

# MERCURY



## THE MAGICIAN

*[Working with Mercury] means that one must cultivate the art of recognizing significant communications, knowing what is truth and what is falsehood, or else the lessons of the crossroads—the point where doors open or close, where persons have to make decisions that may forever affect their lives—will be lost.*

ROBERT FARRIS THOMPSON

*Flash of the Spirit*<sup>18</sup>

Astronomers consider the planet Mercury to be elusive, mysterious, and fast, moving at twenty-four miles per second through its eighty-eight-day orbital cycle. Owing to its proximity to the Sun, it is visible to us only thirty-two to forty-four of those days and can only be seen, close to the Sun, before dawn or at dusk. Dawn and dusk are transitional times; hence the mysterious and elusive god Mercury presides over all times and places of transition, all crossroads.

The temple to Ramses II at Abu Simbel in Egypt is designed in such a way that the inner sanctum is illuminated only at the equinoxes. There sit statues of three gods, fully revealed by the dawn of the equinoctial Sun, with a fourth god to the left, only partly illuminated, in shadows. This is Ptah, the name-giver, one of the many

PLANET: MERCURY

SIGNS: GEMINI; VIRGO

Glyph: ☿

**Key words and qualities:** Voice; communication; what we think; how we express. The part of us that is the Messenger-Magician; the invocative power of language. Mercury is witty, quick, expressive, and clever. It asks the question, "What are you a voice for?"

**Color:** Yellow

**Metal:** Mercury; quicksilver

**Physical body affinities:** Lungs, arms, hands (Gemini affinities); intestines and liver (in Mercury's analytical, digestive, assimilative Virgo mode)

**Day of the week:** Wednesday (*Mercredi* in French)

**Way of honoring:** Connecting with the Mercurial element of air; taking an air bath; walking in windy places; breathing deeply. Lightening up. Feeling like a trickster. Remembering to be in love with words. Witty repartee.

**Shadow, when not honored:** Being superficial, glib, hyperactive, or unreflectively provocative. Believing that talking about something is the same as having done it. To the afflicted Mercury, we'd say, "Talk less, say more." Remember the dictum of the nineteenth-century magician Eliphas Levi: "To know, to dare, to will, and to keep silent." Often, when talking about an idea, we can expend the same amount of energy as would be necessary to complete it. When we really want to get something done, we introvert our Mercury. We "keep silent," letting our inner Mercury-Messenger connect us to the means necessary for the plan's realization.

aspects of the force of intelligence we call Mercury. Because the equinoxes occur at the beginning of spring and autumn, they preside over times of transition. During such times it is especially important to intimately consult this god who helps us clarify our thoughts and our voice, and discern what is truly important. We slow down to listen to the fast god.

Mercury is the god of mind, intellect, thought, voice, and language. Analogous to the planet Mercury's proximity to the Sun, the god Mercury is so close to us that he is invisible, so central that he cannot be seen closely—the "purloined letter" of the spirit world.

Our magical capacity to manifest through language, both thought and uttered, is so central that we often take it for granted and spend time and energy seeking more power. Instead, we simply need to learn to use the power with which we are already endowed, and which is constantly replenished as it flows through us in acts of attention.

Mercury has many aliases, one of which is Hermes, the Magician. Hermes presides over magic, education, culture, and the connective language of correspondences in which the world is written: "As above, so below." As mentioned in the first chapter, according to Paracelsus's doctrine of signatures, everything, but especially plants, is said to have a signature, often a visual clue that indicates its chief sphere of use. For instance, hypericum—St. John's wort, or wound wort—is an herb whose leaves have tiny wells of red oil. When crushed, they look like blood. The plant traditionally is said to heal wounds and ward off evil spirits and madness by cleansing and balancing the blood. It is now being used widely as an herbal antidepressant replacement for Prozac. Divination is the hermetic art of reading the world through associative, symbolic correspondence.

Hermes invented the alphabet and all means of communication. All alphabets were originally thought of as magically invocative. Not only words but letters were considered divine, each a simultaneous honoring and summoning of the force behind its

symbol. Sanskrit, Arabic, and Hebrew are still understood as exemplars of the magical, living divinity of all alphabets.

The Mercury part of us presides over the power of vibratory rhythms—the evocative power of chants, mantras (“mind tools” in Sanskrit), prayers, and names. The medieval philosopher Nicolas of Cusa said, “If we understood the real name of even one thing in creation—we would understand the mind of God.”

Hermes is also said to have invented the musical scale, astronomy, and alchemy, and, like Ptah, governs all crafts and the secret societies associated with them, from Egyptian mystery schools to the Masons.

Anatomically, Mercury is associated with the lungs, the part of our body that processes air and makes it possible for us to express ourselves vocally. In Chinese medicine, ailments of the lungs are associated with unexpressed grief. Mercury also rules the hands—the means by which we gesticulate as well as create, the domain of craft. The language of associative thought would say that hands can be conceived of as partners in expression with the lungs, and that we can heal one by using the other. By creating and expressing with our hands, we can heal our grief.

Mercury is the magical and invocative power of the voice, language, and craft to summon actual reality. In the Yoruba tradition, this power to make manifest is called *ashé*, meaning “So be it. Let it happen. ‘Make it so, Number One.’” All of the gods, or Orishas, are embodied incarnations of *ashé*, but the primary custodian of *ashé* is Elegba, another of Mercury’s aliases.

Many cultures have the tradition of wearing a red mark on the forehead (or third eye). When Elegba sought the power of manifestation from God he wore a red parrot feather on his brow, signifying his understanding that the mind is the focus of creative power and the portal through which it flows.

God granted Elegba the force to make things happen through the power of the word. And Elegba did the “cool” (responsible and

generously appropriate) act and gave a feast for all of the other gods in order to honor God for the great gift of *ashé*. The Yoruba word from which we get “cool,” meaning “responsible,” also refers to temperature, just as in English. In Cuba, one practice is to pour cool water at the crossroads to honor and invoke the “coolness” of Elegba/Mercury, the divine mind. In the Yoruba tradition, which has traveled from its origin in Nigeria to the New World—Brazil, Cuba (where it is known as Santería), Haiti (where it is known as Voudoun), and now to America—practices are undertaken to literally cool the head. It is thought that keeping the head at a cooler vibration allows the brain far more superconductivity in picking up and transmitting information. Techniques designed to cool the head allow one to enter into hot contexts, as a transformer, from a stance of perfect laid-backness. Simply imagining one’s head as cool produces an immediately interesting effect, which you might try right now.

Mercury advises us not to be “hot-headed,” for such an attitude is considered not only uncouth and untutored, but also dangerously far from the divine.

## THE TELEPATHIC UNIVERSE

Mercury, as the companion and messenger of each of the gods, represents the myriad ways in which we communicate. Because he is associated with wind, spirit, and air, he is associated with all birds. Crows love shiny things, revealing their Mercurial nature; it is an African-American tradition to insert tinfoil into a ritual art piece in order to attract Mercurial spirit. In alchemy, Mercury is the unicorn, which turns into the white dove, a symbol for the Holy Ghost, also a Mercury-spirit-wind totem.

Alchemists were interested in coagulating or fixing the elusive Mercury spirit. “Fixation of the volatile” is the alchemical term for the focusing of attention which would grant us the capacity to understand the language of birds and other creatures.

The word *augury* comes from the ancient Roman practice of divining from the flight of birds. Messages are being communicated back and forth between all worlds all the time. *The New York Times* recently reported on an experiment in Geneva, in which two “twin photons” were separated and sent to opposite ends of the city via optical fibers, where they were given a random choice to turn right or left; both paths were equally available. When the scientists stimulated one photon to turn right, even though there was no physical way for the two of them to communicate with each other, the other photon turned in the same direction. Mercury asks, “What is communication, and how does it occur?”

An apparently more joyful and certainly less contrived example of distant communication is the mating practice of blue whales. After considerable nuzzling and creative foreplay, the two whales will “sound,” diving into the utterly dark depths of the sea and swimming away from each other. Though far apart, the two whales turn toward each other at precisely the same moment and swim at ever-increasing speed toward the surface. As they simultaneously erupt from the sea, the male’s giant (around ten-foot-long) penis enters his beloved and he ejaculates. Joined above the surface of the water, they appear suspended for a moment before they crash back into the sea. Apparently it’s been such a good date that they soon begin to nuzzle and do the whole thing again, often several times. That should make those poor twinned photons jealous.

Mercury says that if we have a relationship in which we are in good communication, distance should be no impediment; we don’t need a phone. Our dance with each other can be as beautifully choreographed as blue whales mating or ice-skating partners at opposite ends of the rink, let alone twinned photons in different neighborhoods of Geneva.

Mercury/Elegba is said to travel in all dimensions and all directions, and to have witnessed creation, both original and perpetual. Having seen it all, he is wise and funny, and has an infinite number

of perspectives. In Africa, Elegba has 101 names, while in the New World he has twenty-one, which may imply that in the homeland, a culture where conversations about spirit and telepathy are relaxed and uninhibited, he (and we) had greater freedom and modes of expression to choose from.

The Santería tradition says that God placed a bird—the shining *ororo* bird—in our head at birth. “To the degree that we live generously and discreetly, exhibiting grace under pressure, our appearance and our acts gradually assume virtual royal power. As we become noble, fully realizing the spark of creative goodness God endowed us with—the shining *ororo* bird—we find the confidence to cope with all kinds of situations. This is *ashé*. This is character. This is mystic coolness. All one.”<sup>19</sup>

The power of Mercury, the power of *ashé*, is a privilege of reverent living. It is diminished by any act of disrespect or inattention. Mercury invites us to hone our intellect, attentiveness, and discrimination.

### M E R C U R Y T H E M A G I C I A N

In the tarot, Mercury’s card is the Magician, who assumes a posture in which his right hand is raised while his left points to a table in front of him. This stance reminds us that *ashé*, the power to make things manifest, comes through us, not from us. *Ashé* is thought of as originating with the Sun, the central god, with whom Mercury is in the closest orbital relationship.

On the Magician’s table are the four implements of ritual magic: the wand representing will (fire); the silver cup representing the fertility and creativity of the Moon (water); the steel sword representing action (air); and the pentacle of Saturn representing manifestation (earth).

Mercury in each sign is associated with one of the implements on the Magician’s table, which clarifies its task. Mercury’s sign also describes what that aspect of Mercury thinks about, as well as the

element that person should visit in order to both receive and send information—its spirit fax. Mercury in Aries, Leo, or Sagittarius receives and transmits insight through fire—a campfire, a theatrical bonfire, or a Bunsen burner. Their suit is Wands, their task to ignite the fires of inspiration.

Mercury in Taurus, Virgo, or Capricorn gets its best ideas when working with earth—the garden, the archaeological site, or the wilderness survival camp. Their suit is Pentacles, which means they all must build something that results in a tangible manifestation of an idea—a boat, a book, a garden.

Mercury in Gemini, Libra, or Aquarius receives and transmits through air and space—stringed instruments, social salons, or space stations. Their suit is Swords, so their ideas must rouse and stir the world to action—getting others to connect, to beautify, to organize.

Mercury in Cancer, Scorpio, or Pisces receives and sends information through water—the bathtub, the hot spring, the foggy ocean. Their suit is Cups. Through introspection they offer themselves to the creative mysteries of what needs to happen, the hidden truths or poetic insights that seek expression through them. As water casts a hypnotic spell upon us when we gaze at it, so these watery Mercurys gain access to information through trance.

In the tarot, Mercury, the Magician, the conscious mind, impregnates the High Priestess (the Moon, the subconscious), transforming her into the fecund Venusian Empress. In keeping with this, Elegba is often depicted with an erect penis.

Whatever we think about or turn our attention toward plants a seed in our subconscious garden, which then blooms. Remember: Whatever we think about, we invoke. This applies equally to whatever we say. *Orenda* is a Huron word meaning “incantation,” the power of voice to express and thus invoke one’s will, in contrast to being passive in the face of “fate.” The phrase “I am” is considered the most powerful *orenda* of all.

Central to the art of leading a magical life is the task of weeding our garden, choosing which thoughts we want to flower. The magician reminds us that it is always crucial to intend what we say. Mercury's discriminatory function reminds us to monitor our thoughts in regard to how they make us feel. Are we happy at the prospect of this particular thought becoming manifest? Does this thought give us strength or take it away? Take, for example, the mundane and perhaps "rational" thought, "Oh no, I'm going to miss my plane." By being open to serendipitous intervention, we can rephrase it so that it becomes an energy-boosting affirmation: "I am willing to be amused by being miraculously on time."

One week, when my brother and I were both working on the Magician in our tarot studies, we were truly late for a flight to England. We both started thinking, then chanting, "The plane will be late, the plane will be late." When we finally arrived at the airport, we discovered that the plane would indeed be late—a day late, in fact. Easy does it.

As a small exercise, Mercury would prefer we substitute the word *eager* for most uses of the word *anxious*, as in "I am so *eager* to meet you." "I am *eager* to hear what you think." Another Mercurial exercise is to create whimsically useful invocative affirmations which create thought forms. One of his favorites is "I am always invisible to the authorities except when I request their assistance."

Mercury reminds us that whatever we speak to will speak back to us, and that includes the future. Whatever we think about comes to us. The future rushes toward us. The wind is supercharged with waves of collective information, live transmission of electrical spirits.

The power of our confusing times calls for a multitude of diverse voices. A colleague of mine suggests that one of the primary indicators of transitioning from the Piscean (artist as martyr to creativity) to the Aquarian (let's all create community) age is that "the genius-isolated-in-a-garret trip is done." These transitional times

require everyone to be sparking back and forth. By cultivating his or her unique voices, each of us expands the field of consciousness for the whole team.

### HOW MERCURY LEARNS

Mercury varies its speed, moving faster, from the Earth's perspective, on some days than on others. By looking in an ephemeris (a daily listing of planetary movements), you can check how fast Mercury was moving on the day you were born. It may have been hardly moving at all, in which case you have a deep, penetrating mind; if it was really moving fast, you have a quick wit.

Everyone has her or his own style of mind, his or her own Mercury. Mercury encourages us to broaden our definition of what we consider intelligence and be tolerant of the rich diversity of ways of thinking. IQ tests hardly suffice. Each Mercury in its sign could give any other Mercury an IQ test that it would fail.

Mercury in Taurus, for example, would ask how many names of colors, plants, and animals we know. Mercury in Gemini would answer, "Oh, I don't know, but I talk fast, think quickly, and can score well on *Jeopardy*." There are as many different kinds of intelligence, as many different kinds of communicating, as there are people (and species, and individuals within species).

We want to grow a culture that honors children's unique ways of apprehending. A Mercury-in-Aries child will learn from risk, adventure, and the liberty to engage in defiant, smartass speech. In contrast, the Mercury-in-Cancer child will learn best around food, in environments that feel secure. A Mercury-in-Taurus child will grasp abstractions from the tangible, sensual realm of nature. Give Taurus and Cancer a garden and a kitchen, and they will learn about everything.

Mercury in Gemini will learn best in busy, conversational contexts where they must also work with their hands and correlate two disciplines. Give them a guitar and send them to Pythagorean sum-

mer camp, where they can cross-reference music and math. Mercury in Leo will learn best through performing. Give them a stage. Mercury in Virgo requires quiet in which to delve deeply into the mysteries of exact science. Give them a temple. Mercury in Libra needs a sociable, beautiful environment in which to cultivate its intrinsic aesthetic talents, and in which to be appreciated. Give them a salon. Mercury in Scorpio will best thrive in a situation that encourages deep insight, questioning of orthodoxy, and study of the magical arts of divination. Give them a mystery school. Give Mercury in Sagittarius a well-equipped research laboratory or library.

Mercury in Capricorn learns communicative, literary skills from practical things, like building a boat. Mercury in Aquarius will take off like a rocket when provided with all the possibilities of rapid electronic media. Give them a web site and a satellite, or, better yet, train them in telepathy. Give Mercury-in-Pisces children a mentor and a quiet retreat in nature, where they can build altars out of magical objects found on long walks. Let them read great books, study Latin, immerse themselves in beautiful music and poetry, and talk to spirits.

We also learn important skills from our opposite signs. Mercury in Aries learns how to be polite, like Libra; then it can be more artfully rude. Mercury in Taurus learns how to be sharp and incisive, like Scorpio; then it can be languid with a purpose. When Mercury in Gemini does the research of Sagittarius, it can talk less and say more. Mercury in Cancer learns the Capricorn quality of utility; then it can say constructive words instead of whining. When Mercury in Leo integrates with Aquarius, it then understands the impact of its words upon the community, and can afford to be even more uniquely madcap in its Leonine performance. Mercury in Virgo learns from Pisces how to space out in order to become precise. Mercury in Libra learns from Aries how to be feisty and direct in order to be polite in a nonwimpy way. Mercury in Scorpio learns from Taurus to slow down its pace in order to be even more effec-

tively sharp. Mercury in Sagittarius learns to become more colloquial, like Gemini; then its research will be more accessibly meaningful. Mercury in Capricorn learns from Cancer what is really needed; then its words are less opinionated and insular, and therefore more pertinent and helpful. Mercury in Aquarius learns flair and pizzazz from Leo; then it can be a more effective universal communicator. Finally, Mercury in Pisces becomes more productively spaced out and poetic when it learns precision from Virgo.

### MERCURY THROUGH THE SIGNS

Just as Venus makes us an ambassador, Mercury makes us a voice—a messenger for something larger than ourselves. Finding our own voice is a key Mercury task. While we are born with an assigned Mercury, all modes are available to us. Indeed, because of Mercury's transiting speed, we experience all of Mercury's expressive styles in the course of a year. Wherever Mercury is in the sky will describe the kind of communication and study most effective for that time period.

An improvisational force, Mercury encourages us to “change heads,” to adapt as many modes of thinking and expressing as we can conjure. The well-equipped traveler will carry an extra set of heads in her or his magical backpack.

**Mercury in Aries (allied with Mars)** is the fiery, dynamic mind that produces fast, sharp, aggressive innovative thinkers. Words leap out of their mouths. Mercury in Aries is the verbal warrior, the feisty *agent provocateur* who sometimes says things just to see what happens, to stir things up, to cook the situation. Direct, impulsive, adolescent, combative, argumentative, and competitive, this mind likes to flirt, challenge, and win.

Mercury in Aries embodies competitive confidence and thus enjoys the ritual domain of conflict. This quality of mind can be a hotheaded hooligan—shoot first, talk later; or insult first, introduce

later. It learns by provoking and doing, and is the self-educated maverick who lobbs fresh approaches and insights into the tamer domains of more academic thinking.

This is also the mind of the heroic scout, who leaves the pioneers behind to investigate the path ahead and reports back, "Here's the path through the mountains." This Mercury thinks like Mars acts, and studies martial arts strategies for use in daily life. Cultivating a "cool head" allows Mercury in Aries to transcend bluster and contribute the power of original thinking that carries with it the impetus to make things happen. Then Mercury in Aries speaks for the force of emergent, engaged, willful originality.

**Mercury in Taurus (allied with Venus)** is slow, sensual, and logical, compensating for the excesses of the sign before it. Those of us with a speedier Mercury urge this Mercury on, "Yeah, yeah, just spit it out. Let's go, let's go!" Other Mercuries talk fast, but Mercury in Taurus will take its time and think everything through: "Now let me get this straight. If A, then B . . . that means C." *Zzzzzzzz*.

Unimpressed by razzle-dazzle glibness, this Mercury slowdances with Venus, savoring the texture of words with its deep, slow voice. If Mercury in Aries learns by being the *agent provocateur*, seeing what happens by just trying it, Mercury in Taurus learns by the slow poetry of holding, touching, tasting. If Mercury in Aries barks, Mercury in Taurus croons.

The sensual domain of nature is this Mercury's primary learning text, and the place where it contemplates stewardship of the land. Mercury in Taurus takes an eternity to speak for eternity. The Venusian beauty of nature speaks through this voice.

**Mercury in Gemini (allied with itself—a double dose of Mercury)** will be sparkling, fast, and glib, learning primarily from conversations with others. These guys are reporters of ideas. This is a very unprivate mind—people with Mercury in Gemini repeat things

they have heard, and what they say in turn gets quoted. The Hindi word *talanoa*, meaning “talk as a social adhesive,” describes one of their functions. They think about thinking, they think about plans. Associated with air and the sword of action, this Mercury’s challenge is to actually get something done rather than just blow hot air, trying to be cool.

Indeed, when Mercury in Gemini cools its head, the resulting clarity is dazzling. The actual planet Mercury, home base for this god, has no atmosphere. From its surface the sky always looks dark, whether the Sun is visible or not, and the stars continually blaze. This is unmediated communication; everything is connected, everything talking to itself.

**Mercury in Cancer (allied with the Moon)** has an unlisted phone number. This god lives in the realm of watery introversion, brooding over the emotional welfare of itself and others. This Mercury thinks about food—physical, emotional, and spiritual nutrient. Mercury in Cancer retains a childlike curiosity: How does it feel to be that animal? How does it feel to be that person? What does it feel like to be that cloud? Both the delights and injustices of childhood are a fertile swamp for perpetual rumination. The intensity of outraged innocence and original perception is continuously felt. Here the goal of language is enhanced empathy. Words are food. Language is nutrient.

This Mercury communicates with the world through introspection. Mercury in Cancer speaks fiercely for the right of all sentient creatures to feel safe and be nurtured.

**Mercury in Leo (allied with the Sun)** thinks about show business, hears the fanfare, is the kid who mugs for the camera, is a grown-up who has flair. Mercury in Leo will say, “It is this! It is absolutely this!” and then, “No, I thought it was this, but now, absolutely, it is this!” People who come to love Mercury in Leo just roll their eyes,

knowing that this is merely the edict for this week. This absolutism is intrinsically appropriate for Mercury in Leo, so in building our tolerant community, the rest of us need to relax and accept their pronouncements as part of the rich diversity of life.

Mercury in Leo travels through fire, holding the Magician's wand. Cooling the head helps it to take itself less seriously, thereby allowing this Mercury to be an effective voice for the passionate possibilities of life.

**Mercury in Virgo (allied with itself)** has the capacity as a mind and intellect to deduce the whole picture from a detail. The Mercury in Virgo part of us becomes intimate with life through the particulars. Mercury-in-Virgo children often have incredibly long, beautiful fingers. They look at things with concentration and wave their little hands around in exquisite mudras, even when they are teeny babies.

Mercury in Virgo is also consummately articulate and a wonderfully expressive writer, tuned to anecdote, the telling detail. Word choices are precise and invocative. Like all planets in Virgo, it is a perfectionist—things must be just so, or it will indulge in creative procrastination and inferiority-superiority swings (“I’m the best, I’m the worst”). Mercury in Virgo hungers for a rich variety of expression and precise shades of meaning: “Is that maroon or crimson?” Those distinctions are important to this Mercury.

Mercury rules Virgo, so in this sign it is at home for the second time. The first time was in airy Gemini; now it is in earthy, manifesting Virgo. In Virgo, Hermes/Mercury messages are unexpected: the finding of the important next clue—the turtle shell by the river—the tangible manifestation of an important symbolic message.

When we die, Hermes lays a baton on our eyes and seals our fate. This god of measurement presides over the Last Judgment, the postmortem assessment and encounter with Self found in the tales of most cultures. In Egypt the soul is weighed against a feather. If

the scales balance, the soul is led triumphant to Osiris; if not, the soul is devoured by a monster. The Mercury-in-Virgo part of us would ask, "Have we kept things in perspective, maintained a light heart in our judgments of others? And, above all, have we been of service? Have we helped and guided others?"

**Mercury in Libra (allied with Venus)** carries Venus's messages to the social world. Communication is an art form. It has great wit, cleverness, and curiosity. Just as directive and feisty as Mercury in the opposite sign of Aries, it veils its critique and may indulge in what the New Guineans call *sanza*, the art of disguised insult.

For Libra, connection with the other is important. It needs the other to say, "What beautiful flowers!" or to laugh at a witty insight. Mercury in Libra yearns for the other, does everything for the other, says everything for the other. When deprived of the intimate partner, this Mercury must find a connection to the larger universe. "Here, gods, did you like the way I said that?" (Yes, we did.) This Mercury mulls over the infinite complexities of relationship—human to human to animal to plant. Coolheaded, it transcends its self-conscious need for approval and is a witty voice for the intricate beauty and symmetry of life.

**Mercury in Scorpio (allied with nighttime Mars and his cohort, Pluto)**, both of whom like to say the daring, hidden, tricky, rascally thing. Mercury in Scorpio is imbued with a love of dark humor, irony, satire, bite, and zing. Having an innately creative and suspicious mind, this Mercury is always scanning for what is beneath the surface. As messenger for Pluto and Mars, it keeps an eye out for the hidden organizing forces of conspiracy. Mercury in Scorpio is the Underworld's messenger service dressed in black on a winged bicycle, happiest when delivering a message that enhances the sense of positive conspiracy: "Take the zircon to Foppa, and tell him we move tonight!"

The challenge for Mercury in Scorpio is to be a messenger service to the Grand Intrigue rather than to become embroiled in petty intrigue. If provoked, this Mercury, allied with Mars, can certainly deliver the snappy retort.

When cool, this watery Mercury is a custodian of what the Thais call *sabsung*, the means whereby we revitalize ourselves by slaking an emotional or spiritual thirst. *Sabsung* means literally “immersing in liquid something that has become dry,” and refers to any replenishing activity or restorative ritual—listening to beautiful music, reading a sustaining poem, viewing an exquisite painting, exchanging deep words with a spiritual ally—that waters the soul.

**Mercury in Sagittarius (allied with Jupiter)** is an enthusiastic researcher. This mind is the ticket to global exploration and Renaissance-like delving into innumerable arcane studies. It is never languid, even on vacation. Wherever this Mercury travels, it learns everything about the people, flora, fauna, history, and local lore.

Mercury in Sagittarius is another Fire sign, full of bluff and bravado, not minding (often not noticing) that it offends others. It follows its own protocol: never offend someone who would have the authority to narrow one’s professional options. To others it is perfectly capable of saying, “This is the truth. If you don’t accept it, you’re an idiot.”

Mercury-in-Sagittarius is interested in constantly expanding their opportunities by traveling to foreign lands and learning other languages so that their thoughts are not limited by the expressions available in a single language. This gives them access to concepts that seem as if they ought to have words in all languages, but surprisingly do not, such as the Russian *razbliuto*, which means, “someone who used to be your lover and you love them a lot, but seeing them makes you very uncomfortable.”<sup>20</sup> This Mercury is not big on shopping, but it will bring home ideas and words from its travels.

Mercury in Sagittarius speaks for the rich opportunities for learning that are always available to the curious, and reminds us that we speak the world into being through our choice of language. Having a rich word palette invokes the varied life that catalyzes learning.

**Mercury in Capricorn (allied with Saturn)** is pragmatic, and its criterion is utility. When you pitch anything to Mercury in Capricorn (truth, beauty, aesthetics, coffee, or whatever), stress that it is useful because it is conducive to work and you will get its attention. You can earn these Mercurys' attention in two other ways, as well: by teaching them some pragmatic old-fashioned or esoteric skill and/or by implying they might get laid. (An oft-overlooked aspect of the Capricornian goat is that goats are frolicsome and randy.)

Playful flirtation is a part of this Mercury's repertoire, and yet this is not the same as enduring intimacy. Flirtatious with strangers, yet frigid with familiars, is this Mercury's pattern. But aside from the domain of intimacy, which is not one of Capricorn's strong suits, there is no more dutiful sign in regard both to doing the right thing and to being the voice for responsible action in the world. Mercury in Capricorn gives voice to its feeling that it was born to be the practical leader-administrator of the world. With a cool head, this ambition matures into aspiration wedded to reverence and good works in the service of justice. Mercury in Capricorn is the voice of rags-to-riches stamina, thrift, practicality, and self-educated urbanity.

**Mercury in Aquarius (allied with Saturn and Uranus)** can be reached by telepathy or on a cell phone at all times. If Mercury with Saturn is old-fashioned, writing by hand or typewriter, Aquarian Mercury is both traditional and radically modern, ingeniously madcap. This is Saturn and Uranus's broadcaster of information.

With typically Aquarian neutrality, this Mercury can equally broadcast anecdotes, advertising jingles, or ageless wisdom. One foible is that Mercury in Aquarius can fail to notice that the eyes of its conversational partner have glazed over. So it is incumbent upon the Mercury-in-Aquarius person to clarify what kind of communication is welcome and serves the community.

Because Mercury rules the hands and their capacity for crafts, Mercury in Aquarius bestows upon its natives creative design skills that bring community together. The range of creativity is wide here; this Mercury has an aptitude for both ingenious graphics and public relations, and can constellate festive occasions either intimately or electronically. Imbued with the winsome charm and the eagerness to communicate of the other Air signs (Gemini and Libra), Mercury in Aquarius can speak a universal language that does not cause offense. It therefore can smuggle ideas across borders; people hear controversial material from Mercury in Aquarius and find it accessible. This is in contrast to the Fire signs (Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius), who are disappointed if they have not offended someone. Different Mercuries can say the same words, but the style of their presentation, the tone and timbre, would create very different responses. As we become increasingly conscious, we learn the effect we have on others and we can choose when to irritate and when to mediate. G. K. Chesterton said, "A gentleman is one who never causes offense inadvertently."

Franklin Roosevelt's Mercury in Aquarius exemplifies the Aquarian voice. In an address that he was to have delivered the day after he died, he wrote, "If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships, the ability of peoples of all kinds to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace."

**Mercury in Pisces (allied with Neptune)** is the associative mind. This is the unconscious speaking. It does not care about form,

structure, or outline, but rather gives voice to dreams, surrendering to creative possession. Often these natives grew up in circumstances where they were not heard. Rather than complain, they channel their energy into empathic service: "I will be a voice for all those that do not have a voice."

This quirky, interesting mind can ramble and seem crazy and befuddled. When told to get to the point, it responds, "The point? There is no point. This is just life talking to life. This is—I'm channeling, really." Just as Picasso (Mercury in Scorpio) had to learn how to paint before he could "unpaint," so James Joyce (Mercury in Pisces) learned how to write before he could "unwrite." This is the mind available to those watery Mercuries who delve deeply into the interior state through trance. Those who simply imitate Picasso's or Joyce's abstract work without the deep delving required to have really learned how to paint or write first lack the invisible substructure required by authenticity. Learning to write earns one the right to "unwrite." Mercury in Pisces learns the logic of poetic expression and can then "unlogic." The opposite sign, Mercury in Virgo, learns how to space out in order to become precise.

When Mercury began its journey through the zodiac in Aries, it thrived on competition and conflict. Mercury in Pisces, the last sign of the zodiac, shies away from competition and prefers contemplation.

### "UH-OH, MERCURY'S IN RETROGRADE"

Because Mercury is winging it around the sun so speedily, this planet appears, from the Earth's perspective, to be moving backward in the sky three or four times a year, for about three weeks each period. When Mercury, the god who presides over all things that facilitate communication, travels backward or *retrograde*, we are meant to be reflective. Mercury says, "Go back, you missed something crucial on the first sweep."

This time period is characterized by the necessity for reflection—which, if not heeded, can lead to disaster. The astrological injunction against signing contracts when Mercury is retrograde refers to the likelihood that one or both parties might subsequently change their minds because more research was needed. I would never advise someone not to do something they wanted to do simply because Mercury or Mars was retrograde, because the inner attitude is far more important than the outer action. There are no rules. I explain the orthodox interpretation, then tell them to reflect and do what feels right.

I have occasionally defied the well-known injunctions against buying electrical equipment when Mercury is retrograde just to test if it really is a bad idea. It seems to be. Complex machinery acquired during Mercury retrograde seems to require repair and other “re” activities, such as re-turn to the store, re-negotiate the price, re-nege on your credit card, re-wire the house.

### F E E D I N G   T H E   G O D

Breathe in cool, light, white; breathe out hot, heavy, dark. Then, breathe in hot, heavy dark; breathe out cool, white light for everyone.

Try a moving meditation to feed Mercury. Go to a Mercury rave, in which you dance around in a circular orbit at twenty-four miles per second.

Barring that, breathe deeply in your own rhythm, and with every breath, infuse your body with brilliant yellow, the most regal yellow you can conjure. Elegba’s color is golden yellow. Exhale golden yellow, bestowing the *ashé* of your blessing through your breath on whatever you want to be made manifest.

Ask for the power of words and articulation so that you may be more effectively and uniquely expressive. Ask for tolerance for the modes of expression of others. Notice more the language of everything. Inculcate a willingness to speak to everything in its own lan-

guage. Dogs and cats are not French, and will therefore not mock, but welcome your attempts to speak to them in Woof and Meow. Emerge into life positively busy, from a centered radiance. Know that you are more acute in your perceptions, your capacity to listen, and your capacity to speak to all of life. Offer yourself as a voice for those things that have no voice.