

*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...

website www.billherbst.com
email bill@billherbst.com



Dear friends,

By the time you read this newsletter, Mercury will have gone direct from its three-week retrograde in October. We're not back on the Interstate yet, however. Mars goes stationary on November 15th and has already been in the setup phase of its retrograde loop since September 15th, so we're likely to be stuck in stop-and-go traffic on the Business Loop for quite awhile to come, with speed traps and breakdowns along the way. That's the subject of this month's commentary.

—Bill Herbst

HURRY UP AND WAIT

In astrology, Mars—the “Red Planet” and mythic “God of War”—is the archetype for all things masculine in nature, both in the physical world surrounding us and in the interior working of our psyches.

Mars is paired with Venus as a dyad in astrological symbolism. Venus, as the first planet whose orbit is closer to the Sun than the Earth's, represents the magnetism of attraction, the urge to pull inward from the ego (Earth) toward the center of the life-force (Sun). Thus, Venus is a feminine archetype of active receptivity and soul-meaning. Mars, as the first planet beyond the earth and further from the Sun, represents the thrust of externalizing force, the urge to push outward from the ego into the environment. Thus, Mars is a masculine archetype, interested in dealing with the outer world of events and activity rather than with meaning. As archetypes, Venus is the Queen who determines what is valued; Mars is the Soldier who goes out and gets it for her. Together, Venus and Mars hold dominion over the realm of intimacy in human experience—love and sex, romance and desire, affection and passion.

So, Mars symbolizes sex, desire, passion, and anything that resonates with phallic symbolism—assertiveness, aggression, conquest, and penetration. Mars is hot and sharp, like a sword smelted and annealed to a razor's-edge. Or a surgeon's scalpel. Indeed, Mars represents all surgery that cuts into the body. Tools are often Martian, such as drill bits or saws. Hammers are Martian in their focused impact, but Saturnian in their bluntness. Nails are quintessentially Mars, hard and pointed.

In process, Mars is urgent, kinetic, and vehement, with an emphasis on acceleration and speed. Fast cars are Martian, as are all powered vehicles, even wind-driven sailboats. Propelling missiles is a Martian act, from rocks thrown or spears hurled by hand, slingshot, or catapult; arrows loosed from bows; bullets fired from guns; shells shot from cannons; bombs dropped from airplanes; or rockets launched into space.

Explosions are Martian, although the type of explosive charge may invoke other astrological symbols—chemical explosives are Neptunian, electrical triggers are Uranian, and atomic weapons are Plutonian. The immediate physical impact of any explosion—the shock wave itself—is linked to Mars, as is violence in general, for instance, the collisions of automobile wrecks or airplanes plummeting to earth. Whenever a relatively irresistible force meets a relatively immovable object, something's got to give. Mars relishes this confrontation and is not averse to destruction, but sometimes the sheer force of impact is so great as to be self-immolating, as we see time and again in the maelstrom of war. War-lust is inherently Martian.

Mars also symbolizes all purposeful activity in our day-to-day lives. It is not the mere decision to act (Mercury), nor the preparations or planning (Saturn), but rather the actual thrust of desire and the willful push forward in kinetic and physical expression, to overcome external resistance and defeat, remove, or destroy obstacles. Mars is the urge to DO something, to change and transform the outer world, by both building and constructing or destroying and tearing down. Like a bull charging at the red cape of the matador, Mars is stimulated in the animal psyche by challenge and by pride. Restrain us or hold us back, and Mars responds, rushing to the ramparts to attack.

Like Aries, the cardinal sign it rules, Mars is crisis-oriented, hungry and pushful, like life itself. Birth is a Martian experience.

The Mars Cycle and Its Retrograde Loop

For most of its roughly two-year cycle through the heavens, Mars is one of the faster-moving planets. For over 18 months of that journey, Mars speeds through most of the zodiac—eleven and one-half of the twelve signs—moving through each sign in an average of about 45 days.

Then, due to the parallax factor between the Earth's and Mars' orbits, Mars appears to slow, stop, and back up against the backdrop of fixed stars. For the last 5-7 months of its cycle, Mars will appear to jockey within a very small arc of the heavens, from 10-20°. Whichever section of the zodiac Mars makes its extended stay is emphasized through desire and conflict, heat and fire, sharpness and cutting.

The retrograde "loop" consists of three phases:

1. Setup (also called Shadow), when Mars is still moving forward but slowing down, and moving through territory over which it will later back up.
2. Retrograde, when Mars appears to be moving backwards.
3. Resolution, when it re-covers in direct motion the space it just backed over.

The Mars retrograde loop occurring this year and into 2008 began its setup on *September 15th*. The actual retrograde period starts when Mars goes stationary on *November 15th* and lasts for 76 days. Then the resolution phase kicks in when Mars goes direct on *January 30th* and lasts until *April 5th*. All told, the entire loop is 203 days total, not quite seven months.

Resistance and the Drag Coefficient

In the design of vehicles, "drag coefficient" involves a set of formulae used to calculate resistance to fluid air flow. More drag, less efficiency. During Mars retrograde, we enter a period of more resistance, greater drag, and higher fuel consumption. More energy expenditure is needed to push ahead, since the drag coefficient increases for all kinetic activity. Unexpected obstacles appear, and even when the road ahead initially appears to allow smooth sailing, resistance subtly builds. We may not be clear on what we want or what we should do, but even when we are, getting to our goal is more difficult and takes longer. Spiritually, this process recalls the ancient Hindu aphorism that desire is attachment, making the ego heavier and more difficult to transcend.

(Not to point out the absurdly obvious, but drag coefficient is also a metaphor for the problems of industrial civilization as we hit Peak Oil and head down the long curve of diminishing stocks of easily accessible fossil

fuels, namely oil and natural gas. Resistance to movement in all the engines of modern life is increasing. The halcyon days of easy motoring, “leavin’-on-a-jet-plane,” and cheap home heating are fading.)

In a simpler simile, Mars is like the lead sled dog on our team. During Mars retrograde, our lead dog may take us into areas of thicker snow or darker woods. These snowy woods are where our path leads, but we should go more slowly, with greater caution and thoughtfulness, aware that we are penetrating a mystery that will take time, patience, and sustained effort to reveal.

Collective Meanings of this Mars Retrograde

To reveal astrologically the collective meanings of this particular Mars retrograde, we look to the small section of the zodiac where the loop is occurring.

This Mars retrograde covers an arc of just over 18° in the zodiac, from 13+ Cancer back to 24+ Gemini. That section of the life-cycle dynamic is about security and communication linkage. Home, family, emotional roots, basic needs, and physical protection are Cancerian concerns. Travel, information, curiosity, and communication networking are the Gemini counterparts. All these are subject to the contradiction of “hurry up and wait” from mid-September through the end of January 2008, with the full resolution of whatever arises delayed until next spring. Collectively, we are galvanized to explore diverse ways to make ourselves more safe and secure. In pursuing that goal, however, we find ourselves enmeshed in a thicket of thorns.

One quite specific manifestation that many of us may experience is a search for “missing members of our social family”—meaning people who were at one time important in our lives, but from whom we were then separated for any of innumerable reasons. Lives change. People move away. Relationships play out their dramatic arcs, sometimes fulfilling themselves naturally, but often faltering, cracking, or arriving at sad ends under the cumulative weight of difficult sharing. The individuals in question may be blood relations, but they might just as easily be people we met and were drawn to along the way.

During this particular Mars retrograde loop, we may experience a heightened sense of emotional loss (Cancer) combined with a sudden “need to know” (Gemini). What happened to that person who had so much impact and was once so crucial to our lives? Where is he or she now? How has time and distance changed us? The motivation to reconnect—or at least to satisfy our curiosity about long-departed beloveds—emerges from a longing to revivify social networks of happy association (Gemini) and renew a deeper sense of emotional coherence in our lives (Cancer) by filling in the empty holes in our hearts. Like hunting for Easter eggs, the quest is both stimulating and symbolic of resurrection. Re-feathering our nests by digging up our own long-buried and lost treasures. Reunification (Cancer) through greater social diversity (Gemini).

The experiences noted above are shared expressions of this particular Mars retrograde. Billions of people will feel them to a greater or lesser extent. To reveal other very different meanings that are personal or custom-tailored for each of us, astrology offers two basic techniques: transits and houses.

Individual Mars Transits and Triggered Houses

As Mars moves around the zodiac, it makes various geometrical connections with the symbolic points in our personal natal charts. These connections—Mars “transits”—are periods of temporary urgency where we experience heightened aggression, desire, or conflict. We go to “red alert” readiness, heating up psychologically, and encountering (or even looking for) situations through which we can or must assert ourselves. This may occur intentionally or quite unconsciously, and the manifestations vary widely, from inner shifts in our psychic energy that are barely noticeable to boldly dramatic confrontations in circumstance and relatedness.

Using only the most standard chart factors (hard aspects, ten major planets, and two axes), we will experience 48 such Mars transits every two years. Ordinarily, Martian transits last for only 2-3 days. Mars makes the contact to a certain symbolic point in our chart—pushing at it, inflaming or even igniting it—then quickly moves on. Considered in the larger perspective of all possible astrological cycles, Mars transits represent potential peaks but generally minor events. They may on occasion act as triggers for longer outer-planet transits, but usually they’re fleeting, here one day and gone the next.

During the retrograde loop, however, Mars transits last for 5-6 *months*, with three passes—forward, backward, then forward again. This increases their importance dramatically.

What are typically only brief skirmishes during most of Mars' two-year cycle become extended campaigns during the retrograde—long battles containing many attacks, counterattacks, and lulls between. Imagine a heated argument (either inside yourself or between you and someone else) that ebbs and flows but never quite resolves and keeps coming up again and again for half a year.

Warfare is only one side of Mars, however. Rather than overt *conflict*, we may instead experience extended *desires*, where whatever we want appears initially to be within our reach, but then turns out to require much time and prolonged effort to satisfy. To use a particularly ripe metaphor, imagine a Viagra-induced erection that lasts for *six months* (call your doctor!).

The same process and implications apply to the houses of our personal natal charts where this Mars retrograde loop is focused. Houses define different arenas of life-experience—work, relationships, education, social involvement, isolation, health, money, etc.—the circumstantial stages upon which we play out our individual dramas.

Taken together, the long transits and various house associations triggered by Mars during its retrograde loop reveal the parts of our psyches and the arenas of life-experience that will “light up” or “go red” in our individual charts. The particular matrix of symbols is specific, complex, and different for every chart—a unique pattern in each of our lives.

Whether we're dealing with conflict or desire, knowing which Martian transits and houses are active in our charts during the retrograde loop can tell us where we should prepare for a longer siege rather than a quick victory or easy fulfillment.

A Little Advice, for Whatever It's Worth

In inner consciousness, Mars retrograde implies greater urgency in certain areas of concern and interest—either collectively or individually—with strong feelings of imminent change or the desire for change through action. Paradoxically, however, these urges are signals to *slow down*. Direct and straightforward activity will not bring immediate results or satisfaction, instead tending to bog down into a longer, more subtle and complicated process. External circumstances will shift frequently, requiring us to alter if not our basic strategy, at least our tactics.

This is not to suggest that we should refrain from taking any action. Act according to inner desire and outer necessity. But understand that we have entered into a much longer process than normal, and that the full ramifications of whatever we want or must fight for will take more time and energy than we initially expected. This is not a sprint, but rather a long-distance marathon, so pace yourself. Speed up when you have to, push through when you can, but don't rush headlong and slow down when you run into stubborn resistance.

The challenge, of course, is to remember this over the next six months and apply the knowledge effectively. The Martian part of our psyches is notoriously irrational. Mars wants what it wants NOW—not tomorrow, not next week, and sure as hell not in five months. It's one thing to be aware in our intellects of the patient stance we should adopt toward action during the Mars retrograde loop, but another thing entirely to get our fevered emotions to listen.

But then, that's where the maturity of Saturn comes in—self-discipline in dealing with obstacles as a counterweight to passion.



Bill Herbst resides in Olympia, Washington. To learn about his telephone sessions with clients, go to his web site at www.billherbst.com, and click on the link in the upper right corner for **Sessions FAQ**.

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