
THE HERBST NEWSLETTER

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political views & opinions

--- Thoughts, dates, and reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness ---

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Dear friends,

This month's commentary examines the Mars retrograde that is gathering momentum and will hit critical mass from late December through early March of 2010. This period represents another in a series of significant phases or turning points that set up the momentous decade of the 2010s.

On more personal levels the Mars retrograde brings another chance for us to learn about the Martian archetype in our psyches. Desire, assertion, anger, and all our aggressive impulses move into a phase of inward review for the purpose of psychological cleansing.

--Bill Herbst

Commentary: Mars Retrograde

- 1. Mars retro setup begins on Oct 17th, 2009 (when it passes 0 Leo 18 while still moving direct, but decelerating in the zodiac)
- 2. Mars stations retrograde at 19 Leo 42 on December 20th, 2009
- 3. Mars stations direct at 0 Leo 18 on March 10th, 2010
- 4. Mars resolution ends on May 17th, 2010 (when it passes 19 Leo 42)
- 19° backward arc in the zodiac 80 days retrograde 213 days for the entire loop

When direct, Mars represents the archetypal masculine urge to push outward forcefully into the surrounding environment. The symbolic correspondences are heat, aggression, acquisition, passion, and urgent action. When retrograde, Mars represents that same force directed inward rather than outward. So, the concept of *reinforcement* seems well-suited to describe the natural meaning of the retrograde loop. Mars also symbolizes kinetic and physical exertion, the directed use of willful intention, so Mars retrograde could be considered a time of *inward*

exertion, like exercise for the psyche or soul. Mars remains physical in its basic implications, so the body is still relevant, but during the Mars retrograde loop we reach the body most effectively through the psyche for purposes of repair, renewal, or rejuvenation.

Collectively, the coming months are ripe for a Martian backlash. The economic crisis has now spread from Wall Street to Main Street. Millions of Americans are losing their jobs, their homes, and their savings. And yet, our plutocratic rulers in corporations and government seem unwilling or unable to respond to the plight of ordinary Americans. They squabble over profit and power with no regard for any other value — no reverence, no respect, and no conscience. The time is over for turning the other cheek. Now we nurture our longstanding outrage that alien pod people have taken over our country and, indeed, our planet.

To refine the collective meaning of this particular Mars retrograde loop, we need to place it within the context of a cycle involving two moving bodies. The most logical to use with Mars is the Sun. Their most recent conjunction occurred on December 5th 2008, which marked the beginning or "spring" phase of their two-year cycle. Now, about a year later, Mars is approaching the halfway point of the Sun-Mars cycle. On January 29th, 2010, it will reach that halfway mark. In every astrological cycle, the halfway point is the beginning of the full phase or autumn harvest, where we reap whatever was sown in the spring phase of the cycle.

The halfway point in the cycle occurs with Mars in Leo, only 3° away from the Sun in President Obama's birth chart. All the campaign promises for change (by ending wars, restoring the economy, providing healthcare, etc.) are coming up empty. The honeymoon is over, and Obama will feel the heat. A government controlled by Wall Street and Big Corporations is likely to be the target of a deep upwelling of outrage for the shocking mess those institutions have made of just about everything.

One can make an astrological argument for public anger leading eventually to civil disobedience and a revolution of grass-roots resistance against totalitarian lockdown. Many writers about the coming decade have such darkly dystopian views. While I understand the reasons for their views and accept that power struggles and social violence inevitably accompany Uranus-Pluto activations, I foresee a fundamentally different future for most people throughout most of the world.

Remember Katrina? That was a sneak preview of the next decade, and the lasting human images of a drowned New Orleans were not of mass lawlessness, looting, and chaos, (most of which did not happen) but of an upwelling of care by ordinary Americans. Hundreds of thousands of people from all sections of the country traveled to New Orleans simply because they wanted to help.

I see the role of regular citizens over the next decade not as saboteurs, but as volunteers. Large institutions will continue to collapse without any push from us; as they falter and come down, the public will respond pragmatically by stepping in to provide smaller-scale commercial and social services as required for individual, family, and community survival. This time, the revolution isn't ideological. It's practical, based on our initiative to do what is necessary.

Over the next five years, three Mars retrograde periods (now, Nov 2011–April 2012, and again in Dec 2013–May 2014) will occur. Each will help us psychologically prepare to take action. In my vision, the Martian archetypes of weapons, warfare, and violence (all based on conquest and competition) are less necessary than the will to work (based on care and cooperation) and the productive force to build localized and community-based networked economies that allow Americans to survive and even perhaps to prosper in ways impossible to imagine today.

But what of the personal meanings of this Mars retrograde? Those are, as always, highly diverse, with as many different twists on the theme as there are individuals.

Unfortunately, personal analysis is unsuited to an essay such as this, which is written for a group audience rather than a specific individual. But never mind that. We can discuss the making of a Samurai sword instead, since it works as a terrific metaphor for certain personal aspects of the Mars retrograde experience.

The most popular material for the blades of sharp-edged cutting tools is forged metal. Ceramics are used for some blades and diamonds for edges, but most knives are made with metallic alloys. Cheap knives are stamped out, then the edges are ground; expensive knives are honed and forged by a long and laborious process of annealing (heating in a fire, then cooling quickly in water). They are slowly hammered into shape, then painstakingly sharpened to an edge on whetstones. Similarly, desire and aggressive action take shape in every conceivable form, from crude and blunt to sophisticated and razor-sharp.

Samurai swords exist at the extreme end of artisan-made edged weaponry. They are distinguished by many factors: the patient care taken, the handmade craftsmanship involved, and the many-centuries-old "secrets" of their makers. For our purposes, their most single amazing quality is the number of layers sandwiched into the blade.

Blocks of two different metals (lower-carbon soft iron and high-carbon hard steel) are heated and hammered together, then folded over, heated again, and re-hammered. In this way, the layers of soft and hard steel double with every folding: 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, etc. Unlike the blades of any other swords, the finest samurai blades are composed of literally *millions* of layers, hammered so fine as to be microscopic in thickness. This, along with special annealing processes, gives the samurai sword both incredible sharpness and great strength.

Like our desires, some swords are strong but not very sharp, while other swords are razor-sharp but easily broken. Mars retrograde would have us take our time making our sword, exercising patience and delayed gratification, but NOT by stewing in our own frustrated juices. Instead, Mars retro urges full involvement in feeling and refining our desires.

Mars retrograde is not traditionally considered an auspicious time for initiating

new projects, starting new activities, or pursuing new desires, except as life requires. Instead, the retrograde loop is an ideal time for examining the results of what drove us in the past, to discover the inner repercussions of the energy that coursed through us and out of us while pursuing what we wanted.

What exactly does *new* mean? Over the decades, people often ask me during Mars retrograde how they should deal with some desire they feel or something they want. They may be sincerely confused, or they might just be trying to avoid frustration at any cost, the same way a child wants whatever it wants immediately and tries to find a "legal loophole" to evade lack of permission from a resistant cosmos.

When in doubt about a certain desire, initiative, or action during Mars retrograde, do more research. Go back to the drawing board and ask yourself another 20 questions — Why now? Why this? If not this, then what do I truly want? Do I need a longer-term strategy? Is this really a new desire or simply a new object for an older cycle of wanting? Rather than acting out unconsciously, stop and ask all the questions. Be a good consumer and don't buy a pig in a poke. Be a good predator and sharpen your teeth. Wait attentively until the time is ripe. Shore up defenses, replenish resources, and reformulate plans. Do not be passive, but don't run after anything, either.

Sit with your desire and FEEL the heat. Don't DO anything yet, just stoke the oven. The purpose of Mars retrograde is to light a fire in the belly, to generate clean-burning passion inside that will (later) fuel your foraging through the outer world, making you a smarter (and wiser) hunter.

Ordinarily, we act on desire as quickly as possible, often as soon we feel it, almost as if we cannot bear the desire and want to get rid of it immediately. We then have to assess the results by hindsight. Did we get what we wanted or just what we *thought* we wanted? How much did our prize cost us? Was the price worth it? During Mars retrograde, we have the ability to ask these and other questions before we act on the desire, and that's priceless.

Study desire. Learn about it. Meditate on it; plumb its depths, both light and dark. Don't go off half-cocked by unconsciously running after some attractive object just because you feel a pang of desire; that serves only to dissipate the heat and blur your focus during the retrograde loop, leaving you lost, enervated, and empty. Let those initial pangs be the kindling that you build into a blazing inferno of wanting or a tsunami tidal wave of passion. Like a potter, build a very hot kiln to fire the pots and bring out the shining colors in the glaze. Like a samurai sword maker, fold over the blade and hammer it out again.

Notice everything you can about the experience of wanting. Let the Mars retrograde be a psychic sauna where you breathe in the heat while cleansing the temple of your body. (In fact, Mars retrograde is a great time for spa retreats, not for pleasure, but for the discipline of fitness and health. Diet and exercise programs can be undertaken during Mars retrograde, but only S-L-O-W-L-Y, with no quick fixes or jumping off cliffs.

Desires cannot be easily fulfilled during Mars retrograde, at least not important

or long-term desires. And just so we're all clear on this, the issue isn't doing something versus doing nothing. DOING is perfectly all right, as long as you realize that the purpose of doing is to understand and refine your desires for better fulfillment later.

To quote 19th-century British playwright Oscar Wilde: "There are only two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it."

Mars retrograde is the damage control and inner reconciliation that are necessitated by either outcome. Whatever we went after in the past changed us, whether or not we got what we wanted. Now we deal with the results and repercussions by rehabilitating our desire-nature. Purify your passion; make it strong, then hone it to a razor's edge.

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