

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...

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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & 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,

In last month's Special Edition Newsletter, I wrote about a rare but potent configuration of the Sun, Mars, and Uranus. From mid-July through most of August, that pressure cooker built up one heck of a head of steam. Like new elements forming deep within the earth, the concentration of yang energy bubbled and boiled inside all of us, waiting to explode outward into our relationships with others and the world.

But even as the energy came to a crisis point, cracking through the crust and demanding release, another astrological event entered the picture and altered the immediate dynamic in a hurry-up-and-wait scenario. The implications of that powerful alignment are not over by a long shot (taking two years to play out), but the brakes have suddenly been slammed on.

On August 25th, Mercury began the first phase of its three-step retrograde dance. That threw a temporary monkey wrench into our unfolding experience of the Sun-Mars-Uranus cycle and is the very relevant subject of this month's newsletter.

MERCURY RETROGRADE (August 25th - October 6th)

Astrology is concerned with the symbolic meaning of events, cycles, and the shifting interplay of movement in the heavens from our human perspective here on earth. Thus, we can literally speak of the Sun *rising* and *setting*, since that is our experience, even though we know that this daily alternation of light and darkness is caused by the earth's rotation on its axis, rather than by any objective movement of the Sun. We attribute meanings to sunrise, sunset, daytime and nighttime, and we are correct to do so, because point of view matters.

In much the same way, planetary phases of retrograde movement have a meaning in astrology. Because of the shifting optical perspective called *parallax*, all the major planets

of the solar system appear to us to periodically slow, stop, and reverse their motion through our visual heavens. These retrogradations represent times when the psychological life-functions symbolized by a certain planet are moving “backwards,” contrary to the flow of their usual expression.

With Mercury, this retracing of its path through the belt of the zodiac occurs, on average, three times each year. Mercury’s third and last retrograde period of 2002 officially starts on September 14th and lasts through October 6th. But its “official” period is NOT the real beginning of its retrograde meanings. That occurs weeks earlier, when Mercury is still in direct motion but passes over the point in the zodiac to which it will later move back. That point was passed on August 25th. So, dear friends, some people may believe that Mercury is not yet retrograde, but—*trust me*—it’s already underway.

Mercury Rx — Meanings and Timing

Astrologically, Mercury is associated with mentality, organization, and movement. Its symbolic functions include:

- perception by the nervous system (*what we see*)
- rational differentiation (*how we classify differences between objects*)
- logical association (*literally, thinking*)
- communication with others (*both written and spoken*)
- self-talk (*our inner dialogues with ourselves*)
- dutiful routines (*schedules, appointments, etc.*)
- daily activity (*movement in the immediate environment*)

When Mercury is retrograde, traditional astrology suggests a higher-than-normal degree of disruption in those processes.

- confused thinking and misperception
- misunderstandings in communications
- complications in contracts and commitments
- foul-ups in schedules and appointments
- unexpected delays in travel or breakdowns in mobility

During this time — August 25th through October 6th — forward movement will be slowed or even stopped outright in a necessary re-thinking of plans, choices, options, and intentions. Major decisions are best postponed. Certain facts or patterns may be overlooked or misjudged in their importance, and circumstances are likely to unfold with a slightly strange warp, since the flow of events is more delicate than usual, subject to greater intrusion by unpredictable wild-card factors.

If, in the pop culture wisdom of the old bumper sticker, ‘*SH*T HAPPENS,*’ then it tends to happen a lot more during Mercury retrograde. Murphy’s Law applies. And some of what goes haywire is just plain bizarre. Purchases of consumer goods have a higher rate of returns. Machinery breaks. Tires go flat. Light bulbs burn out. Flights are cancelled. Checks are lost in the mail. Messages are garbled in transmission. *Aaarrrgh!*

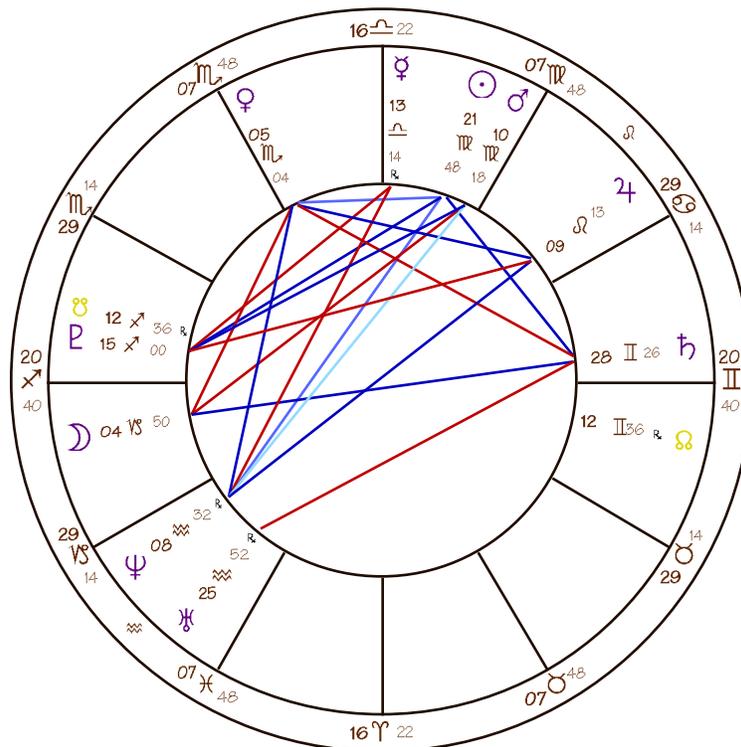
At this level of the unavoidable, however, just roll with the punches. Do the best you can and don’t worry about it.

The Conscious Path of Spirit

But Mercury retrograde has a personal and spiritual dimension as well, and that's where our attention and care should be directed, as well as the focus of my commentary.

To offer insight into the mysteries of Mercury retrograde on the psychological level, I can illustrate how it works through the popular concept of polarized brain function, the division of cognition and perception into left- and right-hemisphere modes.

Normally, reason and intuition form the outer and inner realms of mentality. Logical pragmatism runs the external world, the "business" of living, the working marketplace of commerce and social contacts. Meanwhile, intuitive holism structures our internal emotions and private judgments, re-shaping the interior landscape into subjective and personal meanings. The shifting interplay of these very different processes accounts for much of the drama (and indeed, the melodrama) surrounding human interaction.



Mercury Retrograde Station

14 September 2002, 2:39 p.m. CDT
Minneapolis, Minnesota

When Mercury is retrograde, these left-brain, right-brain poles reverse, at least symbolically. The intuitive and holistic move outward into the external realm of everyday affairs, while the rational and analytical shift inward to address the often invisible realm of private meaning.

OK, so if that's happening, what's the problem? In a word, *habit*. We are so habituated in our programming that any change is unsettling. Consider one small example: Most of us dial a telephone by holding the receiver with one hand while pressing the numbers with the other. Try reversing your hands sometime. You'll notice an awkwardness, a sense of things being slightly skewed or out of sync, and this most mundane activity will become suddenly strange and exotic. You'll mis-dial the numbers more often, and once you've made a connection, your

conversation may feel markedly different holding the phone in the “wrong” hand while listening with the opposite ear.

The trick here is being aware that something has changed, and awakening enough to go with that flow. This reversal in our natural modes of personal thought and social communication can be immensely positive, providing a respite, like taking a break from work for refreshments. This time is an opportunity to realign our inner and outer worlds, fostering greater coherence and deeper meaning.

Mercury retrograde periods are best used meditatively or for contemplation. These are especially good times to focus *inwardly*, to interpret life not as a series of external events leading to objective goals, but rather as a mirror, a reflection of the unconscious self. By focusing on the feelings behind our wishes and dreams, we can reshape the forms of our needs and desires. Don't act or react hastily; instead, slow down. Be patient. Use your mind to notice the inner state of your feelings as they percolate up from inside.

As with so much of human life, however, numerous complications lurk in the bushes. The world does not stop just because Mercury goes retrograde. Circumstantial pressures continue to affect our lives. In modern America, especially, commerce waits for no one. Businesses expect deals to be struck and profits to be made, just as always. Interpersonal and family relationships demand attention and push for fulfillment, just as always.

Further, we may not realize or forget that reason and intuition have switched places. This reversal of thinking modes is very subtle, and a lot of us simply miss it, especially those who pride themselves on their acute awareness. We may continue to conduct our affairs as if things were normal and straightforward, when they're definitely not. We may experience ourselves as thinking clearly, but be confused, or those with whom we're communicating may be confused. Either way, misunderstandings will occur.

The result is a little like dyslexia, or mistaking a mirage for reality. Thinking and communication can twist back on themselves like the dragon eating its own tail. Often, decisions made during the retrograde period must later be reversed. Agreements are misunderstood, contracts are broken, schedules are interrupted, and productivity falters.

If Mercury retrograde implied merely the hassles of disrupted schedules, unexpected delays, or missed appointments, then it would be nothing more than minor aggravation. We could bull through it. The real caution, however, lies in plans and decisions that seem fine at the time, but then go awry later, sometimes months later. Forward-looking commitments made and set into motion while Mercury is retrograde may prove sadly untenable down the road, in the harsh glare of 20/20 hindsight.

So exercise care, think twice, then think again, before making decisions or entering into contracts and commitments that require major capital investments of time, energy, money, or heart. If you must take that new job, buy that new car or home, all right — go ahead. Do what's necessary. But if you have a choice, wait. Don't lean into the future right now. Turn around. Look to your past and feel where you've been. Clean up any unfinished tasks that are weighing you down.

Because this particular Mercury retrograde is coming right on the heels of the peak of the Sun-Mars-Uranus juggernaut, the effect may be shocking — a little like firing up the engines on a rocket only to shut down and delay the launch at the very last second. Much that was either recently set in motion or revving up to be will now shut down — not permanently, but for the time being.

For some of us, this pullback will be a relief from uncomfortable intensity; for others, it may feel like a crunching frustration. Each person will respond to the deceleration in a different manner. Just as the gearing up was a surprise in August, so this slowing down is unexpected now.

Take it easy. Ignore the typical end-of-summer-vacation-back-to-school frenzy. Switch the usual meanings of August and September in your mind. Make September your vacation, in spirit if not in fact.

In the upcoming month, don't push yourself. Don't try to achieve too much (or at least don't be overly attached to the external results you think you're trying to achieve...). Let September be a pause, a break, a time for reflection. Then, in the second week of October — as the weather turns brisk, the trees sigh in their brilliant colors, and the leaves fall — gradually move forward again with renewed clarity and fresh vision.

As always, let compassion guide your actions. Be gentle with yourself and forgiving toward others.



In the October newsletter, I'll write about the upcoming Sun-Venus-Neptune alignment, which could provide a subtle yin balance to the bold yang of Sun-Mars-Uranus energies.

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