

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

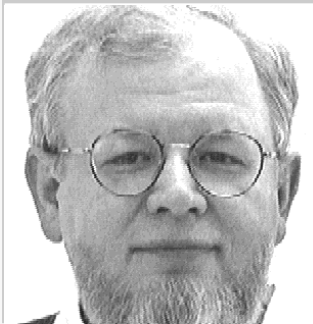
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# THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



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,

This month's newsletter addresses a recurring, well-known phenomenon in astrology, this time with a special concern for the traps hidden along the way.

## MERCURY RETRO REDUX

On August 9th, Mercury goes retrograde again, this time in early Virgo. Then why am I telling you this in July? Well, because the effects of Mercury retrograde begin weeks **BEFORE** the actual station, when Mercury is still in direct motion and passes over the point in the zodiac to which it will later retrograde back. I call that period the "set-up phase" of the retrograde loop, and it begins this month, on July 21st.

During the three weeks when Mercury is retrograde—appearing because of parallax to move backwards—many of us experience life as a bit weird and slightly out of alignment. It's almost a palpable sensation, especially for those who have sensitized themselves to this event, which occurs on average three times each year, about every four months.

During the more subtle set-up phase that precedes the actual retrograde, however, our sensors may not trigger. As a result, during that initial three-week period we are vulnerable to inadvertently biting off more than we can chew, thus setting ourselves up for problems that manifest later, during the retrograde itself.

So, from July 21st until August 9th, begin slowing down the pace of your activity. If you find yourself wound up and pushing at life, ease off and pull back on the reins. Gradually come to a full stop (or, more realistically, as full a stop as the circumstances of your life allow) around the second week of August. Then shift into "assessment mode" for the rest of the month.

This is about traffic flow, about red lights and green lights. Mercury retrograde defines a period of inversion, where normal movement and regular communication turn away from their typical outward productivity and redirect inward for the purpose of emotional cleansing. Less driving and more maintenance. Less “getting somewhere” and more coming home to ourselves.

Consider a 19th-century military metaphor: For the past three months, the “army” of your life has been marching along. The cavalry is now far ahead of the infantry, which is itself well in advance of the slower artillery and supply trains. Your army is stretched out. Mercury retrograde is the natural time to temporarily stop the forward march and go into bivouac, allowing your troops to regroup and consolidate, in effect giving the stragglers a chance to catch up and rejoin their units.

In other words, it’s time to clean up old, unfinished business. Take care of tasks and duties you’ve been putting off. Within the limits of pragmatism and necessity, try not to rush into new commercial or career endeavors. This is not a good time for initiating projects. Like a farmer in winter, let the fields of intention lie fallow while you fix broken machinery and peruse seed catalogs. Spring will come soon enough.

### **The Usual Suspects**

Mercury retro manifestations are well-known to anyone who pays attention to astrological cycles and the rhythms of the natural world. If you can avoid making major purchases, such as a new house, car, or computer, do so. Put off such acquisitions until September. If the chances of unforeseen complications around consumer purchases are ordinarily 10-20%, then during Mercury retrograde periods those odds rise to at least 30-40%.

If you can’t postpone a major purchase, as happens in life when the luxury of choice is sometimes unavailable, go ahead and roll the dice. But pay special attention and read the fine print on the contract before signing on the dotted line. Then let the chips fall where they may, accepting that you might inadvertently bog down in quicksand.

Expect delays and foul-ups in scheduling. When arranging business and social contacts, try to stay loose and leave some slack in the rope. Go with the flow, and understand that Murphy’s Law will apply. Remember the old saying: “*The way to make God laugh is to tell Him your plans.*” So guard against overattachment to structure or results. Remain fluid, not fixed or frozen.

Allow for misunderstandings in communication. You and I may use the word “purple” together and believe that we are in agreement, but during Mercury retrograde especially I might assume a more reddish-purple while you envision a more bluish-purple. Those unconscious misunderstandings can and do provoke trouble. So remember that in Mercury retrograde prose and poetry intertwine, as do the drama masks of comedy and tragedy. Ironies abound. Language—both overtly spoken and internally interpreted—acquires a much more subjective shadow. Emotions past leech up and infect the mental here-and-now. Meditate on your own personal meanings and watch what bubbles up from your unconscious.

This upcoming Mercury retro is a great time to go over your private plumbing. Apply some Drano to the emotional pipes in your basement, especially around clogs of vanity or excessive pride. Roto-root any arrogance and restore a healthy state of clean humility. Exercise patience.

All this applies to the last third of July and all of August, until Mercury goes direct on September 2nd.

Check your birth charts. Those among us who were born with significant planets or angles at the end of fixed signs or the beginning of mutable signs will be more strongly affected by this particular Mercury retrograde.

## Nothing is Cast in Stone

If at all possible, don't get caught up in "legal courtroom" nitpicking around the timing of these periods. What I mean by this is that I've noticed over the years a marked tendency on the part of some people to try to "get around" the cautioning stoplights of Mercury retrograde.

For example, a client's house might be up for sale, and he's received an offer from a prospective buyer. Being sensitive to the "rules" of astrological timing, my client asks me: *"Bill, if I sign the contract two days before Mercury goes retrograde, I'll be OK, yes? Nothing will get weird around the sale, right???"* This person wants to move forward in a direction generally ill-advised during Mercury retro periods, and he hopes that I will authoritatively let him off the hook, as if I were a sharp lawyer who will find a loophole in the law to give him immunity.

Friends, astrology is a road map, not an insurance policy. Yes, I can help interpret or decode the map, but I can't guarantee anyone that selling his home, starting a business, or getting married on a certain date will be secure or fail-safe. Life is far too vast and mysterious for anyone to provide that kind of certainty with assurance.

This is one of those "letter of the law versus spirit of the law" issues. The whole question of precise astrological timing is extremely complex and not at all clear. While the mathematics of astrology can be honed right down to the second in terms of timing, the Laws of Manifestation—what will actually happen in a specific life and when it might occur—are much less sure.

In the example above, where my client hypothetically wants to sign a contract for the sale of his home two days before Mercury goes retrograde, that's clearly contrary to the astrological flow, since the retrograde station is actually the middle of the whole six-week period, not the beginning. OK, so what if my client asks me if it's all right to sell his house two days before the set-up phase begins? Technically, that should be safe, right? Maybe, but maybe not. Selling a house is not a one-day process. The escrow period will go right through the retrograde. Movers must be contracted, utilities changed, and weeks of packing precede the move. My point here is that the rules aren't straightforward, nor are they hard-and-fast, so it's a tough call for an astrologer. Looking at the chart is easy; factoring into that chart the infinite variables of real life is much more difficult.

Well then, what if my client goes ahead and signs the contract anyway? Will the sale inevitably fall through or encounter complications? No, not necessarily. Remember that we're talking about ODDS here. Every choice carries risks, no matter what decision we make or when we make it. Astrological timing is only one of many factors that influence risk. In a given situation, other concerns in life may override an astrological stop sign. We weigh all the factors we know, calculate the risks as best we can, and then we choose to move ahead or wait for better conditions. And the wild-card factor always applies: Sometimes we make lousy choices but skate through unscathed on luck or grace. Other times, even the best, most careful decisions go awry.

The spiritual path involves learning about ourselves and life by observing the process of living rather than focusing on hoped-for results. Given how perversely human beings are hard-wired, that's much easier to say than to do.

Yeah, I know—most **everyone** (including me) wants a good job, enough money, a wonderful mate, and all the other symbols of happiness and fulfillment that our culture dangles like tantalizing carrots in front of our ego-donkeys. But acquiring those goodies is not finally what astrology is about.

In my experience, astrology has only limited usefulness toward securing a certain desired outcome, not so much because the astrological system is flawed (though it is), but more because we aren't very conscious of what's happening within ourselves or around us. What astrology is terrific for, however, is assisting us to better observe the process of our living over time—to show us our own patterns and the interrelatedness of what's connected to what in our lives.

Mercury retrogrades are not inherently frustrating times. They are simply periods of redirection. The aggravation that so many people experience during these six-week phases comes from the fact that even temporary changes in self-expression run into fierce resistance from habits and compulsions. Our ego-donkey is always hungry, programmed to sniff out more carrots even when no carrots are within reach, and sometimes the donkey can be extremely stubborn. Getting the “Ah-Ha” of Mercury retrograde (and enjoying it) requires inner detachment from the allure of outward fulfillment.

Remembering who we are is the spiritual challenge to which we return, time and time again. In that effort, astrology can help us find our way home. Mercury retrograde is a sign posted at regular intervals on that path, telling us when to make a pit stop for routine maintenance of our life-vehicles. So, over the six weeks from late July to early September, leave the rat race behind. Change your emotional oil, rotate your mental tires, and check your psychological steering, suspension, and brakes for wear and tear. Finish up with a nice wash and wax.

Make yourself shine.



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