

Going Deeper into Retrogrades

In "Hot Degrees 2023", we listed all the points at which planets make retrograde and direct stations during the year. At these degrees where a planet travels very slowly and stops, the planet, lingering in place, produces a much deeper imprint than usual and creates a sensitive point that can be activated by any planet transiting it. Years ago the New York astrologer Eleanor Bach taught that these "hidden transits" (as she called them) to station degrees were potent and should be noted.

Like eclipses, it's possible for these degrees to act as sensitive points before, as well as after, the planet makes its station. Even when a planet traverses its own station degree *before* the retrograde occurs, it puts emphasis on that planet and degree and is an occasion you should note. Some find that even though the planet is direct, the retrograde effect is strong on a day when the planet transits either of its two station degrees. The table at the end of this article shows when each of the planets transit their own station degrees during 2023.

This table also defines the whole retrograde cycle, a concept that can be useful for helping you and your clients to ride the retrograde wave productively.

Flowing with Retrograde Mercury

Everyone knows that Mercury retrograde is when you should read the fine print, not initiate important new ventures, and try to avoid screw-ups by taking special care with communications, agreements, and procedures.

You may also know that Mercury retrograde actually signals an excellent time for revisiting old territory and fixing whatever needs to be fixed. This is the time to identify and deal with whatever needs to be finished, repaired or improved. It's also a time to pause and reflect, turning your attention inward to contemplate your deeper motivations. When Mercury is retrograde, it can be easier to get out of old ruts. This is because the normal flow of your life tends to be reversed, stimulating you to look at life from a fresh viewpoint. The retrograde is an opportunity to re-view, re-visit, and ultimately re-new.

The Retrograde Cycle

But there's more to the story. An important thing to remember about any retrograde planet is that it goes over the same section of the zodiac *three times* -- forward, backward and then forward again. This gives heightened emphasis to a *whole degree area* in your chart, highlighting the issues of the houses where the retrograde arc occurs.

A retrograde also repeatedly activates whatever *sensitive points* lie within this degree area. Sensitive points can include any chart factors (planets, angles, midpoints, etc.) that fall within the retrograde arc, or make aspects (particularly squares, oppositions and semi- and sesqui-squares) to degrees within it.

First, a planet *about to go retrograde* highlights these sensitive points in the order in which you usually experience them day after day, year after year through repeated transits from the Sun, Moon and chart angles. Then, when the planet goes *retrograde*, it highlights these points in reverse order. After planet goes *direct*, the usual order resumes.

Noting the zodiacal order of the planets in a chart can be informative. For example, if you have Saturn placed where it is usually transited just before Jupiter is transited, you will tend to feel that hard work eventually brings its rewards. If Jupiter is placed so it is usually transited just before Saturn, you may feel that whenever you grow especially expansive and happy, hard realities soon bring you down to earth. At times when a planet transits in *reverse* over your Jupiter and Saturn, you will clearly not experience these planets in the same way. In his book *Planets in Containment* John Sandbach shows how useful the zodiacal order of the planets can be in chart interpretation.

The Three Phases of a Retrograde

To understand what a retrograde is doing in the chart, you must look at not just the period when a planet is traveling backwards, but also at the periods before and after the retrograde when the planet is traversing the same degree area. These periods, which are often called the *retrograde shadow*, are part of a whole retrograde cycle.

The retrograde cycle has three main phases:

- The *pre-shadow period*, which starts when the planet, traveling forward in the zodiac, transits the degree where it will later make its direct station. This period lasts until the planet turns retrograde.
- The *retrograde period*, from when the planet makes its retrograde station to when it makes its direct station. Throughout this period the planet is traveling backward through the zodiac.
- The *post-shadow period*, when the planet, having resumed direct motion, moves from the degree of its direct station forward to the point where it originally went retrograde.

Being conscious of these three phases gives you a strategy for using the retrograde productively.

- *The pre-shadow period* is when you really should start paying special attention to details, because what you do now can result in problems that you experience later during the retrograde. Strive for clarity in all your communications.
- *The retrograde period* is when the results of problems set up during the pre-shadow can surface. Also, any decisions that you made during the pre-shadow are now up for review. During the retrograde period you will usually, but not always, change those decisions. Ideally, this is a time for pausing to review and reflect upon what you've been doing, so

that you can view it in a new light. It's time to clean up old business, creating a clean slate for initiating new ventures when the retrograde cycle is over. In order to keep from perpetuating existing problems or creating new ones, continue to take special care with details.

- *The post-shadow period* is when you feel life resuming its normal rhythm. With Mercury going over its retrograde arc one last time, you get a chance to re-visit and resolve any problems that arose and integrate the lessons learned. If you do not make a decision during this phase, then the decision that you made during the pre-shadow and/or retrograde phase is likely to stand.

For more specific guidance on the kinds of issues that will come up during the retrograde cycle, look to the signs and natal houses covered by the retrograde arc and the natal planets and sensitive points that lie within it. If Mercury, Gemini or Virgo are strong in your chart, you may be affected by Mercury retrograde more than most people.

The Table of Retrograde Shadow Dates

The table at the end of this article shows when these phases occur during 2020, not just for Mercury but for all the planets. There isn't as much lore about the behavior of Venus, Mars and the other planets when retrograde, but you can expect that the affairs of these planets would be affected in phases analogous to the way Mercury is affected.

While Jupiter and the planets beyond it go retrograde for some months every year, Venus and Mars each go retrograde only about every two years. Occasionally both will retrograde in a given calendar year, as they did in 2020 and in 2022; neither of those planets had retrograde periods in 2019. In 2023, we start with Mars retrograde and it turns direct early in January; Venus goes retrograde later in the year. But, usually, they go retrograde in alternate years. Because the retrogrades of Venus and Mars are rarer than those of the other planets, mundane astrologers are apt to take extra note of them in the year when their retrogrades occur.

The outer planets move so slowly that their shadow periods overlap from year to year. Still, it can be informative to consider the pre- and post-shadows that are attached to the current year's outer-planet retrogrades.

-- adapted from an article by Pat White

Thanks to Solar Fire user David G. Walters, who brought up this matter and contributed information to this article.

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2023 Planetary Stations with Retrograde Arc or “Shadow” Enter/Exit Dates

Dec 12 2022	Mer	8°Cp08'D	Enters	6:26a	EST
Dec 29 2022	Mer	24°Cp21'R	R	4:32a	EST
Jan 18 2023	Mer	8°CP08'D	D	8:12a	EST
Feb 7 2023	Mer	24°Cp21'D	Exits	12:21a	EST
Apr 7 2023	Mer	5°Ta51' D	Enters	7:01a	EDT
Apr 21 2023	Mer	15°Ta37' R	R	4:35a	EDT
May 14 2023	Mer	5°Ta51' D	D	11:17p	EDT
May 31 2023	Mer	15°Ta37' D	Exits	2:38p	EDT
Aug 3 2023	Mer	8°Vi00' D	Enters	8:03p	EDT
Aug 23 2023	Mer	21°Vi51' R	R	3:59p	EDT
Sep 15 2023	Mer	8°Vi00' D	D	4:21p	EDT
Sep 30 2023	Mer	21°Vi51' D	Exits	1:16a	EDT
Nov 25 2023	Mer	22°Sg11'D	Enters	7:34a	EST
Dec 13 2023	Mer	8°Cp29'R	R	2:09a	EST
Jan 1 2024	Mer	22°Sg11'D	D	10:08p	EST
Jan 20 2024	Mer	8°Cp29'D	Exits	11:04p	EST
Jun 19 2023	Ven	12°Le12' D	Enters	3:18p	EDT
Jul 22 2023	Ven	28°Le36' R	R	9:33p	EDT
Sep 3 2023	Ven	12°Le12' D	D	9:20p	EDT
Oct 7 2023	Ven	28°Le36' D	Exits	5:21a	EDT
Sep 3 2022	Mar	8°Ge08' D	Enters	9:42p	EDT
Oct 30 2022	Mar	25°Ge37' R	R	9:25a	EDT
Jan 12 2023	Mar	8°Ge08' D	D	3:56p	EST
Mar 15 2023	Mar	25°Ge37' D	Exits	11:57p	EDT
Jun 11 2023	Jup	5°Ta35' D	Enters	6:27a	EDT
Sep 4 2023	Jup	15°Ta35' R	R	10:11am	EDT
Dec 30 2023	Jup	5°Ta35' D	D	9:40p	EST
Mar 23 2024	Jup	15°Ta35' D	Exits	9:24a	EDT
Mar 11 2023	Sat	0°Pi31' D	Enters	6:08p	EST
Jun 17 2023	Sat	7°Pi12' R	R	1:27p	EDT
Nov 4 2023	Sat	0°Pi31' D	D	3:02a	EDT
Feb 7 2024	Sat	7°Pi12' D	Exits	9:59a	EST
May 12 2023	Ura	19°Ta05' D	Enters	7:02a	EDT
Aug 28 2023	Ura	23°Ta05' R	R	10:38p	EDT
Jan 27 2024	Ura	19°Ta05' D	D	2:35a	EST
May 12 2024	Ura	23°Ta05' D	Exits	5:27p	EDT
Mar 9 2023	Nep	24°Pi53' D	Enters	6:17p	EST
Jun 30 2023	Nep	27°Pi41' R	R	5:07p	EDT
Dec 6 2023	Nep	24°Pi53' D	D	8:23a	EST
Mar 25 2024	Nep	27°Pi41' D	Exits	11:04p	EDT
Jan 8 2023	Plu	27°Cp53' D	Enters	2:19a	EST
May 1 2023	Plu	0°Aq22' R	R	1:08p	EDT
Oct 10 2023	Plu	27°Cp53' D	D	9:10p	EDT
Feb 1 2024	Plu	0°Aq22' D	Exits	1:56a	EST

