

# Shamanic Astrology

by Penny Willer, on Daniel Giamario November, 2001 presentation to ASA

The lecture on November 9, 2001 was entitled *The Synodic Cycles of Mercury from a Mytho-Shamanistic Perspective*. Daniel began by describing Shamanic Astrology as a form of Neo-Archaic astrology, with the intent of it being a form of astrology that would work in any age. There are mysteries found in the cycles of visible astronomical bodies, and the external cycles are equivalent to internal (psyche) cycles. Shamanic Astrology takes literally the saying “As above, so below. As without, so within.” There is a belief in sympathetic magic. The syndic cycle is a planetary return to the same point relative to the earth, with the same stellar background. There is a belief that our own direct experience of the night sky is more important than any abstractions about it. Now we are at the Turning of the Ages, according to Daniel, and the only question currently is whether we are at the end or the midpoint of a 26,000-year cycle. In any case, the gods and goddesses are dancing in a new way. There are new archetypes coming into being. The only other similar school of thought is that of Rudolph Steiner’s Astrosophy, which is described as Neo-Ptolomeic.

Daniel said his presentation was not intended to be a conventional review of Mercury’s characteristics, but an additional enhancement to classical interpretations of the planet in the individual chart. He enthusiastically recommended Erin Sullivan’s work on retrogrades, Robert Hand’s essay about Mercury, and Dane Rudhyar’s study of psychological complexes and emotional problems. They are all good examples of process-oriented approaches to planetary interpretation. The purpose of Daniel’s talk was to show audience members where their natal and synodic return Mercury positions are in the Mercury cycle and suggest potential myths providing different meanings from what may already be familiar.

In Shamanic Astrology, Mercury is the primary symbol for current life intent for cognition, perception, and communication. Traditionally, Mercury has been known as a thief, trickster, shapeshifter, teacher, guide, or communicator. Daniel has found that the planet Mercury has the most eccentric cycle of any planet except Pluto. The synodic cycle of Mercury averages 116 days, with a range of 110 to 130 days. There are three retrogrades every year, which are not equal. In Shamanic Astrology, the synodic planetary return has greater significance than ordinary planetary returns. At the synodic return, the planet is at its greatest strength, which is the good news. The bad news is that the original predicament is maximized, the natal challenge is amplified. Unlike Venus, whose cycles are beautifully symmetric in 5-8-13 ratios, Mercury is very erratic. Daniel studied the Ephemeris to identify when Mercury completes its loops. He found that is approximately 7 years it completes 22 loops. Synodic returns occur at ages 7, 13, 26, 33, 46, 52, 59, 66, 79, 92, and 105. The most exact return is at age 46. Mercury is more influential in the charts of people experiencing one of the synodic returns. The planetary periods were known to the Ancients, as has been discovered in the work of Project Hindsight. Daniel encouraged the audience members to conduct their own research to see what happens in their lives around their Mercury synodic returns.

Depending on whether Mercury rises before the Sun in the morning (is at a lower zodiacal degree than the Sun) or whether Mercury sets after the Sun in the evening (is at a higher zodiacal degree than the Sun), it is considered a morning star or evening star, respectively. Rudhyar and Sullivan discern a different quality between the two positions, calling the morning star Prometheus (a revolutionary) and the evening star Epimetheus (a conservative). Daniel has a different interpretation for the various stages of Mercury (with terminology borrowed from the

Steiner people) based on its movement around the Sun as viewed from the Earth. The beginning of the cycle is when Mercury retrograde makes an interior conjunction to the Sun (Mercury is between the Sun and Earth). Halfway in the cycle is when Mercury (not retrograde) makes an exterior conjunction to the Sun (Mercury is on the other side of the Sun from the view of Earth). Parts of the Mercury cycle are taken from the Steinerian work Astronomy and the Imagination which views the planet as morning star as like Apollo (clear, radiant teacher) and as evening star as like Hermes (trickster or shapeshifter)

Daniel distributed a detailed handout showing the current Mercury cycle, which can be used for specific examples. The current cycle has a Libra Overtone, beginning on October 13, 2001 with Mercury retrograde conjunct the Sun at 21 degrees of Libra. It then rises as morning star, stations direct, reaches its maximum AM elongation, conjuncts Venus (at 19 degrees Libra - October 30, 2001), and begins its descent into the underworld at 17 degrees Scorpio on November 29, 2001. Mercury serves the role of psychopomp, a guide for souls, when he travels through the exterior underworld. This cycle showed Mercury leading Venus in this journey. On December 4, 2001 Mercury was at 13 degrees Sagittarius in an exterior conjunction to the Sun. The following stages are rising as evening star (12/21/2001 at 9 Capricorn), maximum PM elongation (1/13/2002 at 12 Aquarius), station retrograde (1/18/2002 at 14 Aquarius), and descent into underworld (1/23/2002 at 12 Aquarius). "From now until January 27, 2002 Mercury retrograde is in the interior underworld preparing a total archetypal shapeshift from Libra to Aquarius."

During the first half of the cycle, Mercury is in an Apollo mode; during the second half, he is more like Hermes. For individual chart placement interpretation, one needs to determine the most recent Mercury retrograde conjunction to the Sun before one's birth. That is the beginning of the cycle establishing the zodiacal overtone for the entire cycle. Depending on when one is born, one's Mercury expression may be more like Apollo (first half - simple and direct) or Hermes (second half - more complex). In the first half of the cycle, Mercury may be influenced by only one or two signs. In the second half, Mercury may carry with it the qualities of three, four, or five signs. Mercury retrograde before the interior conjunction to the Sun is the most complex placement. It knows it will die soon, and there is a sense of alienation and intensity because of this premonition. In contrast, Mercury retrograde as the morning star after the interior conjunction to the Sun is at its purest point, the most mysterious Mercury placement. No expression is any better or worse than another; they are just different. Shamanic Astrology avoids any type of pejorative judgment against planetary placements. All parts contribute to the whole.

During the latter part of Daniel's Friday evening presentation, he outlined his understanding of the distinct characteristics of the different Mercury astrological placements both by element and sign. In the following discussion, yin and yang refer to gender, not biological sex. Left brain generally denotes more linear, logical thought processes. Right brain relates more to hologram-like, artistic mental functioning. According to Shamanic Astrology, Mercury in the air element functions more from the left brain and displays a yang (masculine) quality. Mercury in Gemini represents a shapeshifter mind; in Libra, a diplomatic mind; and in Aquarius, a scientific mind. Mercury in the fire element is also of a yang quality, but functions more from the right brain. In Aries, it is warrior mind; in Leo, it is leader mind; and in Sagittarius, it is philosophical mind. Mercury in the earth element has a more yin (feminine) quality and functions from the left-brain. In Taurus, it is epicurean mind; in Virgo, it is ceremonial mind; and in Capricorn, it is architectural mind. Finally, Mercury in the water element displays both a yin quality and functions also from the right brain. In Cancer, it is nurturing mind; in Scorpio, it is passionate mind; and in Pisces, it is empathic mind.

The Saturday afternoon talk preceding our direct experiential workshop under the night sky included many complex topics, both planned and spontaneous, due to audience questions. The following is a brief summary of what this writer found most interesting. Perhaps some of you will want to hear the tape from this event. If so, see our esteemed President, Kathe Smith.

Daniel described for us the astronomical relationships between the Earth and the rest of the physical universe as well as the astrological correlations. We have basically 3 huge “hoola-hoops” encircling the Earth. The celestial equator is a projection of the physical equator of the Earth into space. Since the Earth tilts 23½degrees, our alignment with the plane of the solar system is correspondingly different from the celestial equator. This second “hoola-hoop” is called the ecliptic, and along its line we can view the zodiacal constellations. The ecliptic and celestial equator intersect at 2 points, which are our spring and autumnal equinoxes. Daniel emphasized that these are not days in the year, but locations in the sky. At the winter and summer solstices the ecliptic is separated from the celestial equator to the maximum extent of 23½degrees, in the Southern and Northern Hemispheres, respectively. The reason that the astronomical constellations and astrological signs are not synchronized is that the Earth wobbles due to the influences of multiple gravitational forces from different angles and distances. It is not a perfectly spinning top. For this reason, Daniel prefers to refer to the constellations by the names of what they represent, rather than confuse them with astrological signs. Thus, we have the Ram, the Bull, the Twins, the Crab, the Lion, the Virgin Priestess, the Scales, the Scorpion, the Archer, the Goat Fish, the Water Bearer, and the Fish.

The third “hoola-hoop” is the plane of the Milky Way galaxy. It intersects with the zodiac at a fixed place, the Galactic Center, between the Archer and the Scorpion. Because our solar system is on the outer fringes of the Milky Way, when we look toward the center, we see thick star bands. When we look in the opposite direction, toward where the Bull and Twins meet, there is more darkness of deep space than stars to see. This galactic plane intersects the zodiacal plane at a 66-degree angle. There are myths thousands of years old about these intersection points as gateways for souls to enter (between Twins and Bull) and exit (between Archer and Scorpion, where there is coincidentally also a Black Hole).

Returning to the effect of the wobble, the North Star is currently Polaris; 13,000 years ago it was Vega. Furthermore, 13,000 years from now, the North Star will be Vega again. When the tilt and wobble are happening together, we have the Precession of the Equinoxes (or Solstices). The signs and constellations are like two sets of gears continuously operating against each other. The signs are Earth-based phenomena. The stellar patterns are also important, sending their own energetic transmissions. The interplay between the 2 systems contributes to changing symbols, myths, and archetypes. For example, Aries has its own essence, and every 2000 years there is a different constellation behind it. Similarly, our current understanding of what is Sagittarian is colored by the backdrop of the Scorpion. During the Age of Taurus in Sumeria, there was a constellation labeled the Hireling, which meant field hand or indentured servant. When that 3 - star constellation came into greater prominence, it became known as the Ram. The mythic interpretations of the stellar patterns are tied to specific cultures and time periods.

The tilt and wobble also cause a slow oscillation at the equator, where the visibility of constellations makes them appear to rise and fall. For example, the Southern Cross disappeared from the Northern Hemisphere about 25,000 years ago. Approximately 6,000 years ago Centaurus (representing Chiron) was visible and sank to invisibility. Then the cult of the Centaur was projected onto the Archer. In old Glastonbury, the Archer was simply a king with a bow and arrow. There was no horse or centaur.

In Shamanic Astrology, there is significance to identifying a personal star. Daniel thinks that Antares at 9 degrees of Sagittarius, where Mars transited for a long time last summer, signifies the Ascendant in the United States' astrological chart. Antares also means "anti-Aries."

The question now is "What time is it?" Daniel thinks we are at a seasonal boundary. For a long time, he felt that it was an end to an age. Now he thinks that it is possibly a mid-point. During a 26,000-year cycle, the Milky Way intersects with the ecliptic only four times, at the solstices and equinoxes. Now there is an intersection at the Winter Solstice. This is a time of the deepest descent of spirit into matter. Although a precise calculation of this intersection pinpoints May 1998 as the intersection, Daniel estimates the period of 1987 through 2012 as the zone of the Turning of the Ages. The Mayans had an additional crosscheck for isolating this timing. They interpreted it as the end of an age when the solar zenith (no shadow) aligned with the Pleiades on a certain day. Then at midnight they were to light big fires. Depending on specific latitude, this can only happen within a zone of 30 to 40 years (in May and November) within a 26,000-year cycle. As Daniel says, "they are lighting the fires now."

What might it mean for the four points (equinoxes and solstices) to be moving into new constellations? Daniel speculated on a new archetypal horoscope and its implications for a new age. If the Water Bearer and Lion mark the Asc/Dsc axis, then perhaps relationships would be based on individuation, autonomy, and personal sovereignty. Thus, there would be an end to any form of codependence. The Bull at the IC might represent a time when more life force was brought in to turn the planet into a new Garden of Eden. With the Scorpion and Opheucus at the MH, humanity might grow up to take responsibility for the power they can generate, and there would be death and rebirth themes in the workplace and among world governments.

There was a question about what was happening on Earth 13,000 years ago. The planet was having an Ice Age. Daniel's understanding of what happened is that the Earth's crust is similar to an orange rind, somewhat loosely connected to the core. At the Ice Age, there was a 30-degree slippage, causing the rapid changes in climate evidenced by archeological research. Mastodons died quickly while still chewing and digesting plants which now grow in totally different latitudes. The ice at the previous poles melted quickly when shifted to more temperate zones. This also explains maps of Antarctica without the ice and snow cover.

We are now going through a Shamanic initiation, evidenced by the accelerated Pluto phenomena. For people born in 1900, their Pluto square occurred around age 89. For those born in 1900, the Pluto square occurred around age 65. Currently, some people are alive who will have their Pluto square as young as age 36. The transiting Pluto square natal Pluto experience is one of powerlessness, where there is a descent into the underworld for death and rebirth initiations. The transiting Saturn opposition to Pluto we are having represents an attack on the cultural superego. Back in 1965, when this last occurred, there were Black vs. White issues. Daniel likens the change to the movie Pleasantville, where existence is simply black and white (symbolizing superficial, limited consciousness reality) and then there is an awakening into color cinematography. The message Daniel received from the 1965 experience was that he should be his own archetype, bring in a full color wheel.

What mechanisms allow us to perceive a new world? We must question everything created by mind (conceptual reality). The radical spiritual revolution that we have all been waiting for would be characterized by seeing the world completely freshly, perceiving it as if it were the first time, what Zen calls Beginner's Mind. The initiations break down the previous perceptual structures. The greatest talent or skill one could have for these times is the ability to get out of time (i.e., to create the mind space to transcend time). The Power of Now, by Eckhart Tolle, was recommended as a resource for this purpose.

Daniel shared other particularly inspiring and enlightening references with us as well. A book about the Turning of Ages which he rereads every decade is Hamlet's Mill, by Hertha von Dechend and Giorgio De Santillana. For follow-up on the experiential study of the night sky, he recommended an annual publication, Astronomical Calendar, by Guy Ottewell, an astronomer who is not hostile to astrologers. He is at Furman University, and his atlas-sized book (11 x 15 inches, 88 pages with color painting on cover and 2-color illustrations) may be obtained either through the web site <http://www.universalworkshop.com> or by writing to Universal Workshop, P0 Box 426, Middleburg, VA 20118-0426. You may call 540-338-8996 or 888-432-2264 or fax 540-338-8279 8279. Daniel Giamario's web site is at <http://www.shamanicastrology.com>

