

The Phases of Venus

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After the Sun and Moon, Venus is the brightest object in the solar system. It is therefore not surprising that astrologers from Babylon all the way to the Aztec and Mayan cultures in America have considered Venus's dramatic cycle of waxing and waning, appearance and disappearance, morning star and evening star to be one of the primary celestial indicators of mundane events. It is also interesting to note that at least from medieval times Western astrologers have considered Venus to rule the Arabs and Islam.

Venus Begins a New Retrograde Period

On October 10, 2002, Venus made a station at 15 Scorpio 37, beginning a 40-day retrograde period that occurs only once every 19 months. This time, its station point was just 37 minutes off what Uranian astrologers call the Cardinal Axis (0 degrees of the Cardinal signs and 15 degrees of the Fixed signs). These degrees, which are the degrees of the two equinoxes, the two solstices, and the midpoints between them, are said to symbolize the world at large.

Venus goes retrograde every 1.6 years -- only five times in an eight-year period. The degrees at which it makes its stations form a five-pointed star in the zodiac. In the eighth year, after the fifth retrograde, the cycle begins again, about two degrees earlier in the zodiac, and the stations then trace a new five-pointed star, slightly displaced backwards from the previous one. The fact that this month's Venus retrograde station hits so close to the Cardinal or World Axis may make it particularly significant for world affairs.

Echoes of 1994

To see what themes the current Venus station may bring up, let's look at what happened when Venus stationed near the 15 Scorpio point (actually, 18 Scorpio 01) eight years previously in the fall of 1994. In October, 1994, the Taliban movement was created among the former Mujahideen with the support of Pakistan, and they won Kandahar as their first territory. In November, 1994, while Venus was still retrograde, the Republicans stunningly took control of both houses of Congress. Perhaps more notably, George W. Bush entered the political scene by defeating the incumbent Ann Richards to become governor of Texas.

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One bit of old-time astrology that is largely overlooked in today's emphasis on signs, houses and aspects is the "phase" of a planet -- its relationship to the Sun, as seen from the Earth. Much like the Moon, all the planets have phases, as we see them conjoining, squaring, opposing, squaring and then once more conjoining the Sun. To earlier astrologers, a planet's phase was important in judging both its strength and its quality.

Venus and Mercury, the two planets that orbit between the Earth and the Sun, also have phases, but there are some differences. We never see Venus more than about 47 degrees away from the Sun and we never see Mercury more than 28 degrees away from the Sun. Both Venus and Mercury conjoin the Sun, but instead of squaring it, they reach these limiting points -- their "maximum elongation" points -- before moving back once again toward the conjunction. And their conjunctions with the Sun alternate between the "superior" conjunction (when the planet is on the far side of the Sun, traveling direct) and the "inferior" conjunction (when it is on the near side of the Sun, traveling retrograde).

The current Venus retrograde station is a prelude to the inferior conjunction that will occur on October 31, 2002 at 7 Scorpio 53. Venus, traveling retrograde very swiftly on the Earth side of the Sun, will then appear to conjoin the Sun. When a planet is this close to the Sun, it is obscured by the Sun's beams and is not visible from Earth. Some days later, when it gets back to a point in the zodiac about 15 to 17 degrees before the Sun's longitude, it once again becomes visible, rising in the east just before sunrise. This is the "heliacal rising." (The exact heliacal rising depends on the latitude of the observer and on local viewing conditions.)

The heliacal rising was considered a resurrection after darkness, the beginning of a new cycle. After its heliacal rising Venus will be visible as a morning star, getting brighter every day as it travels further and further away from the Sun and we see more of its lit-up side (which at the conjunction had been turned toward the Sun).

As you might expect, the ancients considered the Morning Star (a.k.a. Venus Phosphorus, or Venus Lucifer, the light-bringer) to have a fresh, new and feisty quality. Maybe too feisty! This is Venus as the Babylonian war goddess, whose passion can spill over into ferocity.

Events and the Morning Phase of Venus

Bruce Scofield (author of *Astrolabe's Professional Forecaster* and *Mayan Life Path Astrology* reports) is an astrologer who has long been fascinated with the Venus phase cycle. Scofield points out that Mesoamerican (Aztec and Maya) astrologers believed that when Venus first appears as a morning star, it has the power to strike down those in high places. It was also believed to be the force behind impulsive actions and errors on the part of leaders. In his text for *Astrolabe's Professional Forecaster* report program, he says of the inferior conjunction: "Social conditions may be intense now and people may act impulsively. Establishment leaders may fall or be struck down in some way."

An examination of news events around the times of Venus' heliacal rising seems to confirm this ancient Mesoamerican notion about its destructive nature. Plane crashes are common, usually caused by impulsive decisions. Frequently, leaders are discredited or leveled in some way. Here are some examples:

The Watergate break-in and the Iran-Contragate scandal occurred at the heliacal rising of Venus. With the Inferior conjunction of Sun and Venus in late January 1990, the mayor

of Washington D.C. was caught in a drug bust, oat bran was discredited as a magic health bullet, and an Avianca airliner crashed on Long Island. Other Venus/Sun inferior conjunctions, followed a few days later by Venus' heliacal rising, are the deposing of Mikhail Gorbachev (August 1991) and the Waco, Texas Branch Davidian disaster (April 1993).

Experience has also demonstrated to Scofield that Venus' heliacal rising impacts natal charts. It strongly affects people with the Venus-ruled signs Taurus or Libra emphasized in some way (Sun, Moon, or Ascendant). Also, where in your chart you have either Taurus or Libra on a cusp, expect that house to experience some shocks or rather intense developments. Things may happen quickly and you may be pressed into making decisions faster than you may want to.

The Rest of the Cycle

Twenty-one to 22 days after the inferior conjunction, Venus turns direct. About a month and a half after that, it reaches its maximum western elongation about 47 degrees behind the Sun in the zodiac. Symbolically speaking, at this point in the cycle any conflict or trend that began at the inferior conjunction intensifies and becomes clear and objectified.

And then, continuing to move direct on the far side of the Sun, Venus makes the superior conjunction. Because Venus and the Earth are now moving in the same direction (rather than in opposite directions as they were at the inferior conjunction), the superior conjunction comes more than seven months after the maximum western elongation, and the superior conjunction's period of invisibility lasts for about two months.

In his Professional Forecaster text, Scofield says about the superior conjunction: "Concessions, agreements and 'swaps,' cooperation between individuals and groups, good will, visits, and the resolution of differences may be prominent themes now. It's a time for meetings, social activities and relationships."

About a month after the superior conjunction, Venus reappears from under the Sun's beams and is seen to heliacally set. In other words, it starts to be visible just after sunset. Venus then begins its period as the Evening Star, Venus Hesperus (Hesperus means "west.") This goddess in her waning hemicycle is older, wiser, and less emotionally volatile. Scofield states that, in this Evening Star phase of Venus, the rules of the world prevail over individual urges.

A Timeline of the 2002-2004 Venus Cycle

To recap, here are the significant turning points in a typical Venus cycle:

10/10/02: Venus stations at 15 Scorpio 37, beginning its 40-day retrograde period. It picks up speed as it heads toward its conjunction to the Sun.

ca. 10/25/02: When Venus approaches the Sun within 10 to 17 degrees, it becomes obscured by the Sun's beams and disappears from the evening sky. This is sometimes called its heliacal setting in the East. When Venus is on the near side of the Sun, this period of invisibility under the beams lasts only about two weeks.

10/31/02: Venus makes its inferior conjunction to the Sun at 7 Scorpio 53, beginning a new 584-day Venus synodical cycle. This degree echoes Venus's superior conjunction 4 years earlier on 10/30/98 at 6 Scorpio 32. At the inferior conjunction Venus is the closest it will get to Earth in its entire 19-month cycle. In fact, this is the closest any planet ever gets to Earth. Much like a new Moon or a conjunction aspect, the superior conjunction marks the beginning of Venus's waxing hemicycle.

ca. 11/7/02: When Venus moves from 10 to 17 degrees beyond the Sun, it once again becomes visible, now as a morning star rising just ahead of the Sun. This is known as the heliacal rising in the East. Venus is now increasing in brilliance and its retrograde speed is slowing. To astrologers who relied mainly on observation, this was the rebirth, the beginning of the new Venus cycle.

11/21/02: Venus stations 0 Scorpio 03, beginning its 544-day period of direct motion.

ca. 12/6/02: Venus reaches its maximum brilliance as a morning star.

1/11/03: Venus, at 3 Sagittarius 03, reaches its maximum western elongation (furthest distance in degrees) from the Sun. It is now going at the same speed as the Sun, increasing its speed in direct motion.

ca. 7/10/03: When Venus approaches the Sun within 10 to 17 degrees, it again becomes obscured by the Sun's beams and it disappears from the morning sky. This is sometimes called the heliacal setting in the West. This time, with Venus on the far side of the Sun, its period of invisibility lasts about two months.

8/18/03: Venus makes its superior conjunction to the Sun at 25 Leo 23, at almost the same degree and minute where its inferior conjunction will take place on 8/18/07 24 Leo 51. At the superior conjunction Venus reaches its maximum direct speed of about 1 degree 15 minutes per day. Much like a full Moon or an opposition aspect, the superior conjunction marks the beginning of Venus's waning hemicycle.

9/25/03: When Venus moves ahead of the Sun by about 10 to 17 degrees, it once more becomes visible, this time as an evening star setting just after the Sun. This is usually known as its heliacal setting (or its heliacal rising in the West).

3/29/04: Venus, at 24 Taurus 41, reaches its maximum eastern elongation (furthest distance in degrees) from the Sun. It is now going at the same speed as the Sun, and is slowing down as it approaches its retrograde station.

ca.4/4/04: Venus reaches its maximum brilliance as an evening star.

5/17/04: Venus stations at 26 Gemini 08, beginning a new 40-day retrograde period, leading to the next inferior conjunction (which, in this case, is a rare transit of Venus over the face of the Sun).

For Further Study

For a long-range table of Venus cycles, see the article "Venus Phase Cycle, 1900-2050."

For details on the super-cycle of Venus transits over the Sun, see "Coming Full Circle: The June 8, 2004 Transit of Venus."

There is also much of interest in the book *Venus: the Evolution of the Goddess and Her Planet* by Ronnie Gale Dreyer (now out of print).

Bruce Scofield's books on Mesoamerican astrology, in which the Venus cycle plays an important part, give yet another take on its astrological importance. Most of these are available from Alabe.com.

Scofield's article "President Clinton: A Quetzalcoatl for Our Times" on his website, www.onereed.com, shows how the cycle of Venus (which the Mesoamericans identified with the god Quetzalcoatl) times events in the life of a modern historical figure.