

Hermes



*I love a public road: few sights there are
That please me more; such object hath had power
Over my imagination since the dawn
Of childhood, when its disappearing line,
Seen daily afar off, on one bare steep
Beyond the limits which my feet had trod
Was like a guide into eternity,
At least to things unknown and without bound.*

- William Wordsworth from *The Prelude*

Part 1: The Road We Travel: Homage to the God of Transitions

Life Guide

I first knew I had Gemini rising when I was 19. But not right away. The first chart I had drawn had Cancer rising - I was puzzled, as that did not seem to be the avid train traveller I had become. Eventually the mistake was uncovered - there was daylight saving at my birth; hence Gemini was on the Ascendant and Mercury was my ruler. Even before I knew it astrologically, Mercury had always been on the horizon of my life. As ruler of my horoscope, he has been a remarkable life guide, coach, raconteur, tutor and sometimes antagonist.

When I was a child adults would always ask me, 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' And like many young children I had my standard answer. Having spent my childhood living on military bases, surrounded by security fences and gates, I was intrigued by the man who would suddenly appear out of a small shed to lift the gate for my father and I to pass through when our car pulled up to the boom gate. When the gate lifted, my father and I would continue our way into the headquarters where he worked.

So, when asked this question, I would answer confidently 'a gate lifter', inspired by the magic and power of that faceless man who guarded the boundary crossing. Today I look back and see that man was like Hermes and when you have Hermes as your god and guide you are familiar with thresholds, boundary crossings and transitions.

Sandals: Fit for a God of the Road



Like most Roman gods, Mercury inherits many of his attributes from his earlier Greek personification as Hermes. Characteristic of Hermes were his sandals, often winged, not just for speed but for his role as a messenger and herald. High-quality sandals are necessary for a traveller and as god of the roads, these were imperative for Hermes. Anyone familiar with life on the road has Hermes for his God. Hermes was often a guide to the earlier heroes like Perseus whose task to slay Medusa was accomplished through the mentorship of the god and the loan of his winged sandals.

Godly icons such as these sandals distinguish the Hermetic personality. He was also recognisable by his *petasos*, his traveller's hat and his *kerykeion*, his herald's wand, commonly known as the *caduceus*, its Latin name. This was usually held in his left hand; in earlier depictions he held the *rhabdos*, his wand or magic staff, in his right. Over time the two became merged into one.¹ Sandals, traveller's hat and staff symbolise his role as courier and connector. Feet, hands and head; all extremely active in the Hermetic personality.

While we are familiar with Hermes as a youthful god, a second-generation Olympian but his mythic personality is much older and dates back another millennium to the Mycenaean period where he was often worshipped as a chthonic god of fertility and boundary.

Homer's Last Chapters

Like most of the Gods, Hermes enters Greek epic through the first books of western literature, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In the last book of the *Iliad*, Book 24, Troy has lost their hero Hector in the war. The city is thrown into grief; Troy is in a state of flux. It is evident that a dramatic change is imminent; nothing could remain the same.

Priam, Troy's patriarch and Hector's father, embarks on a journey from the citadel of Troy into the dangerous and foreign encampment of the Greeks in order to plead for the return of his son's body from Achilles. Troy must bury their dead so the transition of Hector's soul and the city's can be complete. Homer does not describe a literal underworld journey, but Priam's passage crosses the threshold from certainty into the dangerous unknown, highlighting Hermes role as a guide into the underworld.

Since an important threshold is to be crossed, it is Hermes whom Zeus sends to guide Priam, even though Hermes' loyalty in the war is with the Greeks. As guide, Hermes is the companion Priam needs to cross the boundary between what is known and what is not. He is 'dearest to be man's companion'; while Hermes is the guide, Priam's safety is assured. The god is clearly depicted as joining Priam in the boundary zone, on the threshold, in order to safeguard his passage. This is the darkness, a metaphor for threshold crossings and it is here on the brink of darkness that Hermes awaits Priam.²

Hermes rendezvous with Priam is on the edge of darkness, sunset; later we shall see Hermes leaving Priam at this same threshold, dawn, as the sun rises. Darkness is the domain of Hermes. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* suggests this:

he helps a few people,
he cheats an endless number
of the race of mortal men
in the **darkness of night**.³

Hermes escorts Priam through the dangerous passage, putting the sentries to sleep so his presence goes unnoticed, then guides Priam through the first set of gates. Finally Hermes opens the huge gates that lead Priam to where Achilles is camped. At this point Hermes leaves the old man to engage in negotiations with Achilles. Hermes is the guide in the transition; once the destination is reached, he leaves.

We meet Hermes again when it is time to take Priam back to Troy. He wakes Priam and his herald and guides them safely to the 'crossing-place of the fair running river'. The crossing-place of the river suggests the transition back to the world that is known. The poet uses the symbol of the rising sun to mark the transitional point of the ascension.

there Hermes left them and went away to the height of Olympos
and dawn, she of the yellow robe, scattered over all earth ⁴

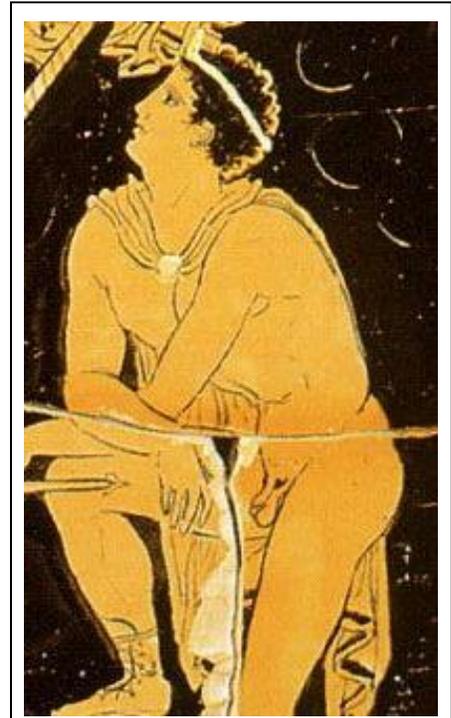
In Book 24 of the *Odyssey*, boundary-crosser Hermes leads the disembodied souls of Penelope's suitors into the dim darkness of Hades. ⁵ Hermes is guide once again, this time to souls who are no longer incarnate and once the souls have reached their underworld destination, Hermes disappears. Homer uses threshold symbols the river and gates are once again. Hermes has successfully guided the murdered suitors to the realms of Death, their new level of experience. Their transition is completed.

Hermes and the Goddess

Classical texts make us aware of two important links Hermes has to the goddess. Two older goddesses Hestia and Mnemosyne were paired with the young god and reveal Hermes' multi-dimensional ways of thinking, knowing and being, as well as his respect for the continuity of feminine wisdom.

Hestia, the first born Olympian is paired with Hermes in *The Homeric Hymn to Hestia*⁶, an unusual couple as Hermes is the god of the road while Hestia is goddess of the hearth. Hermes is the outer traveller; Hestia, the inner voyager. On this level they complement and support one another. 'Hermes is present everywhere that contact is established with others, whether on the road, in public institutions, the town square, or the market, whereas Hestia waits for us 'at home''. ⁷ Hermes intimate relationship to Hestia is another version of his role as guide and leader of souls, bringing the pilgrim to Hestia's door.

Hestia is constant, focused and dislikes change. She is the hearth, a symbol for both the centre and the focus of the home



as well as the personification of family life and the family circle. As custodian of the hearth she is the eternal firelight burning at the heart of life, the fireplace of the home, and the flame lit in the city's central precinct. Hestia is also central to psychic life representing the sacred centre and is the goddess who honours sacred space and protects sacred images. This image is a potent reminder of Hermes as the one who directs us on the road to deeper levels of self and it demonstrates the Hermetic fondness for the inner life and soulful depths.

Both are gods of thresholds, crossroads and boundaries: Hermes marks the outer territory while Hestia surveys the internal ones. In the classical world sanctuaries devoted to Hermes or Hestia were rare since these were gods who were encountered on the threshold of change or on the critical precipice of transition.

Mnemosyne was a Titan goddess; therefore belonged to an earlier stratum of the human experience. She was the goddess of Memory and the mother to the muses, the instinctual way to remember. Art, music, poetry, dance, the heavens were mnemonics. But as rational science and logical concepts emerged, the seat of memory began to shift from the heart to the brain, aligning memory with a more logical and calculating experience, rendering Mnemosyne a passive goddess who collected and stored life's impressions. Her ways of knowing and remembering through imagination and creativity ceded to more logical methods and techniques. The power of image yielded to the power of the word and gods like Hermes took the throne of Memory. Yet it is Mnemosyne that Hermes first honours in song, as his verbal and musical talents are owing to the goddess.⁸

While Hermes takes on the mantle of magician, it is the goddess Mnemosyne that underpins his verbal skills, insights and memories. When he sacrificed to the gods, it was Mnemosyne that was first, as Hermes paid homage to the earlier forms of knowing, not only through logic, words and schooling but through imagination, images and experiences.

Hermes' pairing with both goddesses reminds us of the deeper and more profound aspects of the speedy one and for astrologers prompts us to move beyond the simplistic keywords for our guiding god, who is more than what we see on the surface; He is a god of depth and soul.

The Homeric Hymn to Hermes

We meet Hermes in the first epics of Western literature: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In Book 24 of each epic, there is a colourful description of Hermes as guide and leader of souls. In the *Iliad* he is the escort for the Trojan patriarch Priam into the dangerous camp of the enemy, while in the *Odyssey* Hermes is the guide into the underworld of the disembodied souls of Penelope's suitors.⁹ But classical literature's exquisite depiction of Hermes is in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, a vivid and touching tale of the newborn who would become an Olympian. There are numerous ways to reflect on the hymn and all are valid.¹⁰ As the hymn begins we are first told of his birth in a cave in Cyllene in the Arcadian region.

On my last tour of Greece we visited the cave of Hermes. Upon the plateau before the steep descent, I looked across the Gulf of Corinth to Parnassus where Apollo's oracular cult had been established. How the hymn spoke to me as I looked across to the splendour of Delphi's setting: it made sense that Hermes would make every effort to be as divine as his older brother, the god of light and reason. And why Hermes was born in a minimalist cave, deep in the wilds of rural Greece



removed from civilisation, as we must descend to know the cavernous depths of his soul.

The planet Mercury is also cavernous. Its surface is rough with many craters, all named after artists: poets, writers, sculptors, painters, dramatists, composers... His father is Zeus; his mother is Maia, one of the Pleiades. And then the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* describes some of his characteristics.

A newborn, yet already he is described as:

- shifty
- cunning in mind
- a seeker of plunder
- a rustler of cattle
- a leader of dreams
- a spy who keeps watch in the night

These are early aspects of the archetype; the tale continues: at dawn he was born, at midday he was playing the lyre, and by evening had stolen his brother's cattle and returned to the nursery. Hermes is not only cunning, but imagistic, a magician, thief and road scholar!

And it was these mythic characteristics that the ancients saw not just in their god but in the wander in the sky that they knew as the Star of Hermes.

Released from Darkness; Plunging into Darkness

But Hermes also retrieves those whose soul longs to emerge out of the underworld. It is Zeus who once again calls on Hermes in his role as courier to the underworld when Demeter demands the return of her daughter Persephone. It is Hermes who can lead Persephone out of the darkness of the nether region back up into the light of the gods. It is also Hermes who leads Pandora, a newly created soul, is led by the divine guide/messenger to her fate. Here Hermes mediates a cataclysmic transition, a transitional experience that has repercussions for many.

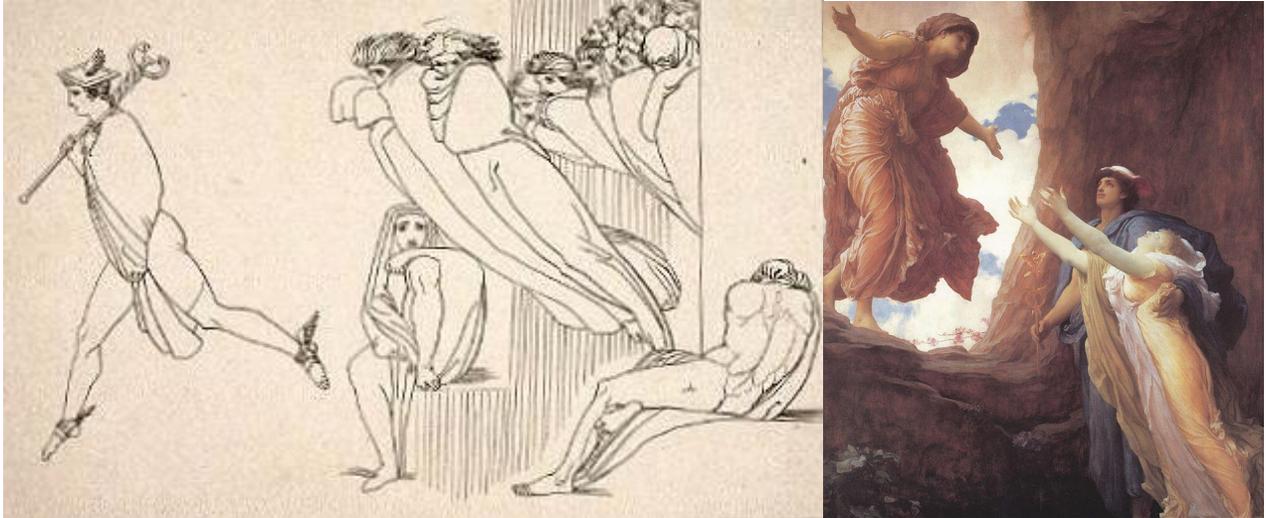
Hermes meets us at the thresholds of death and again at the ascending gate. He waits at the gates, on the edge of darkness. The threshold may be a crucial juncture in life, an initiatory phase, like adolescence, midlife or seniority. Or the threshold may be encountered in the darkness of sleep when Hermes is the shepherd of dreams. Or the threshold is reached when loss and grief obliterates any defences to the point where they disappear beneath the horizon of consciousness and the individual psychologically enters into transition.

From the Star of Hermes to Mercury

The classical Greeks did not seem that involved with astrology; at least not the Greeks in Greece. But in Greek-speaking Egypt where cultures intermixed and the fascination with the mystical was prominent, astrology developed in the period after the classical flowering in Athens. At this time the planets were known as the stars of the Gods. To the Hellenistic astrologers the planet closest to earth was known as the star of Hermes, closely aligned with the Egyptian Thoth.

As Hermes was an intermediary, an in-between god, one who only showed himself on thresholds, he was aptly named, since in the heavens he only revealed himself at the shifting times of dawn or dusk. He was an escort to the underworld, known as the *psychopomp*.¹¹ As the sender or transporter, he became known as the guide of souls, leading them in and out of Hades. Even though Hermes is the conductor of souls and is given the role of guide to the underworld, he is not a god of death as Hades is. Hermes is associated with transitions, in

between states, liminality and threshold crossings. Hermes is not a god of the Netherworld or afterlife, but is given the power to visit it.



Two images of Hermes as leader of souls *into* the underworld (John Flaxman's portrayal of Hermes guiding the souls of Penelope's suitors into the underworld, 1805, Tate Gallery) and Hermes as leader of souls *out of* the underworld (The Return of Persephone by Frederic Leighton, 1891)

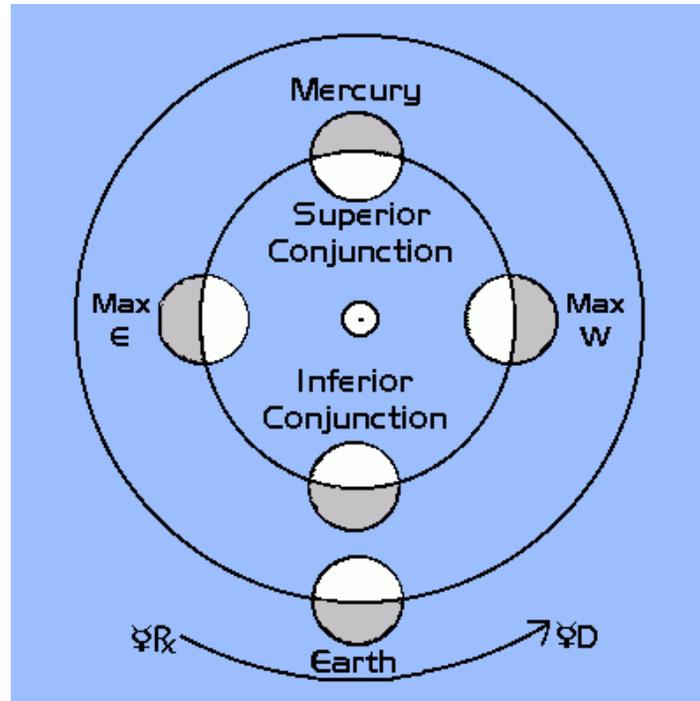
He also conversed with the neighbors of the dead, those souls who slept. As the *Oneiropomp*, Hermes was the sender of dreams. Earlier myth, as explained in *Theogony*, ascribed these functions to Thanatos and Hypnos, the gods of death and sleep but as the Olympian order began to prevail, it was Hermes who now led the soul into death and sleep. Hermes was also the *hypnagog* who hovered on the threshold of sleeping, as well as the *hypnopomp* who was there at dawn's waking.¹² In myth Hermes appeared at the transition between waking and sleeping and materialised at the gateway as the shepherd of dreams.

And so it was similar with Hermes of the heavens. The ancient astrologers observed both sides of his nature and unlike more contemporary astrologers were more aware of his role in the night world. In myth, as in the sky, he is only seen in the transitional realm. And catching a glimpse of Mercury is not easy. He is visible only near the horizon, the liminal zone between the day and night worlds. In his morning face he rises to bring the souls up from the underworld; in his evening face he guides the souls down. And the ancients knew this in the heavens as well, through Mercury's cycle with Apollo, the Sun.

In traditional astrology Mercury is the only planet that is aligned with both day and night. Rising before the Sun, Mercury supports the day gods, but when he shifts to set after the Sun, his allegiance is with the night world of the Moon. Neither benefic, nor malefic Mercury rejoices in the 1st house, the place where soul is housed in body and spirit vitalises the personality. We are always between or immersed in two worlds when Hermes is on the rise or set.

As closest planet to the Sun and as the mythological brother of the Solar God Apollo, Mercury is aligned with the Sun and in the heavens the cycle of Mercury from our vantage point here on Earth maps out a remarkable course in the heavens.

Mercury



Part 2: The Road He Travels: Astro-nomical and Astro-logical Transitions of Mercury

The Cycle of Mercury

Like Venus, Mercury is identified as an 'inferior' planet, as its orbit is contained by the Earth's; that is, its course lies between the Earth and the Sun. As we look towards the Sun, the orbit of Mercury is enclosed by the Earth's; therefore 'inferior'. This is an astronomical term, not a judgement, as Mercury is far from inferior. Astronomically the planet is not as obvious as other visible planets, but his mythological temperament and archetypal character is bright and lively. What you get is not what you see.

Since the Earth never travels between Mercury and the Sun, we can only see the planet in a limited relationship with the Sun. Geocentrically Mercury is never seen more than 28° away. Therefore Mercury can only be in one of three zodiacal signs: the sign of the Sun or one of the two adjacent signs. The only major aspect Mercury forms with the Sun is a conjunction, unlike the orbits of the 'superior' planets (Mars - Pluto) which produce a full range of aspects with the Sun. From our point of view Mercury and the Sun create a dyad, a duo and it was this astronomical interlinking of Mercury and the Sun that the Greeks depicted in their mythic tales of the brothers Apollo and Hermes.

The cycle from 'inferior' conjunction of Mercury and the Sun to their next 'inferior' conjunction is known as their *synodic* cycle. Synod comes from the Greek, via the Latin *synodos*, which means a meeting or assembly and can be applied to a conjunction of planets, *synodic*. *Syn* means together and *hodos* refers to going or a way; therefore the synod suggests a planetary dialogue which goes a certain direction or way. It is this cycle that creates Mercury's mysterious disappearance and reappearance in our skies, as well as its backtracking through the zodiac three times a year.

In each cycle Mercury will be between a maximum of 17 and 28 degrees of zodiacal separation; this will occur twice in its cycle at either its eastern or western elongation to the Sun. Rather than a conjunction and an opposition occurring in each cycle, the Sun and Mercury make two conjunctions: one is called the 'inferior' conjunction when Mercury is closest to the Earth, moving slower and retrograde; while the 'superior' conjunction is when Mercury is on the other side of the Sun, moving its fastest and direct in motion.

These conjunctions are the two major turning points in the Mercury/Sun cycle. The 'inferior' conjunction is akin to a 'New Moon', as Mercury is between the Earth and the Sun at this time. At the beginning of the cycle, this 'new Mercury' begins its waxing phase, yet it is still retrograde. In a symbolic sense a new facet of mercurial development is set in motion. The 'superior' conjunction occurs when Mercury is on the other side of the Sun to the Earth and Mercury is in its 'full' phase. Similar to the Full Moon phase, Mercury is in its most objective and informed point of this cycle. At this halfway period, Mercury is direct in motion, moving fast, and at its most distant to the Earth. Mercury now enters its waning, occidental phase of the cycle, a more pensive and introspective one and disappears from the morning skies.

At each of these conjunctions a turnaround takes place; at the inferior conjunction Mercury leaves its post as the evening star to begin to rise before the Sun in the eastern skies. At the superior conjunction the reverse occurs and Mercury shape shifts into the evening star. At each transition Mercury changes teams from Solar to Lunar and at each conjunction Mercury is invisible, obscured in the brilliance of the Sun. The ancients saw the deity's disappearance from the evening sky and its reappearance in the morning as its descent and resurrection. Mercury's shape-shifting from the god of dusk into the god of twilight displays its adaptability in times of transition as well as its proficiency at moving between hemispheres. Mercury's mythic role as leader of souls was mirrored in this heavenly metamorphosis.

When a planet is close to the Sun it is invisible as it falls 'under the Sun's beams'. The Sun's light obscures the planet's visibility. Mercury needs to be at least 12° from the Sun to be visible; also its appearance is short-lived, as it only appears just before sunrise or just after sunset. Therefore there are limited times when you can catch sight of Mercury; again part of his mythological character. If there are bright lights and the horizon is obstructed, like in major cities, Mercury may be difficult even impossible to spot.

Mercury has three annual synodic cycles; therefore it makes three morning and three evening appearances during the year after its greatest elongation. But because of local conditions it may only be visible for half this period.¹³ In myth Mercury was also difficult to spot; unlike the other gods he did not have sanctuaries and fixed places of worship; instead he was seen on the road, in between, in motion and shape-shifting.

Mercury's orbit is eccentric, which again is characteristic of this *daimon*. Being egg-shaped, its orbital speed around the Sun may vary considerably, ranging from a standstill at its stations to over 2 ¼ degrees at its superior conjunction. Mercury's cycle around the Sun takes 88 days but its synodic cycle with the Sun averages 116 days; however due to its elliptical nature this may take anywhere between 105 and 130 days, or about 1/3 of a year.

Mercury's Life of Pi

Mercury has an affinity with mathematical symmetry. As ruler of Gemini it pairs and duplicates and as ruler of Virgo it honours precision and measurement. Like Venus, its synodic cycle with the Sun reveals the sacredness of geometry; Venus' cycle reflects the Golden Mean and Mercury's cycle demonstrates the mathematical constant of Pi (π). Pi is a numerical

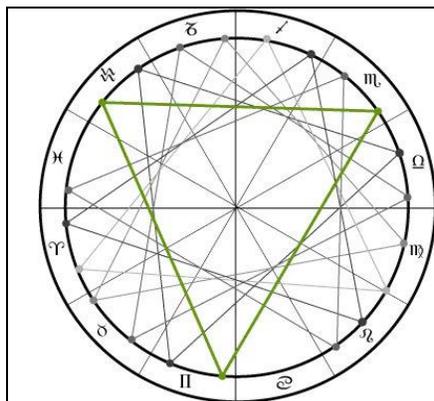
This table below lists the 22 inferior conjunctions for two 7- year periods
Australian Eastern Time

No of Inferior Conjunction	Date of Inferior Conjunction	Zodiacal Degree	Date of Inferior Conjunction Subsequent Cycle	Zodiacal Degree Subsequent Cycle
The beginning	January 31, 2015	10♊20	January 23, 2022	3♊22
1.	May 31, 2015	8♋58	May 22, 2022	0♋43
2.	October 1, 2015	7♌07	September 23, 2022	0♌14
3.	January 15, 2016	23♍49	January 7, 2023	16♍56
4.	May 10, 2016	19♎25	May 2, 2023	11♎09
5.	September 13, 2016	20♏37	September 6, 2023	13♏36
6.	December 29, 2016	7♐28	December 23, 2023	0♐39
7.	April 20, 2017	0♑20	April 12, 2024	22♑32
8.	August 27, 2017	3♒47	August 19, 2024	26♒35
9.	December 13, 2017	21♓14	December 6, 2024	14♓27
10.	April 2, 2018	11♈56	March 25, 2025	4♈24
11.	August 9, 2018	16♉27	August 1, 2025	9♉00
12.	November 27, 2018	5♊03	November 20, 2025	28♋18
13.	March 15, 2019	24♋11	March 7, 2026	16♋52
14.	July 21, 2019	28♌28	July 13, 2026	20♌42
15.	November 12, 2019	18♍55	November 5, 2026	12♍10
16.	February 26, 2020	6♎55	February 19, 2027	29♏47
17.	July 1, 2020	9♏44	June 23, 2027	1♏39
18.	October 26, 2020	2♐47	October 20, 2027	26♐01
19.	February 8, 2021	20♑01	February 2, 2028	13♑01
20.	June 11, 2021	20♒21	June 2, 2028	12♒06
21.	October 10, 2021	16♓35	October 2, 2028	9♓45
22.	January 23, 2022	3♊22	January 16, 2029	26♋29

This table demonstrates how the inferior conjunctions repeat themselves every seven years with an orb of 7 ó 8 days or 7 ó 8 degrees

22 conjunctions over 7 years =

$$22 / 7 = 3.14$$



This diagram demonstrates how Mercury traces out an evolving triangle in the heavens. It has an affinity with the triangle in many ways because of its three cycles with the Sun in one year. The following picture is taken from the website:

<http://christophdelacruz.blogspot.com.au/>

Phases of Mercury

Like Venus, Mercury's cycle has unique phases and distinctive markers. But unlike Venus its cycle is not as symmetrical. Yet even while the time elapsed between phases varies each cycle, Mercury follows its well-worn course through the heavens. As the god of travellers who marks out the milestones, his sky cycle is also worth noting. Mercury's phases are like the signposts on the path of life. As already mentioned, two of these distinguishing landmarks are at its conjunctions with the Sun, when Mercury disappears from the evening sky to resurrect as a morning star and vice versa. The cycle begins at the inferior conjunction which is the midpoint of its retrogradation cycle when the Sun and Mercury rise together. The Sun now begins to move forward, distancing itself from Mercury which is retrograding. Now, as the leader in the zodiac Mercury will rise before the Sun, entering its Oriental phase where it remains before the Sun in the zodiac. About 10 -12 days later Mercury goes direct and in a fortnight reaches its maximum distance from the Sun or its greatest morning elongation. Both the Sun and Mercury are now travelling about the same speed or a zodiacal degree a day.

About six weeks later Mercury will be conjunct the Sun, its 'superior' conjunction. Now the Sun and Mercury rise together but since Mercury is travelling fastest, it pulls away from the Sun, leaving the Sun to rise before it. Mercury is now in its Occidental half of the cycle. It becomes the evening star, waning, beginning to slow down and is more reflective and considered. It is later in the zodiac than the Sun. Five or six weeks after the superior conjunction, it will reach its greatest evening elongation from the Sun. At this time, the Sun and Mercury are again travelling approximately the same speed. About a fortnight later Mercury will station, turning retrograde preparing for its next inferior conjunction and the beginning of a new cycle.

Times will vary, but about a week before the inferior conjunction Mercury sets in the evening to rise a fortnight later, or a week after the inferior conjunction. Due to its speed it will set in the morning about one to two weeks before the superior conjunction and rise in the evening, one to two weeks later or nearly a month after its morning set. The table below traces the critical points in the Sun-Mercury cycle for 2015, starting with the last inferior conjunction in 2014.

Inferior Conjunction	Stationary Direct	Greatest Eastern or Morning Elongation	Superior Conjunction	Greatest Western or Evening Elongation	Stationary Retrograde
2014 Oct 16	Oct 25	Nov 1	Dec 8	2015 Jan 14	Jan 21
Jan 30	Feb 11	Feb 24	Apr 10	May 7	May 19
May 30	Jun 11	Jun 24	Jul 23	Sep 4	Sep 17
Sep 30	Oct 9	Oct 16	Nov 17	Dec 29	2016 Jan 5

The average times between these phases in the above Mercury cycle are:

Inferior Conjunction to Stationary Direct	Stationary Direct to Greatest Eastern Elongation	Greatest Eastern Elongation to Superior Conjunction	Superior Conjunction to Greatest Western Elongation	Greatest Western Elongation to Stationary Retrograde	Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction
11 days	10 days	36 days	38 days	10 days	11 days

When looking at the Mercury cycle from a symbolic perspective we recognise the link between the inferior conjunction which starts the cycle and the superior conjunction which is the half-way point or full phase. The setting and rising of Mercury hovers around its conjunctions to the Sun; at these times an exchange takes place. These times in the cycle are mirror images; linked in the cycle and therefore astrologically connected. We can draw a comparison between the inferior conjunction and the New Moon; the superior conjunction and the Full Moon. Using other times in the cycle as Mercurial phases, we might use the Luration Cycle as a template for considering the phases of Mercury, as in the following table. What is of interest is to reflect on the phase that you are born under and if this colours your understanding of your natal Mercury.

8 Phases of the Luration Cycle	Phases of the Mercury Cycle	Average length - 116 days <i>these can vary considerably due to the eccentricity of Mercury's Orbit</i>
New Phase	Inferior Conjunction to Stationary Direct	This phase can vary between 9 and 14 days but on average is 10 -12 days
Crescent	Stationary Direct to Greatest Eastern Elongation	This can vary between one and two weeks
First Quarter & Gibbous	Greatest Eastern Elongation	This long phase includes the morning set when Mercury disappears as the morning star. This full period last an average of 5 weeks but varies
	Greatest Eastern Elongation to Superior Conjunction	
Full & Disseminating	Superior Conjunction to Greatest Western Elongation	This long phase includes the evening rise when Mercury reappears as the evening star. This full period last an average of 5 weeks but varies
	Greatest Western Elongation	
Last Quarter	Greatest Western Elongation to Stationary Retrograde	This can vary between one and two weeks
Balsamic	Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction	This phase can vary between 9 and 14 days but on average is 10 -12 days

Each individual will be born at a different phase in the Sun-Mercury cycle which can be amplified and reflected upon when thinking about these phases.

Rudhyar's Phases: Promethean and Epimethean Mercury

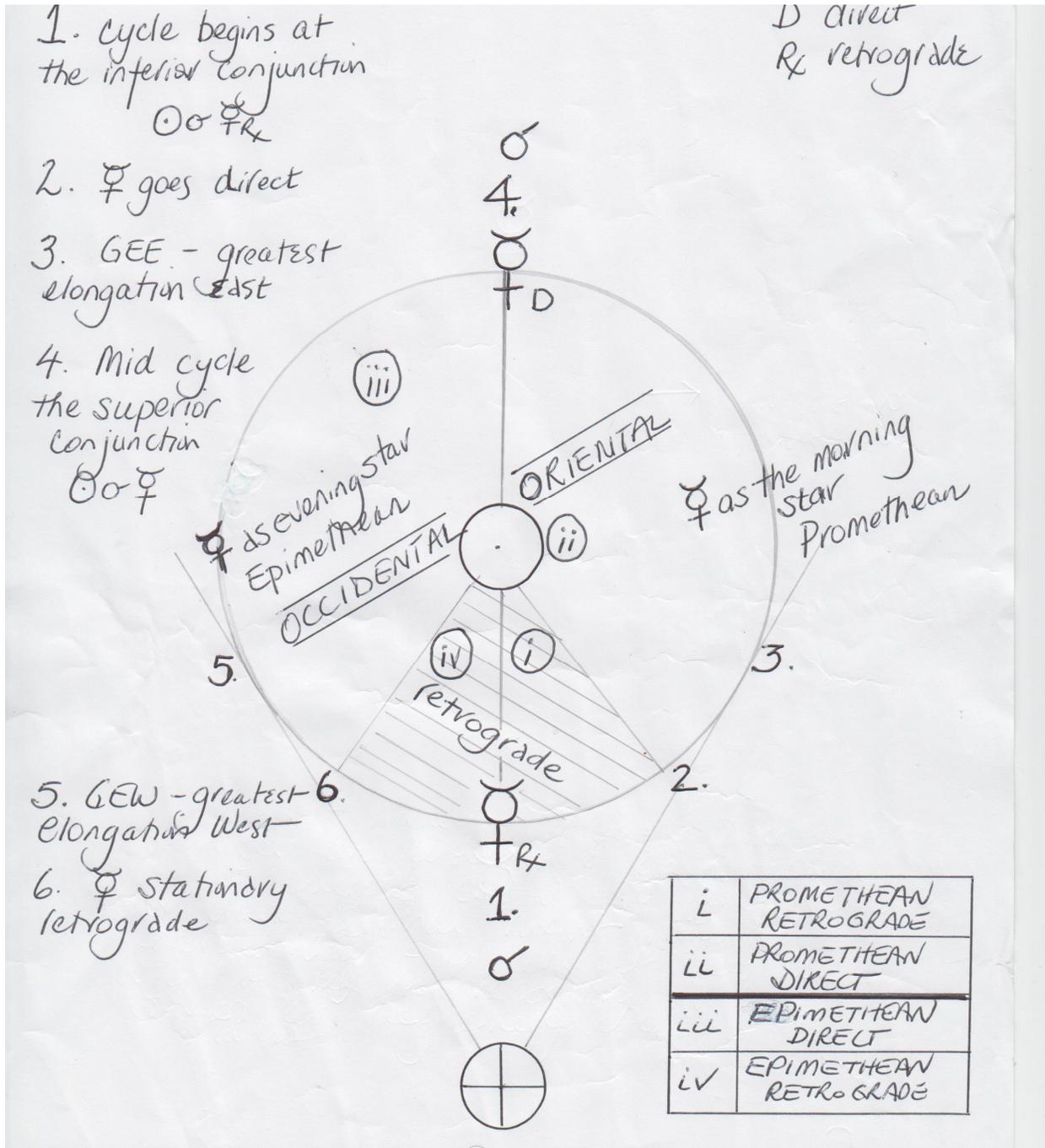
Dane Rudhyar developed the idea of the eight-fold phases of the luration cycle. Interested in Mercury's phases with the Sun, he also developed a four-fold approach to understanding the Sun-Mercury cycle.

As Mercury moves from inferior to superior conjunction, it is the morning star, in its waxing stage, known as its Oriental phase. Dane Rudhyar dubbed this part of the cycle **Promethean**.¹⁴ When Mercury is waxing, it is considered to be more solar - the ancient Greeks often called the morning star Apollo. This is Mercury's diurnal face and while it was also known as *matutine*, Rudhyar named this after the culture hero who stole fire from the gods and disseminated it to mortals. Rudhyar regarded this Mercury as eager, progressive and forward thinking, like Prometheus. As Mercury rises before the Sun, it is ahead of the Sun in the zodiac. The first week and a half of this half-cycle, Mercury is retrograde or as Rudhyar described it, **Promethean Retrograde**.

Between the superior and inferior conjunction, Mercury is the evening star setting just after the Sun. It is in the waning phase, the half of the cycle Rudhyar coined as **Epimethean**, after Prometheus' brother who was more circumspect, deliberate, and conservative and looked back to past events. Mercury's nocturnal aspect was also known as *vespertine*; the ancient Greeks named this Hermes. In this phase we see a more Lunar side about to descend into the

underworld as the leader of souls. The last week and a half of this phase, Mercury is retrograde or as Rudhyar dubbed it *Epimethean Retrograde*.

Rudyhar drew on philosophical symbolism for the two figures of Prometheus and Epimetheus, as they were prototypes of progression and conservatism or as Rudhyar described, the one who seeks to focus ahead of time and the one who takes counsel after the event.¹⁵ While Rudhyar's naming of the phases was philosophically astute, the myths of Prometheus and Epimetheus were much more diverse and wide ranging and not always consistent with these categories. But as four different ways to think about the cycle, this phraseology is very inspirational.



Based on its cycle, Mercury's four faces have been delineated as psychological types. However we could also see these four chapters as four points of reference when thinking things through. Each is an authentic and appropriate way of considering things. The four-fold process could

Hermes & Mercury

also be reflected upon as the progress of thinking. Being closest to the Sun, Mercury is essentially solar in that it is close to the solar spirit. However its cycle and myth also describe its lunar phase. Its cycle is a metaphor for the development and expression of the mental process and both hemispheres of the brain.

Using Promethean and Epimethean phases to classify the dual faces of the Mercurial temperament, perhaps the right and left brain, Rudhyar differentiated each half of the cycle into its retrograde or direct nature, delineating four Mercurial types as follows:

Mercury Phase		Rudhyars' comments from <i>An Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes</i>
Promethean - Retrograde	Inferior Conjunction to Stationary Direct <i>approximately 10 % of cycle</i>	<i>seeks its independence from the instinctual nature</i>
Promethean - Direct	Stationary Direct to Superior Conjunction <i>approximately 40 % of cycle</i>	<i>reaches towards the future and seeks to convey the rhythm of tomorrow to the ego</i>
Epimethean - Direct	Superior Conjunction to Stationary Retrograde <i>approximately 40 % of cycle</i>	<i>seeks to reflect objectively on the meaning of life and events after they have occurred</i>
Epimethean - Retrograde	Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction <i>approximately 10 % of cycle</i>	<i>the mind is seeking introspective union with an inner reality; returning to the source as it were.</i>

The two brothers represent two different ways of judgement - Prometheus is progressive and eager; Epimetheus is conservative and deliberate. Representative of the bi-polar mind, they were appropriate representatives for Rudhyar's ideas; however, as mythological representatives they also describe an underlying layer or pre-rational mind. Prometheus and Epimetheus were two mythological brothers, sons of a Titan and Oceanid; therefore, both belong to an earlier cosmological order before Zeus and the rational order arose, i.e. before philosophical concepts took the place of mythological stories. This stratum of mythological time is pre-literate and the thinking process is more aligned with instinct, gut knowing and the right brain. Mercury honours the ancient as well as the modern way of knowing.

Epimetheus suggests after (epi) thought and Rudhyar used this mythic figure to capture a way of thinking that looks backward, considering precedents and past experiences. This way of assessment is through historical and coherent pieces of evidence. However Rudhyar may not have taken the full mythological story into account, as it was Epimetheus who did not heed his brother's warning and took the captivating Pandora as his wife, colluding with Zeus' plans to unleash all the sorrows and ills onto the world. In this way Epimetheus is seen to be gullible and swayed by desire and beauty. Prometheus is the brother who looks forward (pro) toward the future; he is forethought. He is also a rebel, culture hero and revolutionary. For his theft of fire Zeus sentenced him to be chained to a rock in Tartarus. Prometheus' mythic temperament suggests hasty actions that are not well planned, ignoring boundaries and unfocused intuition. The mythic narrative also symbolises how human mental processes are not independent of the body; Epimetheus' actions lead to human ills while Prometheus' are binding.

While it was Hesiod who records the seminal myth of Prometheus and Epimetheus, Plato in *Protagoras* amplifies the story. Epimetheus distributed the best gifts to the animals - feathers, fur, hooves, horns, as well as cunning and courage, leaving man exposed, having no defence and little protection. Epimetheus forgot that he had distributed all the qualities to the animals, so when it was the human's turn, he was puzzled at what to do. During the confusion,

Prometheus arrived to check the distribution, finding that all the animals were suitably provided for, but that mankind was still naked with neither shelter nor arms of defence.¹⁶

Therefore it was Prometheus who had to step in to rescue man. He encouraged them to stand erect and stole the fires of heaven that allowed them to civilise themselves. But as Plato's allegory suggests, man was still prey to the wild beasts and was also unable to govern himself. And so Zeus sent Hermes to bestow upon mankind reverence and justice, friendships and conciliation.

Mercury Retrograde

In the lead up to the last Mercury Retrograde period *The New York Times Magazine* published an article *Retrograde Beliefs*. In this public sphere, author Kirsten Dombek reflected on the increase in the belief and advice about Mercury going backwards. As she so rightly states 'Facebook and Twitter will clog with reports of appointments missed, important email sent to the spam folder, wars between nations, cars crashed and iPhones dropped in toilets, all followed by some version of the hashtag "#mercuryretrograde"'.¹⁷ Unfortunately astrological Mercury is often reduced to this, only known through its retrograde periods, even though as we have seen, its myth, cycle and astrological tradition is thoughtful and insightful. Its retrograde patterning also is a wonder; therefore Mercury retrograde periods are times of consideration and new ways of thinking or re-thinking. Perhaps the outer missed appointment is the call for reflection.

Year	Stationary Retrograde	Degree	Stationary Direct	Degree	Travel in Degrees	No. of days Retrograde
2015	Jan 21	17♊05	Feb 11	1♋18	15° 46'	21 days
	May 19	13♌08	Jun 11	4♌33	8° 35'	23 days
	Sep 17	15♍55	Oct 9	0♎53	15° 02'	23 days
2016	Jan 5	1♋02	Jan 25	14♌54	16° 07'	20 days
	Apr 28	23♋36	May 22	14♌20	9° 16'	24 days
	Aug 30	29♍04	Sep 22	14♎49	14° 15'	23 days
	Dec 19	15♏07				
2017			Jan 8	28♏52	16° 14'	20 days
	Apr 9	4♏50	May 3	24♐15	10° 35'	24 days
	Aug 13	11♑38	Sep 5	28♑25	13° 12'	23 days
	Dec 3	29♒18	Dec 23	13♒00	16° 18'	20 days
2018	Mar 23	16♑54	Apr 15	4♒46	12° 06'	23 days
	Jul 26	23♒27	Aug 19	11♓31	11° 56'	24 days
	Nov 17	13♓29	Dec 9	27♏16	16° 14'	22 days
2019	Mar 5	29♏38	Mar 28	16♐05	13° 32'	23 days
	Jul 7	4♑27	Aug 1	23♑56	10° 31'	24 days
	Oct 31	27♒38	Nov 20	11♓35	16° 03'	20 days

Note how every third time Mercury goes retrograde it links back to where it went stationary direct approximately 11 months previously -

Mercury is retrograde for 20 - 24 days three times a year or about 1/6 of its time; therefore, about 18% of all charts will have retrograde Mercury. One of the features of the Mercury

retrograde cycle is that it will turn retrograde at approximately the same zodiacal degree as it turned direct eleven months previously. As Mercury weaves its way through the zodiac, it picks up the threads from the previous year which may have been left hanging, weaving them again into the tapestry of knowing.

Mercury has a penchant for three's as it has three cycles a year. It retrogrades three times a year for approximately 3 weeks. And were we to plot these retrograde stations on a zodiacal wheel a triangle would form. For instance, the retrograde stations of Mercury for 2015 occur at 17♊05, 13♋08 and 15♌55 forming a grand trine in air. If we were to plot the inferior and superior conjunctions, two triangles would form the Star of David. Venus etches a pentagram in the sky while Mercury designs triangles and six-pointed stars.

Mercury's penchant for triangles is also demonstrated in its retrograde stations through the elements, as the following table demonstrates. This table was originally developed by Erin Sullivan¹⁸. Mercury retrogrades through the elements residing about 4 - 6 times in each element before it slips back into the previous element.

Mercury Retrograde through the Elements

Year	Date of Retrograde Station	Sign	Element
2013	23 February	♋	Water
	26 June	♌	Water
	21 October	♍	Water
2014	7 February	♋	Water
	7 June	♌	Water
	5 October	♍	Water
2015	22 January	♊	Air
	19 May	♋	Air
	18 September	♌	Air
2016	6 January	♊	Air
	29 April	♈	Earth
	30 August	♉	Earth
2017	10 April	♈	Earth
	13 August	♉	Earth
	3 December	♊	Fire
2018	23 March	♈	Fire
	26 July	♉	Fire
	17 November	♊	Fire
2019	6 March	♋	Water
	1 August	♌	Water
	21 November	♍	Water

An ancient idea in horary astrology suggested that retrograde planets are weakened, a necessary judgement when considering an answer to a specific question. However, this cannot

be extended to personal horoscopes which consider the psyche of an individual not a literal event. Mercury retrograde is a natural part of a cycle and as such represents a natural state for the individual. For personal horoscopes it is not a matter of judgement, but more a metaphoric time to consider the nature of our thoughts, ideas and communications.

When we are on thresholds, in transitions, between times, crossing over or at a crossroads, Mercury might appear to lead us into or out of the situation. Mercury is not just interested in ideas but also in what underpins them, their source and motivation. He moves between both solar consciousness and lunar intelligence. This is well demonstrated in his earlier relationship with two goddesses.

Appendix

Appendix I: The table below follows these phases in the Mercurial cycle beginning with the inferior conjunction on the last day of January, 2015. Because of Mercury's elliptical orbit, the important turning points in the cycle vary.

Stage	2015 Dates	Zodiac Degree	Phase	Mercury's Speed	Visibility	Days in this phase
Inferior Conjunction ☿ ☿ ☿ ☿	Jan. 31	10♊20	Oriental Mercury rises before the Sun, becoming the morning star Rudhyar coined this half of the cycle: Promethean The Sun is later in the zodiac than Mercury Waxing	Slow	Not visible	12 days
Mercury Direct ☿ ☿ ☿ ☿	Feb. 12	1♊18		Increases in Speed	Not visible	12 days
Greatest Elongation West	Feb. 24			Average	Visible near the greatest elongation about 10 days	45 days
Superior Conjunction ☿ ☿ ☿ ☿	Apr. 10	19♈58	Occidental Mercury rises after the Sun, becoming the evening star Rudhyar called this half of the cycle: Epimethean The Sun is later in the zodiac than Mercury Waning	Fast	Not visible	27 days
Greatest Elongation East	May 7			Average and Decreasing	Visible near the greatest elongation about 10 days	12 days
Mercury Retrograde ☿ ☿ ☿ ☿	May 19	13♈08		Decreasing in Speed - Slow	Not visible	12 days
<i>This cycle lasts for 120 days; the cycle before was 109 days, while the next cycle will be 122 days</i>						
Inferior Conjunction ☿ ☿ ☿ ☿	May 31	8♈58	The cycle renews itself	Slow	Not visible	This cycle lasts 122 days

Endnotes

¹ Jules Cashford, *How Hermes and Apollo came to Love Each Other*, Kingfisher Art Productions, Somerset, UK: 2014, 11 -12.

² *The Iliad of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1961. 24:349-352

³ 'The Homeric Hymn to Hermes', from *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Charles Boer, Spring, Dallas, 1970

⁴ *The Iliad of Homer*, 24:694-5

⁵ *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, New York, 24: 1-14.

⁶ 'The Hymn to Hestia' from *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Charles Boer describes Hermes and Hestia.

⁷ Ginette Paris, *Pagan Meditations*, translated by Gwendolyn Moore, Spring (Dallas, TX: 1986), 181

⁸ 'The Homeric Hymn to Hermes', from the *Homeric Hymns*, translated by Michael Crudden, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK: 2001, 58. The hymn was probably written about 2500 years ago and suggests Hermes honoured Mnemosyne for she was 'assigned' to the young god.

⁹ For a fuller description of Hermes as leader of Souls, see Chapter 7 from my manuscript Chaos to Cosmos available from Astro*Synthesis – see <http://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/student-astrology-ebooklets>

¹⁰ In the *Sibling Constellation* (Penguin: 1999), I reflect on this hymn from the point of view of sibling rivalry and the journey siblings often take from envy to equality. See Chapter 9 *Hermes Patron of the Sibling*.

¹¹ The word *psychopomp* is Greek, from *psyche* referring to soul or souls and *pempo* to send off, to guide; therefore the *psychopomp* is the guide to the psyche (soul) or the guide and leader of souls.

¹² *Hypnagogia* is the experience of transition from wakefulness to sleep: from the Greek *hypnos* "sleep"; *agōgos* "leading" or "inducing"; *Hypnopompia* is the transition from sleep to waking: *pompe* "act of sending".

¹³ Mercury is best seen on Spring evenings (March-April in the Northern Hemisphere; September-October in the Southern Hemisphere) and Autumn mornings (March-April in the Southern Hemisphere; September-October in the Northern Hemisphere)

¹⁴ See Dane Rudhyar, *An Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes*, Shambhala, Berkeley, 1976, 74-84.

¹⁵ See Dane Rudhyar, *An Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes*, 73.

¹⁶ Plato, *Protagoras*, from *The Essential Plato*, translated by B. Jowett, 998.

¹⁷ Kristin Dombek, *Retrograde Beliefs*, The New York Times Magazine, Jan, 9, 2015. I was first alerted to this via Donna Cunningham's excellent website and blog at: <https://skywriter.wordpress.com/>

¹⁸ Erin Sullivan, *Retrograde Planets*, Penguin Books, Arkana Series (London: 1992, pp 68-9. Reprinted by Samuel Weiser (York Beach, ME: 2000).