

Mercury Retrograde

Written by Garry Lee Wright
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We live in strangely searching times. We look inward, outward, all around for a fresh clue why surprising things happen, and why most of them are bad. We might seek out that annoying woman on late-night TV with the Jamaican accent whose tarot cards uncannily confirm that your husband, who's been working late for the past 27 years, is actually having an affair with the security guard.

We might investigate on-line therapy, another bizarre trend that lets overscheduled people work out their nervous breakdowns via e-mail. ("Dr. Hackenbush will be out of the office until January, but if your suicide really can't wait, then")

Many folks, understandably, have tried to rediscover their faith. One new Web site (<http://www.beliefnet.com>) presents a quiz on moral choices and theological issues, then explains what religion you *should* be. (Caution: Reviewing this recently on our radio show, we learned that a Pentecostal, a Buddhist, and two Roman Catholics would all be more comfortable if they were actually Quakers.)

So it's not inappropriate to mention a thrice-yearly phenomenon coming our way again, a condition many astute crackpots like me take much too seriously: Mercury Retrograde.

This odd occurrence was first discovered by ancient astronomers/shepherds, who had plenty of time on their hands after bedding down their flocks for the night. Turning toward the darkened sky, they watched the closest planets make their slow but consistent trek through various constellations. One in particular – now called Mercury – occasionally seemed to come to a stop, then inexplicably move in reverse.

This must have come as quite a shock to primitive observers out there in the desert:

"You're not going to believe this, Hammurabi, but I swear that planet is *backing up!*"

"You know, Ishtar, I think that yogurt must have fermented. Why don't you just grab a little nap and I'll knock on the tent later?"

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But it's true. Mercury does seem to back up, and it happens like this.

Say you're driving along the expressway, trying to spot a gas station where 87 octane is under \$3 a gallon. Suddenly, a car full of senior girls pulls up in the adjacent lane, flashes you, and then speeds off.

Now, both cars are moving forward, but from the perspective of the girls' vehicle, yours *appears* to be backing up. It's an optical illusion – called a “parallax” – that also comes into play as the orbits of Earth and Mercury mix it up throughout the year. That's when, from our perspective here on Terra Firma, Mercury seems like it's moving in reverse, or retrograde.

All right, let's put our tops back on and sort this out.

Mercury was the messenger of the gods (he's the guy on the FTD logo), and astrologers believe that the planet Mercury rules communications. (“Rules” in this case means “pertains to the affairs of,” as opposed to “is really cool” – like when Emeril starts screaming, “Pork fat rules!”)

This phenomenon (again in effect from roughly June 2 through 29) seems to signal a temporary thwarting of everyday human communications, in big ways and small. Along with electronic malfunctions, it's mostly about misunderstandings.

On the mundane level, look for inconvenient and/or irritating verbal miscues. Someone calls to re-schedule Thursday's appointment, but the message gets taken as, “Mr. Smith says he threw away his ointment.”

On the larger front, look for public figures to misspeak or get embroiled in weird he-said, she-said controversies. Contract negotiations seem to drag on or fall apart completely. And expired 15-minute celebrities like Darva Conger will come out of the woodwork to show up on TV again.

All good science, pseudo and otherwise, benefits from everyone's research, so monitor these predictions closely. And don't get paranoid, but do pay extra attention to what you're hearing, saying, writing, and agreeing to. Two Mercury Retrogrades ago was that infamous election when the networks came unglued and many voters chose to ratify the presidential ticket of Al Gore/Pat Buchanan.

So stay tanned. I mean, tuned.

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