

MEET THE GRAHAS – MERCURY

COMET FALL EQUINOX EDITION
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by Lynn Bootes

This Fall Equinox of 2021 the focus is on Mercury, that elusive planet which is never more than 28 degrees of longitude away from the Sun. Mercury is the sign ruler of Gemini and of Virgo, the Zodiac signs that the Sun visits at the Summer Solstice and now at the Fall Equinox. Of the visible grahas or planets, it is the one most difficult to spot with the naked eye. And its role in astrology and the meanings attached to Mercury are the most complex and confusing.



Zodiac Sign	Dates Sun is in Sign	Planetary Ruler or Lord
Gemini/Mithuna	June 15 to July 16	Mercury/Budha
Virgo/Kanya	September 16 to October 18	Mercury/Budha



The names of Mercury in various languages tell us a lot about its story. In ancient India, Mesopotamia and Egypt, he was the god of the sprouted seed, the return of new life to the land, and hence to agriculture, and to the values of the agriculture of plants and fields. We still see this today in his association with the Zodiac sign Virgo, known in Sanskrit as Kanya the maiden, and she is pictured in a boat or with a sickle related to a bountiful harvest. This is the Mercury which rules an earth sign and is related to the color green. And in related matters, to the practical matters of accounting, record keeping, scribe work, and calculation. As a harvester, Mercury is related to the careful process of sorting, selecting and storing seeds and other dry harvests – a tedious but necessary process.

Yet there is the name given in Sanskrit to Mercury, which is Budha, which also means intelligent, wise, clever, or as a noun a person with those attributes. In the great story of the Navagrahas, the nine incarnations of Vishnu described in Parasara, Budha or Mercury is related to the avatar or incarnation of wisdom, Gautama Buddha, who lived at a time when all sorts of schools of philosophy developed sophisticated systems of thought and analysis. This is the other aspect of Mercury, related to Gemini the air sign, the twins, the ones who talk and communicate.

Coming from a background of Western astrology and culture, as I did, I found it amazing and reassuring that Vedic thought and Jyotish recognized that Mind is much more than Mercury – the Sun has to do with the inner light or purpose, the Moon with the embodiment of divine Mind and emotion, and Jupiter or Brhaspati with dharma and the wisdom teachings. Yet when we watch the sky and the comings and goings of Mercury, we soon see the vital role played by this dancing planet.

In one of the teaching tales, Budha/Mercury was the child of Moon god Soma/Chandra and Tara, the daughter of Brhaspati. She was not one of his wives (the Nakshatras) and the child was born out of wedlock, but was nonetheless adopted and raised by the Moon as his son. In the teaching tales, Mercury/Budha is seen as symbolic of small children, those who are past weaning but are still never far from their parents, approximately ages 3 to 7 years. One of the astounding facts of healthy human children at this age is their astounding ability to learn, as they master the most complex spoken languages and develop their capacity for memory, to learn the alphabet and numbers.

The synodic cycle of Mercury is such that from our point of view on Earth, we are much farther away from the Sun, and this rapidly moving planet takes only 87 days and 23 hours to complete its orbit around the Sun. A little mental math and you will realize that is about three times per year. The ancient astronomers of India (Surya Siddhanta) and Egypt (Ptolemy) calculated this with astonishing accuracy by plotting its movement compared to the Sun. During these cycles of 87 days, Mercury sometimes moves rapidly ahead of the Sun to the point where it is visible in the eastern sky before dawn, and for a few days it will be very bright. But at the point of maximum elongation, it is also appearing to slow down and come to a stop compared to the background of the stars. This is an optical illusion created by the fact that on Earth we are also under motion. Yet this Stationary Mercury is a fact of what one sees in the sky. At these times we can spot it if conditions are right. Then it appears to move backwards compared to the stars and loses its visibility as it disappears into the brilliance of the Sun (combustion). At the point when it is exactly at the same longitude of the Sun, the invisible Mercury is in a conjunction or yuti. Then as its apparent backward motion continues, it becomes visible after the Sun sets in the west, reaching a point of maximum elongation at 28 degrees behind the Sun. By now it is again slowing down and stops retrograde motion (station) and begins moving forward. In a few weeks it has another combustion and yuti with the Sun and then for a period of several months has a steady forward motion faster than the Sun until the cycle repeats itself. If this study is new to you, please go through the Star guidance calendar for this fall season and you can mentally trace out the path of Mercury in relation to the Sun and its cycle of retrograde, station and direct motion.

These motions are implicit in the way the planet Mercury/Budha is analyzed in the ancient texts, and are described among the strengths of grahas – the degree of brightness and the speed of motion. While beginning students of Jyotish at ACVA do not study these effects in detail, the full exposition of them and how the traits and behaviors of the visible planets are described are really wonderful. It is too bad that so many of us live in cities under artificial lights these days and seldom see the stars and planets. I am fortunate to live in a spot with a great view of the Eastern horizon, but even so it is not often I can see this brilliant and elusive planet.

Among the visible grahas, Mercury is the one in which the meanings and associations attached to it vary the most compared to Western astrology. In particular, the colors and gems are a bit different. Also in many esoteric traditions in the West, this graha is associated with Hermes. The reason this is important to know is that while Hermes was the Greek god associated with the planet Mercury, he also got melded with the Egyptian god of esoteric wisdom and the priesthood Thoth, who was a Moon god.

It was in those centuries that the few surviving books of ancient western astrology were written down. Later, these astrology and wisdom traditions had to go underground as they were not approved of by the Christian church when it became the state religion of the late Roman Empire. And later under the Muslim kingdoms, they survived by claiming a holy book and a god named Hermes Trismegistus – therefore they were accepted as a “people of the book,” in much the same fashion that Muslim rulers in the Indian subcontinent came to an accommodation with the various religious practices described as Hindu.

This rather confusing bit of history is here for a reason. It occurs to me that this is really an example of what this planet is about. He adapts to any situation and changes guise. We see this in the classic slokas, in which we find that Mercury can be a benefic or malefic depending on the company he keeps. He is neither male nor female, but neuter. He belongs to the dual or mutable signs (dvivabhava) Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces. When he combines with the benefics of Venus, Jupiter and certain combinations with the Sun and Moon, he can produce lovely Yoga combinations of mental brilliance and verbal talent. When he combines with Mars he can be opinionated and irritable, with Saturn rigid in his thinking, and with Rahu and Ketu he can take up all sorts of roles. So we should not be too surprised to see him in other guises than the green garb of the statue in the Navagraha temple. We might envision him as a teacher of rigorous Buddhist logic in a sacred grove. He might appear in the guise of a high priest in the Hermetic traditions, as a naked messenger or hermaphrodite in Greece and Rome, and as Woden the god of wisdom who rules Wednesday in northern European pagan lore. And in our modern times he may appear to us as one of those who have created our interconnected world of communication and internet.

Below I have attached the chart of Alan Turing, the British man who laid the foundation of the modern computer and also cracked the Enigma Code of the Nazis in World War II. After the War he tragically lost his life after being arrested for engaging in homosexual activities. Notice the Sun, Mercury and Venus in Mercury's sign of Gemini. In the recent movie *The Enigma Code*, Benedict Cumberbatch made a brilliant portrayal of this brilliant and vulnerable genius.

Birth Chart

11th h. 35 458.58		12th h. 34 517.97		1st h. 27 450.81		2nd h. 22 604.58	
Ra 26:10 Rev				Sa 05:48 Kri As 13:05 Roh		Ve 05:00 Mrg Su 08:35 Ard Me 15:22 Ard	
						Ma 22:43 Asl	
		JuR 15:16 Anu				Mo 23:56 Cht Ke 26:10 Cht	
8th h. 19 371.52		7th h. 27 522.17		6th h. 32 365.46		5th h. 26 476.73	