my custom in January to share the common denominators. Here they are.

As usual, this year's ***Tools and Toys*** is heavily impacted by the events of the past year, and 2005 was a very big year for a lot of folks on a lot of levels. And a very different year. I truly believe that there is a divinity in all things, and one of the best things that has seemed to come out of the natural, economic and political disasters of the past year is the impact it has had on our spiritual lives. I attribute some of that to the influence of the transiting asteroid Chiron in Capricorn, trying with all it's might to bring a greater sense of order to our internal landscapes. As a result, I am seeing a lot more people trying to find spiritual answers to the problems they face, and attempting to use the events that impact them as catalysts to create a closer relations to spirit, a more effective working faith, and a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their everyday lives.

In response to that, to current astrological transits (mainly Venus currently being retrograde in Capricorn) and to other things I have been seeing my practice, this year's ***Tools and Toys*** is huge. Seriously. Literally and figuratively. I have never done anything so comprehensive. But you're ready for it. And most of you are asking about it. So here it is.

I want, however, to start in a little different place than usual: **nature**. Yes, kids, this year we are starting outdoors, rather than in the bookstore. As a Gemini, I can't even believe am hearing myself say this, for us Twins are pretty much wed to our books and the information they provide. But don't worry, we'll get to the books, just in a little different way. So hang on, and if you are an air sign and just can't get out of your head, skip down a couple of pages to the section on books and websites.

So, here goes. Despite the fact that many people feel more connected to God in the natural world, I am frequently just blown away by how disconnected we are from it on a daily basis. Though that may explain some things. Regardless of your religion or spiritual preferences, now more than ever I think staying connected to the various energies of the earth is an important ability to have and cultivate. Many more people than usual have been asking me about developing tools to help them do that in the last year. Again, given the number and intensity of the natural disasters we have had globally in the last year, as well as the growing vocality of the international scientific

community about the scale and impacts of global warming, I think that is very healthy and appropriate.

This will be even more timely for those of you who are more disillusioned with organized religious principles and who find God in nature. Regardless of why you are looking for a stronger connection to the earth, there are three very foundational things (four if you live near a coast) that are easy places to start and that will keep you more connected to the earth and stars, their cycles and seasons. The first is simply knowing the cardinal points. It is really important to be able to orient yourself to the four directions – especially in your home and in your home town. If you don't have that down, start there. The easiest way to do that is to pay attention to where the sun rises (in the east) and sets (in the west). If you can't go any further than that on your own, buy a compass to help you fill in the rest. It may take you a year or more to be able to know the directions from any point in your town, but do it. You will be grateful for this later on. And if you are a parent, once you have it down, teach this to your children.

Why, you ask? Each of the four directions has different qualities and characteristics based on their positions and roles. Some of you more advanced students may want to research what the different ancient cultures believed about the different directions, because that will flesh out your understanding and create greater depth. But in the beginning it is far more important to simply be able to know which direction is which and what you notice about each one. This information can be utilized to increase the focus, integration, power and effectiveness of your prayers, meditations, Feng Shui, and ceremonies.

The second is developing more of an awareness of the seasonal cycles of the earth. The easiest place to start is by simply knowing (or remembering) the when the Sun's solstices and equinoxes are. Grounding yourself into each season can help you reframe the things that are taking place in your life at any given time. And your responses to them. Many different kinds of calendars now have that information in them. Just so you know what you are looking for and where, in 2006 the Spring Equinox is March 20th, the Summer Solstice is June 21st, the Autumnal Equinox is September 22nd, and the Winter Solstice is December 21st.

The third thing that is crucial is to know the cycles of the moon, especially if you have a strong moon placement in your natal chart, and especially if you are a woman. To start out, try to focus on being able to recognize and track when the moon is new, waxing half, full, waning half, and dark. Again, if you don't have this down, many calendars now have that information in them. For those of you who already have that down, try moving on to being able to track what sign the moon is in at any given time.

My favorite wall calendar that has all this information – and more - in it remains John Maynard's *Celestial Influences*. Technically, it is a calendar, almanac, and textbook, and as such it is one of the most helpful and concise tools you can buy. Anyone who is remotely interested in metaphysics and astrology should get one, and it has a little something for everyone. There is also a smaller pocket version, which will do in a pinch, or if you do a lot of traveling.

For those of you who are more visually oriented you will appreciate the art of this year's version. While always quite rich, it is particularly beautiful this year. I am especially excited by a new feature in this year's edition. For each month there is a full ephemeris showing the positions of all the planets as they move during the course of that month. It does not show the asteroids or the nodes, but it does have all the planets. The most helpful thing about this is that for those of you who are at a level of proficiency who can read the glyphs, this will give you a lot of information

at a glance. For anyone, I think the most helpful thing is that you can easily see how many planets are retrograde at any given time and which ones they are.

My favorite desk calendar remains the *We'Moon Gaia Rhythms for Womyn*, by Mother Tongue Ink. As 2006 is their 25th anniversary year, the new edition is bigger and more boffo than ever. Given that I live on the West Coast, I also love it that it is calculated so that all times given are in Pacific Time. Not having to crunch all those pesky numbers makes it so much easier to use. Now I have to warn you, these gals are really serious about their commitment to women's issues and empowerment, so for most men and for women who are not as driven by that, it may at times seem a little over the top. It may at times seem way over the top. However, the thing I like the best about this calendar is that it is so much more than just a calendar. It is practically an encyclopedia. They have so much information in that date book that I find myself turning to it when I am looking for specific details about things when I can't find them anywhere else. If nothing else, I highly recommend having a copy every year simply as an informational resource.

A word here about astrological calendars. Every year I see people really get frustrated with these because they get lost and confused by the complexity the glyphs, the concepts, the signs and the planets. There are three things to remember here. One of them is that everything has it's learning curve, and it is important to be patient with them. The other is that in this case all the answers are always in the front. Please do take the time to thoroughly review the information at the beginning of the books and calendars, it will make all the difference in the world. Do not over look this. Especially you fire signs. The front of these calendars has tons of information. The first 11 pages of Maynard's and 32 pages of the *We'Moon* give all kinds of facts and details. They are both very concise and accurate, though the girls are a wee bit more thorough. The third is to remember the cardinal rule of getting lost: retrace your steps. If you get along into these resources and get stuck, go back to the beginning and look for clues. If you try that and still can't get any traction, remember the second rule of getting lost: stay put and call for help.

And the fourth item, getting back to nature, is only important if you live in a coastal community. For those of you who live near the ocean, it is helpful to have a means of staying in touch with the tidal cycles. Especially if you spend anytime at all at the beach or on the ocean. And especially if you want to do more of it. If all of the above are AND your natal chart is dominated by watery signs and planets, you just don't have a choice.

There is a huge connection between the tides and the cycles of the sun and moon. In the beginning it may take some time to recognize all the subtle details and nuances, so be patient. Some of you will catch on quicker than others, and that's okay. Honor your own process – it is sacred in it's own way. When you are starting out, the most important thing is just to honor what it is you can see and recognize. There are a variety of ways you can go here, give yourself permission to explore the different tools and see what works for you. There are all sorts of Tide Guides and Calendars that cater to surfers, ocean fishermen and sportsmen and are very cool. My guy surfs, and his favorite is a wall calendar put out by Tide products ([www.tidelines.com](http://www.tidelines.com)). What Eric likes is that while the company is based in Encinitas, they make different variations on the annual calendar that are accurate to the different regions of the world.

As for introductory books on astrology, I still think the best beginning book is "*Astrology for Yourself*," by Douglas Bloch and Demetra George. It is a combination textbook/workbook that takes you through the basics in a very linear fashion. I like it because it is both extremely thorough and extremely user-friendly. I have recommended that book for almost a decade. Though I have never used it myself, a couple of clients this year have reported discovering *Astrology for Dummies*, by Rar Orion, and are very happy with it. And that makes me happy. I

still use Jim Lewis' *Encyclopedia of Astrology* quite a bit to get esoteric details and minutiae that I can't find anywhere else.

As far as astrological websites go, there are just a lot of great sites out there, and different things really resonate with different people. Right now I am not hearing a lot of consensus about that. One client likes [cainer.com](http://cainer.com), another likes [nightlightnews.com](http://nightlightnews.com), and still another likes [horoscopes.astrology.com](http://horoscopes.astrology.com). Seems to be personal preference sort of a thing. My all time favorite is still [astro.com](http://astro.com). It has tons of free and accurate information (you can get your daily transits) and is the official site of my favorite Jungian astrologer and author, Liz Greene. There is also a ton of great stuff on the website of Mountain Astrologer Magazine, [mountainastrologer.com](http://mountainastrologer.com). So I'd say explore, find something you like, and then definitely let me know what it is and why.

As for sites on general spirituality, there are several. I am really liking [loggia.com/myth](http://loggia.com/myth) because it gives a lot of information about the pre-Christian Western European faiths that form so much of the foundations of Christianity and western culture as we know it. Love that. I am also really liking [joyofsects.com](http://joyofsects.com), because it is a comprehensive source of information about the fundamental beliefs, practices, and holidays of the worlds largest religions. An even bigger, richer source is [religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu](http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu), for they not only the more recognizeable religions, they cover the different Native American Tribal beliefs and newer cults and religions, as well. Very interesting stuff.

Additionally, I find the programming on religions and religious history on PBS, The History channel, and the Discovery Times channel to be both very well done and very helpful. As I was raised in a strict Baptist family, I was not exposed to much else, nor was I encouraged to look. These shows are also very helpful for people who learn best through audio-visual means.

Finally, I remain a big, big fan of Divination Cards. I am a bit of a traditionalist in that I prefer the actual Tarot, rather than some of the more modern decks. Though I don't use them traditionally. I think in terms of jumpstarting you when you are stuck, there is no quicker or more effective tool than a deck of Divination cards. It doesn't mater to me what deck you use, as long as you have at least one and you use it. They are just great when you cannot see your path clearly, or when there is too strong of an emotional attachment to something to be able to accept what you can see. Either way, what I love about the cards is that they truly can galvanize and focus you in a heartbeat and get you back up and running.

Regardless of what deck I am using, I rarely do big spreads. When I do, it is around big life-changing things I am having trouble wrapping my head around. Maybe once or twice a year. Their highest application, I think, it to them around prayer and meditation and immediate problem solving. In those moments, I just shuffle the deck while I think about some aspect of whatever the issue is, and ask to be given a card that will show me the most important aspect of the situation and what my intention should be around it. And then I pull a card. This method is particularly helpful in the heat of a crisis, and when you are living moment to moment. Since Venus went retrograde and there have been so many break-ups, I find I am referring the cards a lot to those with wounded hearts, who are getting used to living alone and need more support in daily prioritizing.

I think that is probably enough for right now. Play with that for awhile and let me know how it works for you. If you need more I can do second installment later in the year. In closing I just want to thank you for your questions and for your trust. I love it when you ask and I love it when you share your discoveries with me. Your process opens new doors for me and others. I am grateful for that and for all you have brought me in the past year. Love and blessings - b