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France Votes to Force Supermarkets to Give Away Unsold Food
<http://tinyurl.com/jld3x7m>

President of Gambia Bans Female Genital Mutilation
<http://tinyurl.com/jz33qa6>

(Note: I endorse these because I like them. They aren't advertisements, and I get no kickbacks.)

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FREE WILL ASTROLOGY
Week beginning March 17
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<http://www.freewillastrology.com/horoscopes/>
Grammar key: Asterisks equal **italics**

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): "The greatest illusion is not religion," says aphorist Michael Lipsey. "It's waking up in the morning imagining how much you're going to get done today." But even if that's often true, Pisces, I suspect that you have the power to refute it in the coming weeks. Your ability to accomplish small wonders will be at a peak. Your knack for mastering details and acting with practical acumen may be unprecedented. For the immediate future, then, I predict that you'll largely be able to get done what you imagine you can get done.

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Artist Steven Spasuk works exclusively with an unusual medium: soot from candles and torches. He spreads the stuff across a blank canvas, then uses various instruments to sculpt the accidental blobs into definitive forms. I've seen the results, and they're both well-done and intriguing. What would be the metaphorical equivalent, in your world, of using soot to make beautiful and interesting things? I think you're primed to turn waste into building blocks, rot into splendor, and lead into gold. (See Spazuk's work at spazuk.com.)

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Carl Sagan said that science thrives on "two seemingly contradictory attitudes: an openness to new ideas, no matter how bizarre or counterintuitive, and the most ruthless skeptical scrutiny of all ideas, old and new." Whether or not you are a scientist, Taurus, I recommend that you practice this approach in the coming weeks. It's the tool that's most likely to keep you centered and free of both rigidity and illusion. As Sagan concluded, this is "how deep truths are winnowed from deep nonsense."

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): "Excess on occasion is exhilarating," said British author W. Somerset Maugham. "It prevents moderation from acquiring the deadening effect of a habit." Now would be an excellent time to take that advice to heart, Gemini. According to my analysis of the astrological omens, you not only have a license to engage in rowdy fun and extravagant pleasures; it's your sacred duty. So get out there and treat yourself to an orgy of naughty adventures -- or at least a celebration of meaningful thrills. You can return to the rigors of discipline and order once you have harvested the healthy benefits that will come from escaping them.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): At one point in Friedrich Nietzsche's book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the hero is having a conversation with himself. "You have wanted to pet every monster," he says. "A whiff of warm breath, a little soft tuft on the paw -- and at once you were ready to love and to lure it." If I were you, Cancerian, I would regard that type of behavior as forbidden in the coming weeks. In fact, I will ask you not to pet any monsters at all -- not even the cute ones; not even the beasties and rascals and imps that have slight resemblances to monsters. It's time for maximum discernment and caution. (P.S.: One of the monsters may ultimately become a non-monstrous ally if you are wary toward it now.)

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): On a social media site, I posted the following quote from self-help teacher Byron Katie: "Our job is unconditional love. The job of everyone else in our life is to push our buttons." One commenter took issue with this. "'Pushing buttons' is a metaphor that's long past its expiration date," she wrote. "Can't you come up with something fresher?" So I did. Here are a few potential substitutes for "push our buttons": "tweak our manias" . . . "prank our obsessions" . . .

"glitter-bomb our biases" . . . "squeeze our phobias" . . . "badger our compulsions" . . . "seduce our repressions" . . . "prick our dogmas." Whichever expression you prefer, Leo, find a graceful way to embrace your fate: Your current job is unconditional love. The job of everyone else in your life is to tweak your manias and prick your dogmas.

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FEELING JOY STIMULATES YOUR COMPASSION?

Assume that your drive to experience pleasure isn't a barrier to your spiritual growth, but is in fact essential to it. Proceed on the hypothesis that cultivating joy can make you a more ethical and compassionate person. Imagine that feeling good has something important to teach you every day.

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- T. Preneris, Toronto

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VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): In the coming weeks, you will have maximum power to revise and reinvigorate your approach to cultivating intimate relationships. To aid your quest, I offer this paraphrased advice from Andrew Boyd: Almost every one of us seeks a special partner who is just right. But there is no right person, just different flavors of wrong. Why? Because you yourself are "wrong" in some ways -- you have demons and flaws and problems. In fact, these "wrongs" are essential components of who you are. When you ripen into this understanding, you're ready to find and be with your special counterpart. He or she has the precise set of problems you need -- is the person who is wrong for you in just the right ways. (See Boyd's original quote: tinyurl.com/boydquote.)

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): In her book **The Winter Vault**, Anne Michaels says, "We become ourselves when things are given to us or when things are taken away." If she's right, does it mean we should be grateful for those times when things are taken away? Should we regard moments of loss as therapeutic prods that compel us to understand ourselves better and to create ourselves with a fiercer determination? Meditate on these possibilities, Libra. In the meantime, I'm pleased to announce that the things-getting-taken-away period of your cycle is winding down. Soon you'll begin a new phase, when you can become a deeper, stronger version of yourself because of the things that are given to you.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): "I'll make love when the lust subsides," sings Denitia, one-half of the electro-pop band Denitia and Sene. That would be a good motto for you to play around with in the coming days, Scorpio -- in both literal and metaphorical ways. I'll enjoy seeing how your emotional intelligence ripens as the white-hot passion of recent weeks evolves into a more manageable warmth. As fun as the intensity has been, it has blinded you to some of the possibilities for collaborative growth that have been emerging. You may now be ready to explore and appreciate sweeter, subtler pleasures.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): "The poems I have loved the most are those I have understood the least," said T. S. Eliot. I'm going to steal and expand upon his idea for the purpose of giving you an accurate horoscope. In the coming days, Sagittarius, I suspect that the experiences you love most will be those that you understand the least. Indeed, the experiences you NEED the most will be those that surprise and mystify and intrigue you. Luckily, life will be ingenious in bypassing your analytical intelligence so as to provide you with rich emotional stimuli for your soul.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Capricorn painter Henri Matisse made the following testimony about his creative process: "At each stage I reach a balance, a conclusion. At the next sitting, if I find that there is a weakness in the whole, I make my way back into the picture by means of the weakness -- I re-enter through the breach -- and I reconceive the whole. Thus everything becomes fluid again." I recommend this approach to you in the coming days, Capricorn. You've been making decent progress on your key project. To keep up the good work, you should now find where the cracks are, and let them teach you how to proceed from here.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): "We all lead three lives," said Austrian novelist Thomas Bernhard, "an actual one, an imaginary one, and the one we are not aware of." I suspect you'll get big glimpses of your third life in the coming weeks, Aquarius: the one you're normally not aware of. It might freak you out a bit, maybe unleash a few blasts of laughter and surges of tears. But if you approach these revelations with reverent curiosity, I bet they will be cleansing and catalytic. They are also likely to make you less entranced by your imaginary life and better grounded in your actual life.

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Homework: Identify your fondest childhood memory, and recreate in the present time the feeling you had back then. Testify at Freewillastrology.com.

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