

MEET THE PLANETS: MARS AND VENUS

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MARS AND THE RED MIST

Most of us in the United States remember the title of a popular book, “Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus.” While the reality of being identified as a male or female human is really more complex, we can all relate and laugh at the concept that we really belong on different planets.

For thousands of years, people have paid attention to that red-colored wanderer in the sky known as Mars in western astrology, but we should remember that he has many other names and deities around the world. In India the most commonly known names are Mangala and Kuja. The second son of Shiva, known as Karttikeya or Skanda, he was said to have been conceived in an elaborate manner with the aid of divine forces, as Shiva was totally immersed in austerities. His semen was transported to a sacred spot where three rivers joined, where the holy city of Kashi (now known as Benares) was built. In all of his many names and forms he is associated with young men, and he is considered chaste or married to his army. In South India, many worship him as Murugan. So in the Hindu tradition he does not have the association with sexuality but with activity, aggression and the austerities of meditative practices.



In most respects, however, a person who knows Western astrology will be on familiar ground, as Mars is the sign ruler of the rashis (zodiac signs) of Aries and Scorpio, exalted in Capricorn and debilitated in the sign Cancer. Mars also is the Dasha ruler of three of the Nakshatras: Mrgashira, Chitra and Dhanistha. In all these signs and Nakshatras, Mars has extra energy and vitality and inspires action. In our bodies, Mars rules the marrow and muscles and the digestive fire in the midgut: the spot where stomach acid, bile and the enzymes of the pancreas mix and turn our food into usable materials for our body. Of the gunas, Mars is pitta. Of the elements, fire. Of the types of planets, natural malefic. Of the social groups or castes, the warriors. Of the directions, the South. These are just a few of the characteristics of Mars from the ancient lists in the traditional textbooks. Mars wears red and is worshipped on Tuesday.

Because Mars is located just outside the orbit of the Earth around the Sun, his apparent motion in the sky is rather dramatic. The length of time from one conjunction with the Sun (from our point of view) is about 26 months. Yet the time when the Earth and Mars are closest together is at the opposition to the Sun, and at that time Mars appears at its brightest. It is also at that part of the dance of planets that Mars appears to slow down in forward motion, stand still, and then move backwards (retrograde) against the stars. Mars spends an extremely long part of its cycle, 76 days, in retrograde motion, and because it is in the same one or two signs before and after the retrograde, it often appears to be stuck in the same one or two zodiac signs for 5 or 6



months! This is indeed what happened in 2020, when Mars spent many months in Pisces and Aries just as the COVID epidemic peaked. This was also a time when travel between Earth and Mars was the easiest, which is why several nations launched Mars expeditions within a short time of each other. And after watching red Mars loom in the same spot in the sky for months, even members of the general public were more aware of this red planet and its potential to incite argument and aggression. And yes, Mars rules adrenaline, the fight or flight hormone, and the phenomenon of being riled up – the “red mist.”

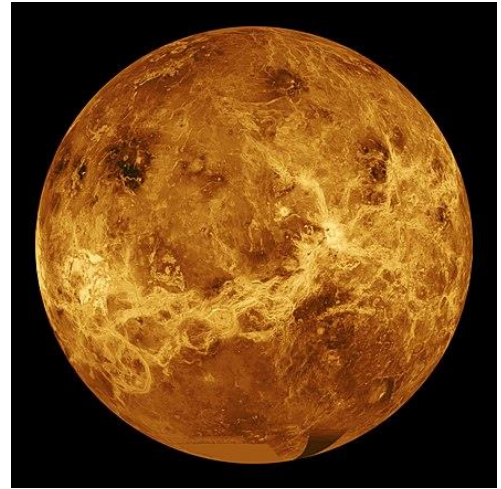
Yet despite being a malefic planet, we cannot do without Mars. As animals, we must find and consume and digest food, whether of the plant or animal variety. As peoples, we must defend ourselves and our families from danger. Mars is considered to be related to the time of young adulthood, when the body is full grown but full of energy and vigor – when young men and women raise children and do the active work of the world. We happily celebrate Mars when we enjoy a sporting event with friendly competition. We celebrate young heroes and especially young women who defend themselves from injustice.

As astrologers reading an individual's chart, we look to see if Mars is placed so that it can constructively express these natural tendencies which we all possess. Mars does best if it is in a compatible zodiac sign and house and influenced by many factors which we learn about in the ACVA courses. Does a strong positive Mars give the potential for a winning athlete, police officer, or soldier? Or is it poorly controlled and irritated, leading to injuries, inflammatory diseases and an easily irritated temper? One the other hand, is Mars so insignificant and weak that the person does not stand up for themselves? And how does it interact with its polar opposite, the planet Venus?

VENUS AND LOVE IN THE AIR

Venus, the planet which travels around the Sun just inside the Earth's orbit, is the brightest of the Tara Grahas, the wanderers known as planets. Some of the oldest astronomy records tracked the motion of this brilliant Morning and Evening Star. Many of the meanings of Venus will be familiar to Western astrologers, but there are some differences in Jyotish. Love and sexuality, of both male and female, are in the domain of Venus in Vedic astrology, where Shukra (Venus) rules semen and the ovum and the related body structures and functions. The stage of life of Venus is puberty and adolescence, when our awareness of our bodies and appearance is at its greatest. All aspects of beauty, refinement and decoration come under Venus – the arts, romance, wealth, even mathematics. The guna is rajas, the element water, the color clear white or variegated (as in the rainbow), and so forth. Venus is a mixture of kapha and pitta dosha. Venus is considered to be affiliated with the refined Brahmin caste and/or people of refinement and taste. And most important, Venus is a natural benefic – it tends to bring positive things.

Even Venus' irregular path as seen from Earth is a thing of beauty. Most of the time Venus moves in a direct or forward motion, and unlike Mars it spends very little time in apparent retrograde motion. And when it does, it does an elaborate dance in that it completes a cycle with the Sun in 224 days, or 5/8 of a year – that is 5 cycles every 8 years. This unusual cycle has been known about for thousands of years and may be the logic behind the wonderful 8-sided yantras or geometrical figures associated with Venus in India. And very important to know, Venus is never far from the Sun – 48 degrees to be exact. That is why we know it as the Morning Star when it rises in the east before dawn and the Evening Star when it sets after the Sun in the west.



In the ancient traditions, Venus was the chief of the Asuras or demons, the divine forces who represented one half of the universe. Jupiter or Brhaspati was the chief of the Devas. This is not just trivia, because when we look at the signs and planets associated with Venus, we find that Venus rules Taurus and Libra, and is a planetary friend to Mercury and Saturn who rule the other earth and air signs. Their colors are all in the cooler spectrum of blue, green, silver, white and pastels, in contrast to the



red/orange/yellow spectrum of Mars/Sun/Jupiter. As ruler of Taurus, where we find the Sun from mid-May to mid-June, it is easy to associate Venus with fertility. As ruler of Libra, the zodiac sign of the festival season in the fall, we find Venus associated with prosperity, beauty and sociability. Venus rules the Nakshatra Bharani, associated with birth, of Purva Phalguni the marriage bed, and of Purva Ashadha, the Invincible Star who is thought to work hard at improving marriage. It is easy to think of the positive aspects of Venus when describing these traits, but we do find times when Venus presents problems in an individual birth chart. It might be in a very weak position by house or sign in which it cannot express affection, or influenced by malefic planets. Or it may be in a position to create weakness or disease affecting the reproductive system, or there may be problems with excessive spending or frugality.

When you outline the Rashis on a birth chart, you will notice that the opposite sign to a Venus-ruled Rashi is always one ruled by Mars. Aries is opposite Libra, and Taurus is opposite Scorpio. Thus, no matter how different, these two are always seeking each other out, as they share the emotional intensity, they bring the drama and excitement of youth. So in the spirit of spring, enjoy Mars and Venus as they romp through your favorite comedy or drama, as we watch life renew itself.