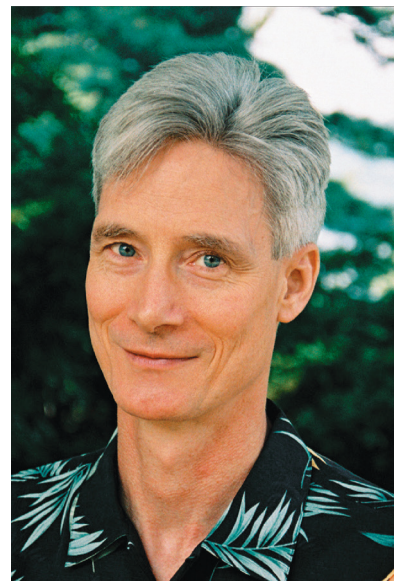


*Not all things under Mercury retrograde go wrong, and
not all things under Mercury direct go right.*

Retrograde Mercury

A Slow Dance with the Trickster

by Mark Wolz



Several years ago, I ran into a friend on the street. “I’m so excited!” she exclaimed. “I signed the contract for my first novel this morning, and I went right into my first meeting with the editor who’s been assigned to me.”

I knew we were deep into a Mercury retrograde. What did I say to my friend? “That’s great! Let me know how it goes.”

A year later, my friend was reviewing her experience: “If I had known when I signed that contract how much work would be required of me,” she said, “I would not have signed. But my editor was excellent. We went through every paragraph in the novel and reduced the length by a third, and now it’s the book I wanted it to be. It took an unbelievable amount of time and energy, but in the end, it was exactly what I needed.”

That interaction led me to pay attention to how we think about Mercury retrograde. I took note of how often people say, “Oh, I can’t do that because Mercury is retrograde.”

I believe that notion is mistaken. First of all, this is a misapplication of

our age-old wisdom regarding Mercury and its influence. Secondly, this attitude causes people to miss out on valuable experiences. So, I offer the following points to ponder, along with an invitation to re-evaluate how we look at Mercury’s retrograde.

Mercury in the Digital Age

When and why did we start saying that airline flights are ruled by Mercury and influenced by Mercury’s retrogrades? Traditionally, Mercury ruled local transportation, basically the rumbling of an oxcart about town, and that symbolism held up for two millennia. Then, along came the horse and buggy, and for a few hundred years, Mercury took on that rulership. Over the past half-century, we have agreed that Mercury governs the errands we run in our automobiles. Those transitions in local and ground transportation were easy to justify — but the technological leap to intercontinental jetliners would seem to be of a different order, and the symbolism would extend Mercury’s purview from 3rd-house issues to matters of the 9th.

How and why did we give Mercury responsibility for all facets of computers — hardware, software, sales, repairs, design, programming, and the whole of the World Wide Web? A hundred generations of astrologers have said that Mercury rules communication. This started with the town crier and afternoon gatherings around the village fountain, and gradually expanded to include local newspapers, then the telegraph and telephone and, eventually, broadcast media. Over the past two generations, as we have rushed to press everything forward to the Digital Age, Mercury picked up the computer world by extrapolation, and Mercury’s retrogrades are now blamed for all computer glitches.

What if we could pose our questions about Mercury in the Digital Age to Galileo, traveling back in time to meet him in his observatory? Hush, as he sets his telescope down and turns his far-seeing eyes toward us. “Show me your notebooks,” he would say. Certainly, Galileo would know that if we’re not writing down our own observations, we’ll soon be in danger of reciting dogma.

The Trickster

A Matter of the Mind

No known study has ever corroborated the Mercury retrograde phenomena that are depicted by astrologers. Yet, Mercury's retrograde stories are cherished by the astrology community. This is actually not a problem: We are unified and our calendars are well organized to get us through retrograde periods.

However, we might want to notice the influence on our mindset of what I call the blue effect. If you tell me that next week will be all about blue, I'll notice every shade of blue in the sky: the blue of people's eyes; blues on the radio; blue clothing; blue lettering; blue logos; blue trucks, bicycles, and baby carriages; a blue toothbrush, cell phone, and coffee mug; the blue flower in a vase — everything blue. How do my expectations for Mercury retrograde affect my perceptions of the world around me?

We should also take into account the voodoo effect. If I believe I can be affected by a spell that someone casts upon me, I am susceptible to that spell. What influence does this effect have on our retrograde anecdotes?

For an enterprising researcher, an opportunity presents itself: Insurance companies that cover delivery services and travel plans, brokers that back business contracts, and companies that maintain information technology would pay piles of money to someone who can demonstrate that data from an ephemeris will reliably point to periods when travel delays increase, contracts are infused with untenable clauses, and computers conk out more often than usual.

Mercury in its orbit stays on a steady course; it never goes backward. From our perspective on Earth, however, Mercury appears to reverse its course periodically. Learning from the symbolism, we can say that our actual ability to communicate will not slip into reverse — it is our perceptions, assumptions, and projections that turn things around.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if Mercury retrograde is "real" or not. Viewing astrology as a symbolic

During Mercury retrograde, our actual ability to communicate will not slip into reverse — it is our perceptions, assumptions, and projections that turn things around.

system, we are assured that if we interpret the symbols faithfully and consistently, they will give us good guidance, and we will be rewarded with productive lives.

Fear Not Mercury Retrograde

When Mercury is retrograde, I might have to be more attentive, more diligent, more responsible for the details. Something might need to be revisited, revised, done twice to get it right. Is that a problem?

If you have a list of terribly naughty things to do before you die — wear mismatched socks, dare to look around the room when all other heads are bowed in prayer, sneak off to the movies for an afternoon — you can add to it mailing out something important on a Mercury retrograde.

Let's believe in serendipity as strongly as we believe in Mercury retrograde. Say I'm on a flight to Las Vegas. Mercury is retrograde and, sure enough, the pilot announces that the flight has been diverted to Salt Lake City, where I'll have to spend the night. I have a choice: I can start muttering under my breath in frustration, or I can relax a little and chat with the person next to me. If I mutter, I'll be rehearsing all the things I want to say to the chief executive officer of the airline, a person I'll never meet, and kicking myself for not listening to my astrologer's warning about traveling during a Mercury retrograde. If I go for the chat, I could meet a charming person who's up for a lively look around town when we land, and that might lead to a positive experience in a place I'd never have explored otherwise. I might even forge a useful busi-

ness connection or establish a social link that I wouldn't have expected. What's so bad about Mercury retrograde?

Upon our return from every camping trip, we have a story to tell. If the weather was perfect, the pancakes were golden brown, and we never lost the trail on our hikes, that story won't be long at all. But if rain flooded the tent, a bear made off with half our food, snapping turtles ate all the fish we left on a stringer, and somehow we got poison ivy on our behinds, those tales will be retold for a lifetime. Look at what Mercury retrograde adds to our storybook!

Then there's the cyclist who's training to race but never rides on rainy days. Verily, verily, the day will come when it rains during a race — that rider will slip and slide all over the pavement. Hone your skills during Mercury retrogrades, because truly the time will come when you're called upon to perform under stress.

When I practice certain physical exercises, I hold them longer or do more repetitions on my weaker side. I often switch the mouse on my computer to my nondominant hand. When Mercury is retrograde, try to use this time to build the skills that are your weakest.

Not all things under Mercury retrograde go wrong, and not all things under Mercury direct go right. Infuse your project with positive energy, and you will be able to accept those parts that seem to go right, along with those parts that seem to go wrong.

What We Don't Do Can Hurt Us

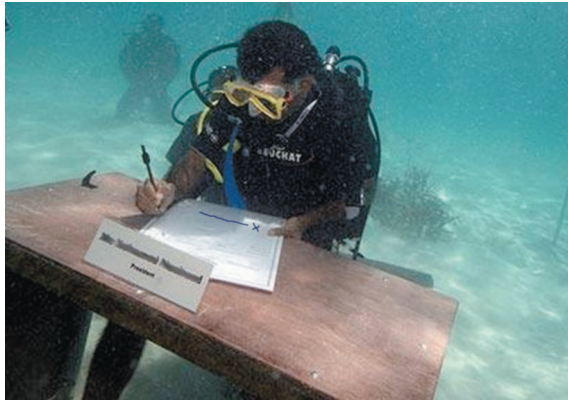
It's no mere coincidence that the symbol Rx is used to denote both retrograde motion and a prescription. Let your prescriptions be for action.

Why do we blame the planets? Why is it always Mercury, Mercury, Mercury and never "my bad"? If I'm so quick to say that retrograde Mercury made things turn out this way, I'll have little incentive to examine my role and find a different way to play it next time around.

When I steadfastly refuse to start something new during a Mercury retrograde, I may congratulate myself on not being exposed to risk, but at the same time I'll never know what I missed.

In our minds, Mercury has a meaning. This meaning is comprised of

Given a choice, I would much rather sign a contract under Mercury retrograde than during a square between Mercury and Neptune!



symbolic representation, intuitive understanding, and everyday observation. All three are important, they are inter-related, and they require continual updating.

Mercury is the trickster; he loves to play with my mind. When he goes retrograde, things slow down around me and my thoughts turn inward. This is my chance to discern how thoughts revolve in my mind: I'm doing a slow dance with the trickster.

For most of us, it's fair to say that superstitions establish a fierce hold on the mind, while intuition speaks very softly. The more our ear is turned toward superstition, the less we are able to hear the inner voice of intuition. Let it be your intuition that guides your steps whenever Mercury is retrograde. Test your intuition. Take an action when the moment feels right, and wait till later to check what the ephemeris says.

Ultimately it is my actions that will answer to the planets: I've taken my last breath, and I'm passing over to the other side. I meet a guide who's directing the stream of souls gliding along. "Oh, you're one of them," she says to me. "You'll go this way." She indicates a small path off to my left.

"What do you mean 'one of them'?" I ask. "And where does this path go?"

"This path takes you to immediate reincarnation," she replies. "You're one of the people who never took fresh action under Mercury retrograde.

We have to send you back because you missed too many important experiences."

If Mercury is retrograde when I go to sign a contract, it's retrograde for all parties to that contract, and the outcome for me depends not on Mercury's motion but on my skills as a negotiator. Given a choice, I would much rather sign a contract under Mercury retrograde than during a square between Mercury and Neptune!

Next time you go to a job interview, try telling the employer that you won't be taking any significant actions when Mercury is retrograde or in the shadow of a retrograde. Run your pencil across a calendar as you say that, crossing out the dates ...

Almost nothing in life is determined by a single factor acting alone. What if I reject a real estate deal because I know that Mercury has gone retrograde, but I don't notice that, halfway through that retrograde period, the little guy will be conjunct Venus and in a grand trine to Saturn and Jupiter? Could the retrograde set up a delay or indicate some adjustments to come? Probably. Would the grand trine eventually pay off handsomely? Just as likely. But I missed it, didn't I?

In Step with Mercury

To use a Mercury retrograde well, study the sky as you would for any conspicuous movement of a planet. Study the whole sky and look for the subtle-

ties. Be aware of aspects to your natal chart. Examine the entire retrograde period, and use your intuitive faculties to finesse the situations that arise.

What sign is Mercury occupying? Which element? Which planets will it aspect, and what do those aspects look like? How are all the planets interacting with my natal chart? If I'm invoking a blanket rule about behavior during Mercury retrogrades and not looking at the particulars in this moment of time, I'm missing all the subtleties.

Take each retrograde as it comes. Astrology is our laboratory; it is not so much a set of answers as a pile of questions, and most of the questions have more than one answer.

If you find that you can't free yourself of apprehension around a Mercury retrograde, try working with heliocentric charts instead, where no planet is ever retrograde. Let your mind travel to the vantage point of the Sun, and allow its radiance to guide your decisions.

May you look forward to each and every Mercury retrograde period, experience it fully, and enjoy the benefits it brings.

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Mark Wolz practices and teaches astrology in New York City. He is certified by NCGR for both consulting and teaching and has served on the NCGR Board of Directors. Mark also teaches yoga and meditation and practices therapeutic yoga. He holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's in Anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies. He can be contacted at MarkWolz@DharmaRising.com

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