

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

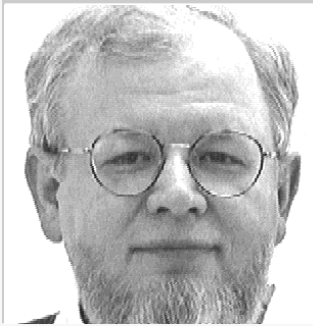
*Issue #79
August 2005*

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,

Last month I discussed collective forecasting in astrology versus individual experience. This month, I focus on an upcoming collective event that will have personal ramifications for many of us. I'll push the envelope a bit to allow each reader to see whether his or her individual experience will be directly affected in the months ahead, and — in general terms at least — how that may occur.

MARS RETROGRADE

About every two years, Mars makes one complete circuit around the heavens we see on earth by traveling through all twelve signs of the zodiac against the backdrop of what we call “fixed” stars. Actually, nothing in the heavens is truly fixed or stationary, but the visual movements of stars and galaxies vast distances away are so slow as to be imperceptible over the span of a human life. From our perspective, those myriad pinpoints of light appear “fixed” relative to each other, and the bodies in our solar system move through that background.

In astrology, Mars represents the urge for kinetic action outward into the environment through bodily movement. Mars is not reflective or philosophical in tone; instead, it is the instinctive and emotional drive to have physical impact on our world, to exercise muscular strength, or to move through space toward a target, as a spear or missile does. Mars can be sharp and cutting, like a knife or scalpel, or blunt and bludgeoning, like a hammer, but it always seeks impact.

As the first major body beyond the earth, Mars symbolizes centrifugal or outward-directed force, and thus is associated with the masculine element in our energies. Venus, the first major body inward from the earth closer to the center of the solar system, represents the opposite feminine principle, the inward-drawing magnetism of receptivity and enfolding. Because this pair of planets is so close to the earth (our symbolic “body”), astrology places them in the context of primal intimacy. Venus is personal affection — romantic, aesthetic, and tender — while Mars is personal desire — sexual, physical, and rough. While Venus is cool and graceful, Mars is hot and urgent. Venus is peace and harmony; Mars is war and conflict.

Martian energies are simultaneously exhilarating and uncomfortable. The adrenalin rush is amazing, but the tension and fear in relation to others (either on the giving or receiving end) can be withering. Most of us are divided within ourselves about Mars, and indeed, American culture is extremely paradoxical in its attitudes regarding assertiveness and aggression. Sexual desire is lauded, but, despite official denials to the contrary, we have been slow to condemn rape. The line between sexual vigor and sexual violence is still obscured for many of us. If anyone doubts how important male sexual desire and performance are to Americans, just check the sales figures for Viagra or Cialis.

We are similarly unresolved about anger. Designed in part as nature's way of preventing violence (through ritual displays of aggression, such as snakes rattling and hissing or apes pounding their chests, stomping, and pulling down vines, which are not actually attacks but messages to "Back Off!"), human anger is uniquely unsettling. Rather than defusing confrontations, anger among humans often results in escalation of the conflict. In this, Mars has gotten a bum rap in the proscriptions of extreme political correctness, which now brand all anger as sociopathic (which it is not). In some social circles, the important distinction between anger and violence has been not merely obscured, but wiped out entirely.

Violence is technically outlawed in endless formal statutes, yet America remains among the most violent societies on earth. Within our country, statistics for murder and bodily harm remain shockingly high, more so than in any other "civilized" culture. Our entertainment in movies and video games overflows with fictionalized violence. Outside the country, we're just as aggressive. Our propaganda insists that Americans are a peace-loving people, yet our government and military have been involved in continual wars around the world for the past century. From pro wrestlers to special forces soldiers, we deify our warriors as "heroes," like Martian gods.

Eisenhower's warnings about the "military-industrial complex" have come true (the original draft of his famous speech in 1958 contained the wording "military-industrial-commercial complex," but "commercial" was dropped at the last minute). America now spends half a trillion dollars a year on the military, which is an amount larger than the cumulative spending of the next ten largest nations added together.

Mars is explosive. Fireworks, bombs, and guns are Martian, as are internal combustion engines. All big bangs are Martian, from dynamite to fireworks, including the sustained high-decibel roar of jackhammers, power saws, motorcycles, lawn mowers, and leaf blowers. Life in any urban or even suburban landscape in America is filled with the sounds of Mars.

So Mars is nothing if not provocative.

When Mars is active in our charts, we are much more inclined to feel any of those impulses along the broad scale of Martian meanings — heat, self-assertion, aggression, desire, impatience, anger, etc. We are in a "red alert" state, ready for action and waiting for a trigger, but also more prone to anger or inadvertent violence through accidents (a slip of the knife, car wrecks, etc.). When Mars is up in our charts, we are fiercer and more combative.

How often and for how long is Mars active in our charts? To answer that, we need to understand Mars' movement through our earthly heavens.

Since Mars has a two-year cycle around the zodiac, that's 24 months to go through 12 signs. Thus, on average, we might assume that Mars spends about two months in each sign (Aries, Taurus, etc.). Averages are deceiving, however, and in this case incorrect.

Like all planets viewed from earth, Mars is subject to the parallax effect of retrograde motion. Once in every complete cycle around the heavens, Mars appears from our perspective on earth to slow down, stop, and back up in the heavens. So Mars whisks through the heavens for 18 months of its two-year cycle, moving through eleven signs at a rate of about six weeks per sign. The one remaining sign (or a segment of the zodiac of about 15°, which, at times, spans two signs) is where Mars exhibits retrograde motion.

Like Mercury retrogrades, the Martian retrograde period covers three distinct phases: When Mars passes the point to which it will later retrograde back, we enter the Setup Phase, which lasts about seven weeks.

In this phase, Mars moves progressively slower. The Setup phase ends when Mars stops, after which it appears to slowly back up against the backdrop of fixed stars, gradually increasing in backward momentum for a couple weeks until it slows and stops again. [The stopping points are called “stations.”] This period between stations is the actual Retrograde Phase, which takes a little more than nine weeks. Then, in the third and final Resolution Phase, Mars resumes forward motion, slowly accelerating while it moves again through the section of the zodiac it recently backed over. That period lasts almost eight weeks.

All told, the three phases comprise a time frame just one week short of six months. The Setup and Resolution Phases are often called “Shadow Phases” by astrologers, but that term is also used to describe the entire six months.

We are about to enter a Mars retrograde. The Setup Phase runs from August 11th to October 1st; the Retrograde Phase from October 1st to December 9th, and the Resolution Phase from December 9th until February 3rd, 2006.

In collective forecasting, astrologers often speak of Mars retrogrades as a period when action naturally “turns inward.” Outward-directed activities are often delayed or ineffective in producing the desired results. Anger may simmer, with inner brooding or dissatisfaction. Positive results can be gained by going back on one’s path to address and correct problems that were overlooked previously. In this commentary, however, I’m not particularly concerned with the presumed collective effects. I want to write instead about the meanings for us as individuals.

Ordinarily, Mars transits in each of our natal charts last only one to two days. These brief periods are forceful in our psyches and circumstances, indicating that “red alert” state where we are both hotter and sharper than usual and may suddenly trigger into conflict or combativeness with others or suffer physical accidents through impatience or inadvertent aggressiveness. Still, they are only blips on the radar screen, here and gone quickly. As crossroads, short Mars transits are significant, identifying sharp turns in our journeys. As experiences, however, they are usually minor.

That’s how Mars operates in our charts for about three-quarters of its two-year cycle. During the six-month period of its retrograde phases, however, all that changes. Any major contacts Mars makes to significant points in our charts become what are called “three-pass” transits that last not one or two days, but upwards of four months!

Given Mars’ aggressive nature — he is, after all, the God of War — we might consider Martian transits in military terms: The brief, two-day transits resemble skirmishes or short battles, in that they are sharp and hot. The extended three-pass transits are more like campaigns, where fighting occurs sporadically within a longer period requiring strategy, planning, and realignments to adjust for shifting circumstances. In a skirmish, we fight from where we are. In a campaign, we move troops as needed, both forward and back. We may attack, fall back, regroup, defend, and counterattack. In the happier terms of intimacy, short Mars transits are like a “hot date.” Extended Mars transits, however, are like a courtship, with numerous encounters that ebb and flow repeatedly within a relationship where we feel certainty about our desire at some points, yet very unsure at others.

The coming Mars retrograde is a collective event; it applies to all of us together. However, each of us will experience the changing Martian energies differently, depending on at least three factors:

1. where in our individual charts Mars goes retrograde
2. what natal points Mars contacts in our charts
3. how our consciousness responds to the real-life events symbolized by those activations

Because I don’t have the natal charts of all my readers, I’m limited in the specificity and depth of information I can provide. So, from this point on, I will discuss only certain factors I can know generically. For instance, extended Mars transits to the Moon and Angles are very significant but impossible to assess without full natal charts. Similarly, four-month Mars transits to the inner planets must be discarded. That leaves upcoming Mars transits to the Sun, Saturn, and the outer planets — Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto.

I have calculated the birth dates of everyone who will undergo major Martian transits (conjunction, square, or opposition) to one or more of those points in their charts. As you read further, check to see if you are about to experience any of these extended Martian contacts, all of which represent “campaigns” to move your life forward in one way or another through the obstacle course of real life. Even if you’re not going through any of these transits, you will almost certainly know or interact with someone who is.

The earliest Mars transits in this coming period run from August 11th to December 9th (when Mars goes direct again) — almost five months in length. The last transits to activate will run from October 1st (when Mars goes retrograde) through February 3rd — four months duration. If you’re in one of the groups below, check an ephemeris or contact an astrologer to learn the exact dates of your particular Mars transits and the specific, custom-tailored meanings indicated by your chart. [Please don’t ask me for this information unless you want a full session.]

MARS-SUN transits affect us at the core level of consciousness, through our central life-purpose. Altering our basic life-direction in some fashion is desirable, to leave behind the way things were and push ahead into new forms of manifestation, new circumstances, and new ways of being. Pride and dignity are heightened concerns. Look behind to see where you’ve been. Look ahead to see where you want to go. About a billion people — one-sixth of the world’s human population — will undergo a major Mars-Sun transit during the upcoming months.

Who will have a Mars transit to the Sun? Everyone born in any year between the following dates:

January 28th – February 11th
April 27th – May 13
July 31st – August 15th
October 31st – November 15th

MARS-PLUTO transits are like walking around without realizing that you’ve got a bottle of nitroglycerin in your pocket. The transit operates directly out of the unconscious and brings either new beginnings or final endings. That is the point of Mars-Pluto contacts. One way or another, your life will be cleared for new growth. Confrontations with collective power (in the form of authority) are quite likely. Difficult or unpleasant circumstances that cannot be reformed may be destroyed. Watershed experiences and total catharses are possible. This period is good for research or sustained investigation to reach the heart of a matter and bring it to light. Whether in your personal psyche or your external social life, something hidden will be revealed. Carefully monitor absolutism, dogma, or ruthlessness in your own feelings and self-assertion, and — if possible — avoid people who express those qualities. Conflicts with others are a sizable risk, because they can escalate out of control very quickly.

Anyone born between the following dates will have Mars contacting Pluto over the next six months:

22 Sep 1943 – 29 Dec 1943
27 Jul 1944 – 12 Mar 1945
28 May 1945 – 29 Aug 1953
2 Mar 1954 – 4 Jul 1954
23 Nov 1986 – 11 May 1987
19 Sep 1987 – 27 Nov 1992
12 Jun 1993 – 19 Sep 1993

MARS-NEPTUNE transits hone desire to a mysterious and almost mystical edge. We feel heat everywhere we turn. The transit may also breed confusion or misunderstanding. What we actually do is less important than the radiance of our force-fields. Both conflicts and desires involve illusions. Secrets (old or new, true or false) affect situations dramatically. Actions are motivated by lofty idealism or covert cynicism; either way, results are likely to be different than expected. Spirituality bleeds into mundane activities for better and for worse. Fantasies and dreams are energized, which is fine as long as they are

accepted as compelling mirages and not mistaken for realities. This period is dubious for ego-recognition, but very good for selfless giving or other experiences that are motivated by intentional self-transcendence.

Anyone born between the following dates will have Mars contacting Neptune over the next six months:

8 Sep 1918 – 18 Jan 1919
10 Jul 1919 – 13 Sep 1925
14 Feb 1926 – 16 Jul 1926
13 Dec 1959 – 10 Apr 1960
14 Oct 1960 – 25 Dec 1966
30 Apr 1967 – 28 Oct 1967

MARS-URANUS transits are electric and unpredictable, like being struck by lightning (or becoming lightning and striking someone else). Old habits, routines, and duties are suddenly intolerable and may be tossed aside in fits of pique. New desires can galvanize us, commanding our full attention for brief periods where we throw ourselves headlong into new pursuits, at least for a short time. Boredom is anathema; we want fresh stimulation and will do just about anything to get it. Surprising changes of direction occur, and we may consciously break our own and others' expectations of who we are. This can include shocking people to show them that we aren't who they assumed us to be (even if we really are). Desire and self-assertion are extremely willful throughout this period. Conflicts are sharp and sudden. Planning and patience out the window in favor of living spontaneously in the moment.

Anyone born between the following dates will have Mars contacting Uranus over the next six months:

<i>8 Feb 1914 – 10 Sep 1914</i>	<i>21 Feb 1961 – 2 Jul 1961</i>
<i>23 Nov 1914 – 29 Apr 1917</i>	<i>11 Nov 1976 – 9 Jun 1977</i>
<i>27 Jun 1917 – 7 Feb 1918</i>	<i>29 Aug 1977 – 18 Dec 1979</i>
<i>16 Jun 1936 – 14 Oct 1936</i>	<i>18 May 1980 – 6 Oct 1980</i>
<i>6 Apr 1937 - 5 Jun 1940</i>	<i>10 Apr 1997 – 15 Jun 1997</i>
<i>5 Dec 1940 – 24 Mar 1941</i>	<i>20 Jan 1998 – 28 Mar 2001</i>
<i>14 Aug 1957 – 5 Mar 1958</i>	<i>2 Aug 2001 – 18 Jan 2002</i>
<i>25 May 1958 – 15 Sep 1960</i>	

MARS-SATURN transits affect work, responsibility, and restriction. This combination hits us in our vulnerabilities and fears. We are increasingly frustrated with anything in our psyches or circumstances that has been holding us back. We can't usually break through the walls, but we can't stop butting up against them either. Imagine driving your car and flooring the accelerator and the brakes simultaneously. The result is improved torque but high stress on the engine. That's good for slowly climbing hills, but lousy for high-speed highway driving. New starts are likely to be delayed, and necessarily so, since circumstances do not favor forward movement. Put the emphasis on long-term strategic planning rather than short-term tactical gains. Restrain yourself and lie low, biding your time. Fight defensively for survival. When the transit ends, you'll be able to move forward much more easily.

Anyone born between the following dates will have Mars contacting Saturn over the next six months:

<i>19 Apr 1911 – 13 May 1912</i>	<i>25 May 1940 – 21 Dec 1940</i>	<i>15 Dec 1962 – 27 Jan 1964</i>
<i>28 Aug 1917 – 13 Mar 1918</i>	<i>28 Jan 1941 – 21 Jun 1941</i>	<i>23 Jul 1969 – 18 Sep 1969</i>
<i>5 May 1918 – 23 Sep 1918</i>	<i>9 Dec 1941 – 7 Mar 1942</i>	<i>1 Apr 1970 – 27 Apr 1971</i>
<i>4 Mar 1919 – 11 Jun 1919</i>	<i>24 Oct 1946 – 17 Dec 1946</i>	<i>11 Aug 1976 – 5 Sep 1977</i>
<i>23 Nov 1924 – 13 Jun 1925</i>	<i>2 July 1947 – 27 Jul 1948</i>	<i>8 Nov 1983 – 18 Dec 1984</i>
<i>7 Aug 1925 – 6 Jan 1926</i>	<i>11 Jan 1954 – 25 Mar 1954</i>	<i>4 Jun 1985 – 12 Sep 1985</i>
<i>6 May 1926 – 5 Oct 1926</i>	<i>2 Oct 1954 – 13 Nov 1955</i>	<i>21 Jan 1992 – 1 Mar 1993</i>
<i>5 Feb 1933 – 19 Mar 1934</i>	<i>18 Mar 1962 – 29 Jul 1962</i>	<i>8 May 1999 – 2 Jun 2000</i>
<i>7 Sep 1934 – 12 Dec 1934</i>		

Let me state for the record that Mars transits — whether brief or extended — are not “bad.” Yes, they are provocative, and on rare occasions even dangerous. Yes, they are powerful in whomping up our testosterone and adrenalin, stimulating the energies of desire, self-assertion, and physical activity. And yes, Mars contacts in our charts can be disruptive.

But self-assertion is not the same as violence. Consciously-directed and under control, even anger can be a great boon toward overcoming obstacles that would ordinarily stop us in our tracks. Mars helps us to start over or change directions. As an important function of our life-vehicles, Mars allows us to accelerate and steer. Without Mars, free will and choice would be impotent.

If you have one or more of the Mars transits above, do your best to monitor your psychic “temperature” by staying in touch with your feelings. Try to find productive outlets for activity and release. Be as awake and conscious as you can. And — if all else fails — simply observe what happens and learn a little more about how your unique life-machinery operates.



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