

Venus Retrograde

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Among the many binary distinctions in astrological symbolism is one that I grapple with often, in my own chart and life, in the charts and lives of others, and in my assessment of the ever-changing flows within the collective zeitgeist. The distinction I'm referring to is the difference between the *ascetic* and the *hedonistic*. The ascetic is sparse, barebones, often severe, usually hard-edged, and sometimes dogmatic. The hedonistic is voluptuous, plush, soft, and sensual. In its most basic form, the ascetic holds that less is better and takes the hard road, while the hedonistic presumes that more is better and always chooses the easier path.

All astrological symbols contain both perspectives, but some symbols lean more toward one direction than the other. I'm thinking mainly of major bodies here, which represent the urges and motivations that undergird our actions. Here's a brief categorization of typical ascetic/hedonistic inclinations for those bodies:

Sun, Mercury — neutral, can go either direction, often both
Jupiter, Uranus — ideological, typically in one direction or the other
Moon, Venus, Mars, Neptune — strongly hedonistic
Saturn, Uranus — strictly ascetic, although Uranus is contrarian
Pluto — intense and extreme in either direction, but not both

With that established, let's move on to the phenomenon of retrogradation. Retrograde loops are noteworthy within astrology. From our perspective on the earth, all bodies in the solar system in orbit around the sun appear to periodically slow, stop, and back up against the background of fixed stars in the heavens. This happens not because those bodies literally change direction (obviously, they don't), but instead as a visual anomaly caused by the parallax factor of "overlapping" cycles.

The Sun and Moon always move in direct motion and never go retrograde. The other major bodies used in astrology (which we call planets) exhibit periodic retrogradation. This is true also of all the thousands of other smaller bodies in orbit around the sun — "minor" planets, asteroids, and comets. Many of those have been discovered over recent decades, and some are now used as symbols in astrology, especially by younger astrologers. For this commentary, I'll restrict my discussion to the traditional eight planets. The retrograde periods for each of these major bodies represent times of possible re-assessment concerning whatever forms of expression had been previously habituated.

All retrograde loops occur in three phases:

- First, an initial period when the body is still moving in direct motion, but passing through the section of the zodiac through which it will soon back up. Throughout this phase the planet is “slowing down” as it approaches its apparent change of direction (called its retrograde station). This period is typically referred to as the “shadow” phase, but I prefer the term “setup.” It’s the preface to the meaning of the retrograde period that will follow, setting a tone in attitude and circumstance.
- The second or middle phase is the actual period of retrogradation or apparent backward motion. That’s when we are likely to experience the literal correspondences in real life with whatever that particular retrograde loop symbolizes.
- After the retrograde phase ends with the direct station and the body resumes direct motion, we enter the third and last phase. I call this “resolution.” This is when we implement whatever changes became advisable or necessary during the initial two phases. In essence, that’s when we “clean up” whatever happened.

Mercury retrograde loops occur on average three times each year, about every four months. They have entered the public awareness of astrology as frequent periods of three weeks where communication, plans, schedules, and agreements all become more liable to disruption. New acquisitions are less certain to work out as expected, so people are typically advised to avoid major purchases. What this means is that if there’s typically a 10% chance of something going awry in an agreement or a purchase, those odds increase to 20-30% during Mercury retrograde.

Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto all undergo one retrograde loop each year. Venus and Mars retrograde on average once every year and a half to two years.

Right now, we’ve entered the setup phase to another Venus retrograde. That phase began on November 17th 2021 and will be followed by Venus’ actual 42-day retrogradation (apparent backward movement in the zodiac) from December 19th 2021 through January 29th 2022. That will then give way to the third and final phase of resolution or denouement that will last until March 2nd 2022. The entire loop will span 106 days, or about three and a half months.

As with all the planets, the symbolism of Venus in astrology covers many correspondences in the pantheon of human drives and experience. More than any other symbol, Venus represents the eternal feminine — the centripetal and receptive power to draw the outer world into oneself. This is where beauty and fertility reside as magnetic, compelling, and almost magical properties. Venus is also the symbol in astrology for money, and, most significantly for purposes of this commentary, for the sensory pleasures that are associated with material reality. Aesthetics and art, romantic love, physical sensuality, and food are

included here as luxurious pleasures that can bring the experience of satiation and happiness (or so we hope).

With food, for instance, Venus represents both the art and pleasure of eating. That can mean the high end of cultural cuisine, in all its creativity and even social status, experienced as a chef or a diner through the appreciation of wonderful food, but it could also mean gluttony and the wide range of addictive disorders people suffer around food and self-image, from bulimia and anorexia through food sensitivities and toxic allergies.

When Venus goes into its retrograde loop, we're offered the chance to re-assess how all these correspondences have become programmed into our lives over the past couple of years. In this case, that means since July 2020, which was when the previous Venus retrograde ended. Not only are we "offered the chance to reconsider," but, to one degree or another, we may feel impelled to do so. Circumstances might arise that push us in that direction. Should we continue down the road we're on or change course?

As with all such astrological events, the real-life experiences that correspond to the symbolism will vary widely within the population in terms of form, style, content, impact, and meaning. Some people will undergo experiences that matter quite a bit and may carry some weight in altering their life-journeys. Others will experience almost nothing different or out of the ordinary, barely noticing any change in the zeitgeist. These differences are assessed typically by examining each person's natal chart to see where the Venus retrograde occurs, what other symbols are activated, and to what extent the retrograde loop integrates into the overall pattern of the chart as an unfolding mandala.

Within an individual life, the most significant shifts in our experience of Venus and its correspondences are indicated by activations (called "transits") within the cycles of the outer planets to our natal Venus. Our personal transits to Venus by Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto all reveal the possibility and timing of changes in love, pleasure, money, etc. These transits vary widely in both frequency and intensity.

Jupiter cycles are twelve years long, so significant Jupiter-Venus transits occur at the quarters, every three years. Saturn cycles are 29 years long, with major Saturn-Venus transits every seven years. So, over a lifetime, we'll experience those shifts many times. Uranus-Venus transits occur every 20-21 years, so we'll get three or four of those over a long life. Neptune-Venus and Pluto-Venus transits are more rare, occurring only once or twice in a full life.

The Jupiter and Saturn transits to Venus are about our maturation as conscious humans. They represent practical growth in our understanding of all things Venusian in our lives. By contrast, the transits to Venus by the trio of trans-Saturnian outer planets (Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto) are all effectively wild-cards — like jokers in the cosmic deck — indicating Venusian changes that emerge mysteriously from a larger context that is beyond our individual will.

What distinguishes a Venus retrograde loop from these more personal cycles is that we all go through Venus retrograde together, as a culture and species. Even though the individual manifestations vary widely, there is an overall tone to a Venus retrograde that potentially affects everyone together, collectively.

The most obvious way of assessing that collective symbolism is to reference where in the zodiac a given Venus retrograde loop occurs. Other technical indicators can be used, but the sign position is the most basic. This time, the section of the zodiac through which Venus will move backward (typically about half a sign) is through mid-Capricorn, from 26° back to 11° of the cardinal earth sign.

This means that the upcoming three months are likely to bring the possibility of reassessing work and ambition in our lives. Are we happy with our work? Does it produce sufficient reward (income) and personal satisfaction? How might we alter our work lives to create a more harmonious whole?

At the social/cultural level, the Venus retro in Capricorn encourages us to rethink and reconsider our major institutions, from business corporations and social organizations to government. Are these structural elements of our society operating harmoniously? Who reaps benefits and satisfaction? How are our institutions dealing with money? Do they care about us, and are we being well-served? If not, how might we change them to increase collective happiness and/or reduce suffering?

What are the odds that this Venus retrograde will result in a change for the better in our institutions? Slim or none, I think. Corruption is far too deeply embedded for any internal reform to succeed. A reasonable expectation for the coming three months of this Venus retrograde loop is increasing dissatisfaction among people all over the world concerning the effectiveness of their social institutions — commerce, government, medicine and public health, education, media, law, finance and accounting, etc. The Venus retrograde is likely to expand the already worsening mistrust of such organizations by the public.

The worst downside I foresee to this period is that those in power who seek to rule over us with authoritarian control (and who do not have our best interests at heart) will use the ongoing and increasing breakdowns of society to tighten their grip. They'll do this in part through the exercise of draconian policies, but also through the use of media-promoted narratives that further divide us by fear-mongering and targeted scapegoating. That has been extremely successful thus far, and I see no indication that the tide is turning. The public is still too easily hypnotized. By and large, Americans continue to believe what they are told.

To my way of thinking, though, the positive potential of this Venus retrograde is in this very arena — the realm of gullible belief. The coming months may help some of us break the chains of whatever trance has held us captive. As a collective, we are mired in illusion. Dis-illusionment is a necessary corrective step. The more of us who undertake that, the better our chances in the future.