

Cycling with Mercury




Mercury (ca. 30 – 50 CE). This sculpture is in the museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA.

Like most representations of the god, this statue originally had wings on either side of the head. His arms may have held a caduceus and a sack of gold. Wings symbolize his penchant for flight and height, a caduceus for his role as herald and messenger, and gold for trade and commerce.

Multifaceted, Multifarious and Magical Mercury –

The following tables and questions will help orientate you to the Mercury cycle. This is only a guide to your Mercury cycle, as timing of each cycle of Mercury can vary considerably

| Your Mercury Cycle  | Mercury rising before the Sun | Mercury setting after the Sun |
|--|--|---|
| | earlier in zodiacal longitude | later in zodiacal longitude |
| | Matutine | Vespertine |
| | The Morning Star | The Evening Star |
| | Oriental | Occidental |
| | God of Dawn | God of Dusk |
| Ancient Greeks | Apollo | Hermes |
| Rudhyar | Promethean | Epimethean |
| Mythologically | Psychagogos, <i>soul-conjuring bringing souls up from the underworld</i> | Psychopompos, <i>soul-guide leading souls into the underworld</i> |

Questions to help reflect on your Mercury Cycle

1. Is Mercury before or after your Sun in zodiacal longitude?
 - a. If before, Mercury is oriental, rising before the Sun; therefore, you are born between the inferior conjunction and the superior conjunction. Call yourself a Promethean!
 - b. If after, Mercury is occidental, setting after the Sun; therefore, you are born between the superior conjunction and the inferior conjunction. Call yourself an Epimethean!
2. Is Mercury Retrograde or Direct?
 - a. If Retrograde and before the Sun then you are born after the Inferior Conjunction (between the 1st and 12th day after) - you are a Promethean Retrograde type
 - b. If Retrograde and after the Sun then you are born before the Inferior Conjunction occurs
1 -12 days later. You are an Epimethean Retrograde type
 - c. If Mercury is Direct then you are either a Promethean (see 1a) or a Epimethean (see 1b)
3. If you are Promethean Direct (Mercury before Sun) how many days after the inferior conjunction were you born? How many zodiacal degrees separate Mercury and your Sun?
 - a. If you are born between 10/11 - 21 days (three weeks) after the conjunction, you are born between Mercury going direct and its greatest elongation from the Sun.
 - b. If you are born about three to eight weeks after the inferior conjunction, you are born between the planet's greatest elongation and their superior conjunction.

If you are Epimethean Direct (Mercury after the Sun) how many days after the superior conjunction were you born? How many zodiacal degrees between Mercury and your Sun?

- a. If you are born up to approximately 5 weeks after the superior conjunction you will be in the phase between this conjunction and their greatest elongation.
 - b. Born between 5 and 6½ weeks after the superior conjunction, you are probably born between the greatest elongation and Mercury's station retrograde.
4. What is the Secondary Progressed phase between your Sun and Mercury?
 - a. Has Progressed Mercury changed from oriental to occidental, or vice versa? Or has it returned to its natal hemisphere. If so, look back to see what years the progressed Sun-Mercury conjunction/s occurred and whether inferior or superior.
 - b. What is the new phase between Progressed Mercury and Progressed Sun? How does this relate to the natal phase?
 - c. Has Progressed Mercury stationed retrograde or direct - when did this happen?
 - d. What is the current Progressed Mercury sign - what is its relationship to your natal Mercury sign? Follow its track through your life reflecting on the aspects it has made, the houses it has occupied and the qualities of the signs that it has transited.

The Synodic Cycle of Mercury - Going through Phases

For a visual of this cycle, see page 5

Mercury has distinct crossroads in its synodic cycle: it begins at its inferior conjunction with the Sun, turns direct, reaches its greatest elongation as the morning star, disappears from sight under the sunbeams to conjoin the Sun again on the other side. It reappears out of the sunbeams, reaches its greatest elongation as the evening star, turns retrograde and then renews its cycle at the next inferior conjunction. Each cycle is marked by these two conjunctions and two elongations, one as Mercury rises before the Sun (deity of dawn) and one as Mercury sets after the Sun (deity of dusk).

Each phase could be seen as stages of the development of one idea or the mind in general.

| Phases - the Mercury Cycle | Mercurial Time |
|--|--|
| 1. Inferior Conjunction* to Stationary Direct | Mercury guides the spirits out of the underworld so their essence may be brought to light and serve in the reformation of a new cycle. Old projects may be resurrected; new programmes imagined. |
| 2. Stationary Direct to Greatest Elongation | Instinctive and remembered ways of thinking are at crossroads with new developments taking place |
| 3. Greatest Elongation to Morning Set; Morning Set to Superior Conjunction | New ideas and insight inspire the Geminian spirit to find a way forward with new strategies. The Virgo attitude of discrimination, focus, and craft can later be applied to bring the ideas to manifestation through application and work. |
| 4. Superior Conjunction to Evening Rise; Evening Rise to Greatest Elongation | This is the time to reflect and harvest insights and initiatives that have been applied towards the goal. It is time to disseminate the design, share the products of your creative process, and articulate your process. |
| 5. Greatest Elongation to Stationary Retrograde | Consideration - Thinking becomes reflective, more introspective and philosophical |
| 6. Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction | This is the time to harvest insights and initiatives that have been applied towards the goal. It is time to disseminate the design, share the products of your creative process, and articulate your process. |
| The Return to the Inferior Conjunction | The mythic brothers forge another cycle, as Mercury guides the spirit of imagination and phantasmagorias towards consciousness |

Astronomically, 'inferior' signifies when Mercury or Venus are between the Earth and the Sun and closest to Earth. The root of the word 'inferior' refers to low, like the lower regions, the inferno. It is not a judgment - inferior is closer to earth, to matter - and the planets will be retrograde, moving in a direction converse to custom. Metaphorically, like Mercury and Venus, the 'inferior' function is closest to earth and backward in movement. Being in these lowlands is where we re-encounter the spirits of our indigenous self.

For the dates of the Mercury Cycle see: *The Current Cycle of Mercury* under **Student Resources**
<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/student-astrology-resources/>

The Sun–Mercury cycle averages 116 days; however, each individual cycle may last 105–30 days, so each phase can also vary. We might think of these as being like academic terms of a year or modules of a course. Mercury’s synodic cycle goes through phases, a heavenly and helpful time frame when imagining and developing certain projects. Following are the average lengths of each phase of the synodic cycle.

| Inferior Conjunction to Stationary Direct | Stationary Direct to Greatest Elongation | Greatest Elongation to Superior Conjunction | Superior Conjunction to Greatest Elongation | Greatest Elongation to Stationary Retrograde | Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| 11 days | 10 days | 37 days | 37 days | 10 days | 11 days |
| Retrograde | Direct | | Direct | | Retrograde |
| Mercury rises before the Sun; it leads the Sun <i>Promethean</i> | | | Mercury sets after the Sun: it follows the Sun <i>Epimethean</i> | | |

Being egg-shaped, Mercury’s orbit is eccentric, which is characteristic of this god. Its orbital speed varies considerably, ranging from a standstill near its stations to over 2.25° a day at its superior conjunction.

The cycle’s two conjunctions are turning points. The Inferior Conjunction occurs when Mercury is retrograde and between the Sun and Earth. The other conjunction is called ‘superior’ as it occurs on the other side of the Sun. At the inferior conjunction Mercury leaves its post as the evening star to rise first, leading the Sun into a new cycle. At the superior conjunction Mercury is on the other side of the Sun, changing position to now follow the Sun. Through the technique of planetary sect our astrological ancestors respected Mercury’s dual temperament by aligning him with the day sect, when he rose before the Sun, and the night camp when he set after the Sun.

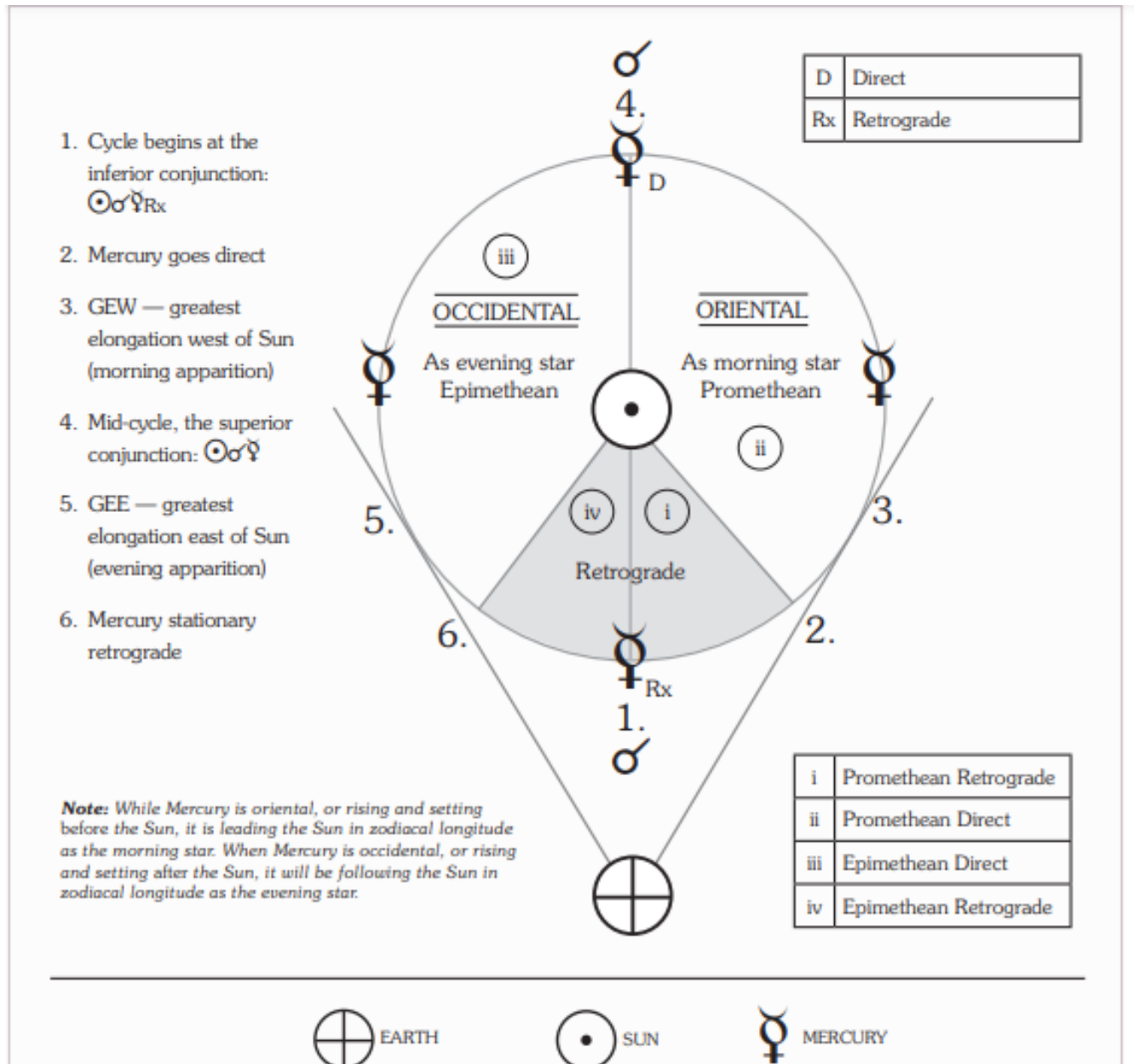
This cycle accounts for Mercury’s disappearance and reappearance, as well as its retrograde period three times a year. Shape-shifting between the god of dusk and dawn is consistent with the Mercurial disposition: adaptability in changeover times, proficiency in moving between hemispheres, acclimatizing to new arrangements, guiding in transitional zones and linking different states of consciousness.

| Rudhyar’s comments from <i>An Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes</i> | |
|---|--|
| Promethean Retrograde | <i>The mind seeks its independence from the instinctual nature.</i> |
| Promethean Direct | <i>The mind reaches towards the future and seeks to convey the rhythm of tomorrow to the ego.</i> |
| Epimethean Direct | <i>The mind seeks to reflect objectively on the meaning of life and events after they have occurred.</i> |
| Epimethean Retrograde | <i>The mind seeks introspective union with an inner reality – returning to the source, as it were.</i> |

Using Solar Fire to animate your Sun/Mercury cycle

The following diagram displays six phases of the synodic cycle of Mercury geocentrically; that is from our position here on Earth.

- At position 1, the inferior conjunction, Mercury is between the Earth and Sun, closest to the Earth and retrograde. Mercury changes positions and now rises before the Sun.
- At position 4, the Superior Conjunction, Mercury is on the other side of the Sun, direct and moving quickly. Mercury changes positions and now rises after the Sun.
- At positions 3 and 5 Mercury is at its great elongation or greatest zodiacal distance from the Sun from our perspective here on Earth.
- Travelling between positions 3 and 5 takes approximately 10 weeks for Mercury; between positions 5 and 3 takes approximately 6 weeks.



Now you can personalize this cycle using your Solar Fire program, following these steps. This will help you visualize the cycle each day after your birth = one year of progressed time.

1. Open your chart
2. On the top menu choose **Displayed Points**. Click .
3. Choose Mercury File or Create a Mercury File if one is not there
4. Highlight Mercury and choose Edit. Then in Selected Points, choose Sun and Mercury only. Save
5. Now your chart will be displayed with only Sun and Mercury.
6. On the top menu choose the icon that represents Animate Chart
7. Choose Step by 1 Day - click on the tab that will animate each day - this will represent one progressed year but will also be a good visual to see how Mercury and the Sun move

The first day after birth shows your progression at age 1; second day (second click) is age two and so on - follow the progressions of Mercury through your life -

For your own interest put the Step by on 1 week. Then follow the Sun and Mercury relationship for 16 weeks (16 clicks) - you will see the changes that occur in one complete cycle of Sun/Mercury.

Mercury Retrograde

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 retrograding through the elements, it picks up the threads from the previous year which may have been overlooked, weaving them again into the mercurial tapestry.

| Year | Stationary Retrograde | Degree | Stationary Direct | Degree | Travel in Degrees | No. of days Retrograde |
|---|-----------------------|--------|-------------------|--------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 2023 | Dec 13 | 8♃29 | Jan 2, 2024 | 22♁10 | 16° 19' | 20 days |
| 2024 | Apr 1 | 27♃13 | Apr 25 | 15♃58 | 11° 15' | 24 days |
| | Aug 5 | 4♄06 | Aug 28 | 21♃24 | 12° 42' | 23 days |
| | Nov 26 | 22♁40 | Dec 15 | 6♁23 | 16° 17' | 19 days |
| 2025 | Mar 15 | 9♃35 | Apr 7 | 26♁49 | 12° 46' | 23 days |
| | Jul 18 | 15♃34 | Aug 11 | 4♃14 | 11° 20' | 24 days |
| | Nov 9 | 6♁51 | Nov 29 | 20♄42 | 16° 09' | 20 days |
| <p><i>Note how every third time Mercury goes retrograde, it links back to where it went stationary direct approximately 11 months previously - on November 26, 2024 Mercury will go Retrograde at 22♁40, picking up the Mercury Direct thread of January 2, 2024 at 22♁10</i></p> | | | | | | |

Pi in the Sky: The Infinite Intelligence of Randomness

Mythic Mercury has a penchant for mathematical symmetry. He is the god of the classroom, yet with one wave of his hypnotic wand, he can induce drowsiness in his students – two sides

of his learning curve. As the astrological ruler of Gemini, he pairs and duplicates; as the ruler of Virgo, he respects precision and measurement.

Mercury's cycle reverses the sacredness of geometry through the mathematical constant of Pi that is etched on the heavens in this planet's cycle with the Sun. Mercury's cycle of 22 conjunctions in 7 years aligns with Pi, an infinite number, whose subsequent decimal digits progress endlessly. Mercury invites us into his seemingly unplanned world, where intelligence is based not only on reason, but also on participation and transition. When we are in between and in motion, Mercury stirs thoughts and memories that reconnect us to the world we are passing through. The affinity of Mercury's synodic cycle with this mathematical and astronomical transcendent number can be shown in two ways:

1. Each Sun-Mercury cycle is an average of 116 days; therefore, in one year it completes 3.14 cycles (365.25 divided by 116).
2. The zodiacal location where the Sun-Mercury cycle begins repeats itself again in seven years, by approximately 7-8 degrees and days earlier. Between these repetitions there are 22 inferior conjunctions or cycles. The 22/7 ratio is often used to approximate Pi, or 3.14.

For instance, the following table begins with the first inferior conjunction of April 2, 2018 at 11°56' Aries. Seven years earlier, the inferior conjunction was on April 10, 2011 at 19°36' Aries, while the next one will be seven years later on March 24, 2025 at 4°24' Aries. Between each of these times, there are 22 inferior conjunctions. Note that the inferior conjunctions retrograde through elements and follow this repetitive pattern every seven years within an orb of approximately seven days or seven degrees. Mercury will always be retrograde at the inferior conjunction, which is the midpoint of its retrogradation sub-cycle.

| Date of Inferior Conjunction | Zodiacal Degree | Date of Inferior Conjunction 7 years later | Zodiacal Degree Subsequent Cycle |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------------------|
| April 2, 2018 | 11♈56 | March 25, 2025 | 4♈24 |
| August 9, 2018 | 16♁27 | August 1, 2025 | 9♁00 |
| November 27, 2018 | 5♊03 | November 20, 2025 | 28♋18 |
| March 15, 2019 | 24♋11 | March 7, 2026 | 16♋52 |
| July 21, 2019 | 28♌28 | July 13, 2026 | 20♌42 |
| November 12, 2019 | 18♍55 | November 5, 2026 | 12♍10 |
| February 26, 2020 | 6♎55 | February 19, 2027 | 29♏47 |
| July 1, 2020 | 9♏44 | June 23, 2027 | 1♏39 |
| October 26, 2020 | 2♐47 | October 20, 2027 | 26♑01 |
| February 8, 2021 | 20♑01 | February 2, 2028 | 13♑01 |
| June 11, 2021 | 20♒21 | June 2, 2028 | 12♒06 |
| October 10, 2021 | 16♓35 | October 2, 2028 | 9♓45 |
| January 23, 2022 | 3♑22 | January 16, 2029 | 26♐29 |
| May 22, 2022 | 0♒43 | May 13, 2029 | 22♑30 |
| September 23, 2022 | 0♓14 | September 16, 2029 | 23♒18 |
| January 7, 2023 | 16♐56 | December 31, 2029 | 10♐06 |
| May 2, 2023 | 11♑19 | April 23, 2030 | 3♑21 |

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| September 6, 2023 | 13♍36 | August 30, 2030 | 6♍32 |
| December 23, 2023 | 0♍39 | December 16, 2030 | 23♁51 |
| April 12, 2024 | 22♍32 | April 5, 2031 | 14♍51 |
| August 19, 2024 | 26♁35 | August 12, 2031 | 19♁17 |
| December 6, 2024 | 14♁27 | November 30, 2031 | 7♁40 |

From Evening to Day Elongation

While we have been reflecting on the synodic cycle of Mercury from inferior to superior conjunction and back again, it is also revealing to study the cycle from its morning elongation to its evening elongation and vice versa. The midpoint of these phases is the superior and inferior conjunctions. What is of great interest is that the evening elongation of the current cycle, the inferior conjunction, and the morning elongation of the next cycle all occur near the same degree, sometimes very close, as shown in the table below. Mercury's movement during this period is intently focused on one segment of the horoscope.

| | Cycle from 11.04.24 to 19.08.24 | Comment |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Evening Elongation | 26♁52 | Note the similarity between the evening and day elongations from one cycle to the next. |
| Inferior Conjunction | 4♍06 ♁ | |
| Day Elongation | 26♁35 | |

Below are some more examples of these Mercury's stations along the way, interconnecting these three times in the cycle.

| | 2022 | 2022 | 2022-23 | 2023 | 2023 | 2023-24 | 2024 |
|----------------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Evening Elongation | 29♁26 | 1♁36 | 19♍49 | 11♁03 | 14♍33 | 3♍19 | 23♍19 |
| Inferior Conjunction | 0♍43 ♁ | 0♁14 ♁ | 16♍57 ♁ | 11♁19 ♁ | 13♍36 ♁ | 0♍39 ♁ | 22♍32 ♁ |
| Day Elongation | 2♍30 | 27♍39 | 15♍07 | 12♁58 | 11♍26 | 28♁25 | 23♍33 |

The average time between the Greatest Evening Elongation and the Inferior conjunction is 21 days; similarly, between the Inferior conjunction and the Greatest Morning Elongation is 21 days, a total of 42 days. This timeframe is similar to the Venus Retrograde period and the symbolically significant image of the 40 days and 40 nights of myth and legend.

During this period Mercury is retracing his steps. The following table shows Mercury's footprints on the zodiac during these periods in **2024**. **This year the emphasis has moved from last year's focus on the Earth trigon to Fire.** This period of approximately 42 days represents 36% of the total synodic cycle.

| | 2023/4 | 2024 | 2024 | 2024 |
|---|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Mercury Reaches Greatest Elongation <i>Evening</i> | Dec 4, 2023 3♃19 | Mar 24 23♃19 | Jul 22 26♃53 | Nov 16 16♃52 |
| Mercury Stations Retrograde | Dec 13 8♃29 ♀ | Apr 1 27♃13 ♀ | Aug 5 4♃06 ♀ | Nov 26 22♃40 ♀ |
| Inferior Conjunction; <i>Sun conjunct Mercury</i> ♀ | Dec 22 0♃39 ♀ | Apr 11 22♃32 ♀ | Aug 19 26♃36 ♀ | Dec 6 14♃27 ♀ |
| Mercury Stations Direct | Jan 2, 2024 22♃10 | Apr 25 15♃59 | Aug 28 21♃25 | Dec 15 6♃24 |
| Mercury Reaches Greatest Elongation <i>Morning</i> | Jan 12 28♃25 | May 9 23♃33 | Sep 5 24♃59 | Dec 25 11♃49 |

Each Mercury cycle is like a trimester of the year. This part of the cycle seems akin to the time when the breakdown, digestion, and assimilation of learning and understanding might be deeper, perhaps more soulful. Certainly, the demarcations of the elongations of the cycle seem to correspond well with Mercury as hypnagog who hovers on the threshold of sleep, about to take us down into the nightscape of dreams and shadows, as well as the *hypnopomp* who is there at dawn's waking.¹ What might the inferior conjunction signify?

The root of the word 'inferior' is Latin, referring to 'low', like the lower regions, the *inferno*. This leads us to images of the underworld, as Mercury from our position is under or lower than the Sun. Inferior is not a judgment – inferior is closer to the earth, to matter and moving in a direction converse to custom. When Mercury is on the other side of the Sun or above the Earth, this will be where the superior conjunction occurs from our perspective. Superior is from the Latin, meaning 'above'.

When Mercury is in this position we might imagine our perceptions, understandings and insights might not be as coherent or rational, but more divergent and cyclical, stimulated and comprehended by image, analogy, metaphor, symbol, myth, reflection and stillness. Being in the lowlands is akin to being in a place where we are unaccustomed to our habitual ways of knowing. Unsigned pathways, mysterious turns and inevitable returns, not mapped by human hands might be more evocative of meaning. We backtrack, returning to deepen our familiarity with the landscape. It is an open-ended process, a dis-course in its truest sense.

In the 'low' land, the wisdom of inferior functioning can also come to the fore. From an astrological perspective this might suggest that elements of our horoscope, not highly visible in the day world of rational and progressive standards, may find expression and be loosened from their bindings. Being in this time is when we are more able to access the essence of our indigenous self; in the Mercurial lowlands is where imagination, intuition and interconnection are revived. When stressed, feeling lost or anxious, we often revert to type to explain away our confusion. But in the wilderness of the mercurial lowlands, we turn away from typing, comparing, and judging towards archetype, which allows more reverence and immersion in plurality, ambiguity and complexity.

Mercurial and Hermetic functions of language and imagination can be loosened at this time. Unreflective use of language reinforces bias, judgment and control. At this time of the cycle we

are invited to find a language that reorientates, integrates and even reshapes consciousness. This language is not learned, nor spoken, but is psychologically resonant in the images and symbols of animistic stories. Imagination helps unblock psychic impasses by heightening our sensual awareness to be able to hear, feel, smell, taste and see through the density of the concrete world into other worlds, natural ecospheres and unconscious realms. The soul speaks to us in these ways.

Articles

Mythic Mercury

Hermes, as the forerunner of our astrological Mercury, has always been close to me. Embedded in this planetary god are images, stories, symbols and escapades of the Guide of Souls, as the Greeks knew him to be.

Homage to Hermes, God of Transitions

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Homage-to-the-God-of-Transitions.pdf>

Hermes, Patron of the Sibling

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Hermes-Patron-of-the-Sibling.pdf>

Crossing the Threshold: Hermes as Guide and Leader of Souls

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/hermes-guide-of-the-souls-brian-clark.pdf>

The Olympians: Hestia and Hermes

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/hestia-and-hermes-olympians-greek-mythology-brian-clark.pdf>

Transitioning with Hermes, Part 4 of Gods in our Times

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Transitions-with-Hermes.pdf>

The Cycle of Mercury

The synodic cycle of Mercury is a fascinating timing technique, and ways to contemplate the semesters of our lives. Below are a few articles to help orientate you to the Mercury cycle.

Timelines of Mercury

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Timelines-of-Mercury.pdf>

Mercury Pi in the Sky

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Mercury-Pi-in-the-Sky.pdf>

Interpretation and Imagination

An article inspired by Hermes on participating with symbols and the imagination.

Hermes Helps with Hermeneutics - moving between interpretation and imagination

<https://www.astrosynthesis.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Hermes-Helps-With-Hermeneutics.pdf>

¹ *Hypnagogia* is the 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".