

Going Deeper into Retrogrades

In "Hot Degrees 2021", 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 2021.

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 2021, 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 2014 and in 2020; neither of those planets had retrograde periods in 2019. But, usually, they go retrograde in alternate years. In 2021, Venus will turn retrograde in December. 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.

2021 Planetary Stations with Retrograde Arc or “Shadow” Enter/Exit Dates

Jan 15 2021	Mer	11°Aq01' D	Enters	2:51a	EST
Jan 30 2021	Mer	26°Aq29' R	R	10:52a	EST
Feb 20 2021	Mer	11°Aq01' D	D	7:52p	EST
Mar 13 2021	Mer	26°Aq29' D	Exits	12:17a	EST
May 14 2021	Mer	16°Ge07' D	Enters	7:16p	EDT
May 29 2021	Mer	24°Ge43' R	R	6:34p	EDT
Jun 22 2021	Mer	16°Ge07' D	D	6:00p	EDT
Jul 7 2021	Mer	24°Ge43' D	Exits	12:47p	EDT
Sep 6 2021	Mer	10°Li07' D	Enters	2:55p	EDT
Sep 27 2021	Mer	25°Sc28' R	R	1:10a	EDT
Oct 18 2021	Mer	10°Li07' D	D	11:17a	EDT
Nov 2 2021	Mer	25°Sc28' D	Exits	8:02p	EDT
Nov 17 2021	Ven	11°Cp04' D	Enters	3:32p	EST
Dec 19 2021	Ven	26°Cp29' R	R	5:36a	EST
Jan 22 2022	Ven	11°Cp04' D	D	3:46a	EST
Mar 1 2022	Ven	26°Cp29' D	Exits	9:32p	EST
Mar 27 2021	Jup	22°Aq19' D	Enters	4:53a	EDT
Jun 20 2021	Jup	2°Pi11' R	R	11:05a	EDT
Oct 18 2021	Jup	22°Aq19' D	D	1:30a	EDT
Jan 8 2022	Jup	2°Pi11' D	Exits	10:06p	EST
Feb 14 2021	Sat	6°Aq52' D	Enters	9:28a	EST
May 23 2021	Sat	13°Aq31' R	R	5:19a	EDT
Oct 10 2021	Sat	6°Aq52' D	D	10:17p	EDT
Jan 15 2022	Sat	13°Aq31' D	Exits	3:44a	EST
Apr 28 2020	Ura	6°Ta43' D	Enters	8:50a	EDT
Aug 19 2021	Ura	14°Ta47' R	R	9:40p	EDT
Jan 4 2021	Ura	6°Ta43' D	D	3:35a	EST
May 4 2022	Ura	14°Ta47' D	Exits	9:50p	EDT
Mar 4 2021	Nep	20°Pi24' D	Enters	3:57p	EST
Jun 25 2021	Nep	23°Pi11' R	R	3:22p	EDT
Dec 1 2021	Nep	20°Pi24' D	D	8:23a	EST
Mar 21 2022	Nep	23°Pi11' D	Exits	11:57a	EDT
Jan 4 2021	Plu	24°Cp18' D	Enters	5:06a	EST
Apr 27 2021	Plu	26°Cp48' R	R	4:01p	EDT
Oct 6 2021	Plu	24°Cp18' D	D	2:29p	EDT
Jan 27 2022	Plu	26°Cp48' D	Exits	4:20a	EST