

Synodic Cycles and Their Importance

Transcript of Talk given by **Daniel Giamario**,
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MY intention here is to give you a more practical understanding rather than going through the entire details of all of the synodic cycles. We will start with how I came into it, a bit of history over time, then offer to you the value that I find in using synodic cycles in practical chart analysis.

In the Shamanic Astrology Mystery School understanding the synodic cycles is a core part of our training in how the night sky operates. In our school we don't train people to be astrologers unless they also know the sky and one of the important parts is how the synodic cycles operate.

I had the great fortune in the early 1990s of going to the first *Project Hindsight* gathering at Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. They were talking about planetary periods and synodic cycles and from the translations of old Hellenistic material. I saw interesting information I hadn't seen before about planetary periods. Because I had been working with the night sky for a long time I noticed certain things about the table of planetary periods. I was intrigued and dived more deeply into this area of research.

Soon after that my wife and I moved to New Mexico. This was right around the time of my Jupiter return at the age of 47-48. When I was there in New Mexico at the Mimbres River Valley I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time at sacred sites. I actually found two ancient petroglyph sites that were not recorded and nobody knew about. It was there that I tuned into the sky and actually got the first insights into the use of synodic cycles in modern times.

In 1996 - 97, I contributed the first articles about using synodic cycles from an experiential perspective to the Mountain Astrologer. At that point I wasn't aware of anyone else researching synodic cycles, from an observational perspective, but over the last 10 – 15 years there has been a synodic cycle renaissance.

A number of my students have gone on to make a big splash about the use of synodic cycles, especially the Mars and Venus synodic cycles. In our school we've actually been using these for 20 years now and have collected a lot of data.

I want to go back in time and look at the overall history of people working with the sky. I'm going to use a date – anytime you use a date some new material comes along that shifts our understanding, so I'm going to suggest the date of somewhere around 400 BC, that you start to see the use of individual horoscopes. The original meaning of the word “horoscope” meant the Ascendant, not the square or round chart.

What truly individualized the individual chart was the Ascendant. Prior to the invention of the use of individual horoscopes, around the world, cultures were orienting themselves to the night sky in many other ways.

I am a great fan of a lesser known woman, a brilliant genius from the 20th century, a cosmologist by the name of Hertha von Dechend. She is the one who really had most of the theories in a well known book that many of us in the late 1960s were influenced by, called *Hamlet's Mill*.

Unfortunately Giorgio de Santillana, because he was the male, gets credit for the book. It was really her theories that myth, and even the way that societies organized their cultures, was in accordance with the cosmology of what they were actually seeing in the sky; I guess you could say a version of what they did in ancient Egypt, which was the great project of bringing heaven to earth.

And so the development of a culture was based upon the actual cosmology that was seen in the sky. This included numerous mythic stories from around the world. If you are able to tune into the cosmological key you can see that the stories were sourced or inspired by the actual movement of the planets and stars. I'm speaking here beyond just the precession of equinoxes.

I'm looking to mythic stories like Rapunzel, or Inanna and Dumuzi, and the Pawnee tales of the warrior going across sky to meet up with the woman who throws difficult things in front of him on his way to the western horizon. We are able to decipher these stories if we have the cosmological framework that they are actually coming up with stories based upon what they are seeing in the sky. For instance, in the story of Innana (from the Sumerian culture) and Inanna's decent into the underworld, every character in the story is based upon planets in the sky, as well as the precessional framework.

I'm attempting to develop for you the idea that prior to the individual horoscope, for thousands of years, people were orienting to the sky in different ways, as to their particular clan and tribe. Then along about 400 BC comes the use of individual horoscopes.

I'm not bringing this up to be critical but there are some that would say that the biggest problem today is in our being too individualistic, like a separation from our connection to a clan, tribe or a whole people having a collective experience of the sky, working ceremony together and so on.

I'm not going to go that far. I'm going to say that if we look at the movement of evolution or whatever word you want to use, for a variety of reasons it became necessary to come up with individual horoscopes.

Dane Rudyar's understanding of this was that it coincided with the most recent time in history when Uranus, Pluto, and Neptune were together; about 550 to 600 BC. Around the planet arose this revolution in consciousness – from Confucius and Lao-tzu to Pythagoras, Plato, Zoroaster, etc.

So you have this whole development of individual enlightenment; separating from just being part of the collective tribe. The bringing into the astrological discussion of synodic cycles is a way of blending the two – going back to the bigger story of how Venus, Mars, Mercury (the most easily visible planets with the fastest cycles) to see how the knowledge of the cycles puts our own individual story within a larger context. Mercury is about a 120-day story (four months), Venus a 584-day story (approximately 19 months) and Mars about a 26-month story. Your own individual chart is found somewhere within that larger story.

We could spend a lot of time looking at the Venus cycle, breaking it up into its different component parts, where the descent into the Underworld happens and so on. Here I'm going to cover some of that but not all of the details of it, trying to relate this discussion to a more practical way of how to use these things as well as sharing with you to what extent I use them in an individual reading and how it can help our interpretations.

The word synod is a word not used often in our culture. I knew this word when I was younger when synod was used by the church my mother attended, Missouri Synod Lutheran. Some words have an ecclesiastical background. Even the word hierarchy has a spiritual background. Synod simply means meetings.

There are two primary ways that planets can have meetings with other bodies. Maybe the simplest way of seeing the difference is to think of the Moon cycles. There are two Moon cycles: synodic and sidereal. The one that most everyone in America uses, without even thinking about the other one, is the 29.5 day cycle which is actually a synodic cycle.

On planet Earth we see this from New Moon to New Moon or Full Moon to Full Moon: 29.5 days. What that has to do with is the relationship between the Moon and the Sun. And that is what holds true for the Mercury, Venus, and Mars synodic cycles. It is the pattern of the meeting between those planets and the Sun as seen from planet Earth.

One of those things that haunted the ancients was how to fit the lunar cycle into the solar cycle.

The way the Sidereal Lunar Cycle operates is that you can take any bright star along the ecliptic, my favorite being Spica, as it was the star rising in the east when I was born – about 24 degrees Libra at this point. So therefore, let's say that you see the Moon, in whatever phase, near Spica. 27.3 days later the Moon reaches Spica again. That is the sidereal cycle of the Moon.

The fascinating thing about that is that the original zodiac around the world was Lunar. It was based upon the Sidereal Lunar Cycle. They had a starting point, the so-called prime fiduciary that was often marked by the Pleiades. Based on the movement of the Moon each night through the stars, there were the Lunar Mansions, 27 of them, plus a mysterious 28th (27.3).

Polynesia and South Asia is the one part of the world where they didn't use the sidereal lunar cycle. They used the synodic one. A young person born there would know what Moon they were born under and they would be familiar with the shape of the Moon. There is a name for each shape of the Moon. In that system there are 29 Moon names and a mysterious thirtieth (29.5). Remember, the whole thing is how do you fit the Moon's cycle into the Sun's cycle.

I am not bringing this up for nothing. The same issue comes up with Mercury, Venus and Mars. How do you fit those cycles into a year. They do not come out even although Venus does a pretty good try at it. What we have tried to do in our school is to train people to understand it from our senses by dividing up the different portions of the synodic cycle of Mercury, Venus and Mars, much the same way we understand the synodic cycle of the Moon in a variety of different ways.

With the different Moon phases we can distinguish fairly easily and visually recognize, the Crescent Moon. In our school we follow the traditional way of observing the New Moon meaning to observe the appearance of the first tiny Crescent Moon rather than the Sun/Moon conjunction that is invisible. From there we can identify, the First Quarter, Gibbous Moon, Full Moon. There are three days of Full Moon as it actually looks full for three days.

I'm old enough to remember in the mid 1960s where there was a considerably less percentage of any individuals with understanding of the Lunar cycle. I can remember talking to people who were starting to get into New Moon ceremonies and Full Moon ceremonies, who were shocked to discover that the Moon in each phase was doing the same thing every month. Or that you can see a Moon phase at a certain time of the day each month. It was a starting point of getting back into a physical awareness of the Moon cycle. Now it is more wide spread. It is not that obscure to teach about the Moon.

The same thing is going to be done with the Mercury, Venus and Mars cycle relative to the Sun. The Planetary Synodic Cycle is the pattern of meetings that the planet will have with the Sun, from the perspective of the observer. What I am suggesting is that with the synodic cycles of Mercury, Venus and Mars, that they have their own unique phases that cannot be compared with the Lunar phases, cannot be compared with the outer planets.

Question: I am a bit fuzzy on the meaning of sidereal.

Daniel: Sidereal means meeting with the stars while synodic means meeting with the Sun.

Q: Is it any star or is it one star in particular?

D: It could be any star. Just as in a synodic cycle you could choose any portion of a Lunar cycle and start there. You can start at First Quarter and 29.5 days later here comes the First Quarter again. You can pick any star you like. Recently the Moon was with Antares. If you notice the night the Moon was with Antares, 27.3 days later the Moon is again with Antares but it would not be in the same phase.

Q: Because the earth has moved in it's orbit to the Sun, when you line up the Moon with Antares or any other star, then the Moon is in a somewhat different position in it's orbit around the earth relative to the Sun?

D: That is the astronomy of it. One of the things that we love to do in our training is try to re-learn how to directly experience the sky to the earth rather than first trying to go to the abstract level of looking at it all from the outside in, which makes more sense. That's how our bodies are wired anyway.

Incidentally, here is a speculative question? Many would say that a woman's menstrual cycle is connected with the Moon. Which one is it most connected to – the 27.3 or the 29.5 day cycle, or neither?

Some think it's 27. My wife's is about 35. I think that it varies. On a statistical level I wonder. A lot of people assume that it is 29.5 cycle and there is some evidence to substantiate that according to a Russian study done in 1970s. Which one are we wired

to? It is an interesting question since our culture seldom even thinks about the 27.3 day sidereal cycle.

One last final thing on this Moon material. If we divide 29.5 into a year, the closest whole number is 12. If we divide 27.3 into the year, the closest whole number is 13. So I always like to tell people that the sacred number of the Moon is 12 and 13 equally. Some people in other groups like to set up this battle between 12 and 13. 13 is the Goddess number and 12 is the patriarchy number.

Nothing can be further from the truth. They both are sacred numbers of the Moon. Originally every zodiac on the planet was about the Lunar Mansions. Usually, the lunar cycle became punctuated with stellar influences, and then later it became solar based. Even in Egyptian history it started out as stellar and lunar before it ever became solar.

Lets start with individual chart analysis, then later in our conversation we can see how to work with this on a cultural level.

Most people are familiar with planetary returns. Solar returns are, by far, the most well known and most widely used. Less often a simple version of Venus, Mars and Mercury returns are studied.

You can simply look into the ephemeris and see when transiting Mercury, Venus, or Mars returns to the original zodiacal position on your natal chart again. It actually happens quite often. But that is not a synodic planetary return. A synodic planetary return is when Mercury, Venus or Mars returns to it's original degree in closest proximity to your birthday.

Essentially what you get is the recreation of the angle between the Sun and Mercury, Venus or Mars that you were born under. It is a return cycle of a higher order than if Venus, Mars or Mercury simply return to the original zodiacal degree of your birth chart. Mercury goes retrograde three times a year. Venus will do every year, and Mars about every two years.

Again, lets for a moment go back to the Moon. Most individuals are familiar at this moment with the magic of working with the Sun/Moon angle. If you are born under a Sun/Moon square, then each month there will be a Sun/Moon square, which can be considered to be your lunar birthday. It works actually for both men and women, although there is a lot of material out there first sourced from the 1960s under the subject of astrological birth control.

The discovery was that there is another ovulation cycle that is possible when the Sun/Moon angle re-occurs. I'm speaking of this now beyond whether or not such a thing can be used for becoming pregnant or preventing pregnancy. Rather, there is this potent point of creativity because of it being the Sun/Moon angle that you were born under. It is actually a return cycle.

However, with the Sun and the Moon you have to wait until the 19th year to have the Sun and the Moon in the same angle and the same sign, on your birthday. This is the power of what is called the Metonic Return of the Moon; a larger order lunar recreation of the original angle closest to your birthday.

That is a really big gap between having the same Sun/Moon angle every month and having the one that is right at your birthday at age 19. This is also associated with the cycle of the Lunar Nodes. (The Nodal Return and the Metonic Return is a whole other subject.)

If we relate this to Mercury, Venus and Mars, then the idea of a synodic planetary return is the recreation at various points in your life of the original angle that you were born under. This is "As Above, So Below," planetary magic at it's best; the recreation of the original set of instructions as when you incarnated, relative to Mercury, Venus and Mars. That is the power of the synodic return cycle.

Just one quick speculative issue – what do you suppose the odds are of having the recreation of your own chart with all of the same angles of the natal Sun with every one of the planets out to Neptune? What is the algorithm for that? Any guesses?

Not in a life time is accurate. Five to ten thousand years? Keep going. The Astronomer Jean Meeus did the calculation on this and I believe it was 17 trillion years. This algorithm is beyond the age of the known universe!

So the individual horoscope is totally unique. However, there are points along the time line of life when the Sun/Mercury, Sun/Venus, and the Sun/Mars angle is again close to our birthday. Also there are times when you get more than one at the same time like Venus and Mars or Venus and Mercury.

That is what we are going to look at right now. By the way, you can come up with some really great insights as to what initiatory process people are going through just knowing someone's age, by using this knowledge of the synodic planetary returns.

Lets first look at Venus. It is always easiest to start with Venus. Venus, of all the planets, has a nearly circular orbit and in a fairly short period can be made to fit into a number of solar years. The entire synodic cycle of Venus is almost 584 days.

You can take any point in the Venus cycle, whatever one you choose, Sun conjunct Venus retrograde, Sun conjunct Venus not retrograde, morning or evening star Venus, Venus at greatest elongation. In our school we choose the heliacal rise of Venus, when Venus is first seen as it rises in the morning sky just before the Sun. This is what the Babylonians and Mayans did. The Mayans were really into Venus as the common denominator of all the other cycles.

You can choose any starting point that you want and you will have the same number in 584 days Venus will have gone through all of her phases. That doesn't fit into a one year or two year solar cycle. It is pretty irrational to try to fit one synodic cycle of Venus into a year. However, if we multiply five synodic cycles, the eighth year it comes out almost exactly even, give or take about a day and a half. Elegant. There is nothing that is quite that close in the other planetary cycles.

But the really wild thing is that five of the synodic cycles, within one day, equals 13 sidereal circuits of Venus around the Sun. So there is a magical 5, 8, 13 sequence with Venus, connected to the Fibonacci sequence found throughout nature. Steiner, whose ideas help found the astrophysics school, knew this. A major part of his school was in working with this insight.

Now if you are you are looking at where Venus rises as the morning star, 584 days after Venus rises as morning star it is not going to rise the next time in the same sign, or in the same season. So you have to go through five of these cycles for Venus to come back to its starting point in relation to the Sun in a particular sign and the same season.

That is the synodic return of Venus, when it comes back to its original degree, as close as possible to your birthday. This is the re-creation of the natal Sun/Venus angle. Therefore, since it is an eight-year cycle, it is very easy to know if you are in a return cycle of Venus if you use multiples of eight. The years 8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56, 64, 72, 80, 88, 96 and so on are years of "Venus Returns."

The question is how long does the Venus return last. In this approach to synodic planetary returns of Venus they last the entire Venus synodic cycle. You might wonder where your Venus natal position fits into the Venus story.

If you have Venus in the morning sky when you are born, Venus return at multiples of eight will start just prior to your birthday. But if you have Venus as an evening star when you are born, the return cycle begins at least a year or more before your 8 year birthday. It's just that at your birthday there will be the exact recreation of the Sun/Venus angle that you were born with.

The return at age 8 is a different stage of maturation than age 16. Age 40 (5 x 8) is significant. The stage of maturation can also be different within these eight-year cycles depending on whether you have a person who has Venus early or late in the cycle. At 16, if an evening star Venus might show up as late developer compared to the morning star Venus. (This could be an interesting area of research.) Also, since the Venus return is the exact recreation of the angle and the original intent of that Venus position there will be a wide variety of experiences. If you look at a chart you can discern what the original intent is by looking at the sign, house, and aspects.

The Venus return dates are magic. If I am doing a reading for someone, and they happen to be in one of those return cycles than I know the front line of interpretation is to look at what is happening to Venus as the dominant planet of initiation at that time.

Back when I started working with this in the late 1990s I did over idealize seeing the Venus return as a really good thing. That was until I realized that what happens at a Venus return is the intensification of the original set of instructions; the intensification of what the original predicament was.

If you happen to have Saturn/Venus (by conjunction, square or opposition), then at each Venus synodic return you have the re-iteration of that original set of instructions associated with that placement. It also suggests, if you know a person is in a Venus return, not just to put your full attention on what the original aspects are with Venus, but to really look to see if their Venus, at that time, is undergoing some other kind of major transit.

If a person is in a Venus return and at the same time Pluto is conjunct their natal Venus, you can really spend a third of the session on what is coming up for a person regarding that. This is a very powerful tool for determining what is happening in a person's life.

So now let's look at Mars. The Mars synodic cycle is an average of about 26 months. Again, it depends on what you choose for your starting point. You could do what a lot of astrologers traditionally have done and use the Sun/Mars conjunction as a starting point.

What we do from an experiential level in our school is the *acronyca* rising of Mars. The *acronyca rise* is when Mars rises in the east at sunset, opposing the Sun. We choose this point because this is the point in the Mars cycle when it stays in the same sign for about eight months and it is the brightest. It takes about 26 months on average to do all of its phases. It is a completely unique cycle. It can't be related to Venus, it cannot be related to Mercury. You cannot relate it to the Moon. It is its own thing.

Unlike Venus, Mars has an extremely eccentric and erratic orb that is quite intriguing if you think about it philosophically. Where the cultural knowledge would say that one of the differences between men and women is that women are always changing and men stay the same, if you use Venus as a symbol of the feminine and Mars as the symbol of the masculine, astronomically, it is exactly the reverse.

Venus is very predictable and elegant in its simplicity of its cycle relative to Mars. Mars is all over the map. Sometimes a Mars cycle brings it so close to the earth that it can become as bright as -2.8 magnitude.

Here is a trick question. What is the second brightest planet in the sky? Most people would have said Jupiter. But sometimes it's Mars. In two of its synodic cycles, Mars can become brighter than Jupiter. But on some of its orbits, it is less bright than Saturn. It has an extremely eccentric orbit.

Q: Did the ancients observe that or make note of it?

D. Interesting question. My first answer is how could they not note it? As far as the notations of it, I'm not sure. I do not have any source or documentation on that.

So think of it this way. If the cycle is 26 months and you are looking in the ephemeris, and you are looking for the first time that Mars comes back to its original zodiacal degree, it can really vary. I suggest that you look at your own. This is the astronomical version of what's called in our culture the "terrible twos."

It is when Mars comes back to its original position for the first time. It actually could happen before age two, sometimes it happens after the age of two. This first semi-Mars return could be way off from your actual birthday. In some cases it could be right near your birthday.

There is something in Developmental Psychology called reproachment which is when the young child gets its first urge to get away from mom. The amount of space the child gets away from mom before it feels fear and wants to know "Where's Mom?" is a gap that stays with you your whole life as far as the ability to have intimacy goes.

A child of two is not going to be able to survive without mom. The child, in an early attempt at individuating, attempts to distance from mom. And then, they may see dad. Dad might say "I'll take you back to mom" or "You don't have to go back to mom, just come with me." But a specific spatial reality will emerge. That gives one a psychological flavor to the Mars cycle.

So this is how it works with Mars. Remember, with Venus it was five (584 day) cycles that come out nearly perfectly on the eighth year to being on the same degree as when

you were born, giving rise to this multiple of 8. Mars actually takes 7 times 26 months before you have the first synodic planetary return. That happens at age 15. And it is not as precise as Venus. It can be 2-3 weeks off.

So if you look in the ephemeris, you will see that the Mars position is in the same area of the sky but it is not exact on the birthday. You have to get through 7 Mars' cycles to have a chance for Mars to be back in the same area of the chart where it was when you were born on your birthday.

Notice how intriguing it is that the first real Mars return is going to happen at the age of 15. I think that the Mars return in combination with the Saturn opposition, that happens between age 13 and 15, depending on the chart, are the planetary symbols that have to do with puberty. We can also see that the Mars return can be used particularly for boys, to inform parents, about what initiator process is best for that son. Fortunately, we live in a culture that allows for options for boys other than simply being warriors.

If you went to certain places in Africa they would send the boys off in pairs into the jungle and they would be informed "You cannot come back unless you bring back a lion." It was certainly a good way to make sure they were all a certain type of boy. Either they got killed or were exiled, or they were successful. This might be good for a Mars in Aries but if you have a son with Mars in Cancer or Mars in Libra, I would suggest for that initiation into puberty that they should do something different.

I am wanting to get across here the awareness of a main theme. The length of the synodic return cycle is 26 months. Depending on where you are in the larger cycle, whether you are born with Mars conjunct the Sun, whether it is in the underworld, morning star, evening star, in a particular phase of development, the Mars cycle could start as early as age 13 or could last as long as age 17. After age 15, the next possibility is 32, 47 and then a very interesting time, when two of them happen very close together, 62 and 64, and then age 79.

The simple explanation of why the age at which the synodic cycle occurs varies is because Mars has a far more eccentric and erratic orbit than Venus does. At age 79 the synodic return of Mars is really close.

At 47 it is pretty close, within a few days. At age 62 and 64 the synodic return can be almost the same. It is like the two returns come together. I've actually just recently gone through those two in a row and it was a very intriguing process.

But if those are each Mars returns, much like the Venus ones, you can see that we have the Mars principle and intention incarnating on a deeper level at each return. The re-creation of the original Mars/Sun angle is going to be different at 15 and 32 that is a completely different phase of life, as are the other ones.

Those two ages, 32 and 64, are the only times that both Venus and Mars recreate their original angle with the Sun at the same time. Now in practice, I can't help but notice that if on the natal chart, Venus and Mars have a easy relationship with each other, such as a nice sextile or trine, without heavy Pluto or heavy Saturn, then these would be good times. We would, in the conventional sense, think that they are more benign placements and I have seen 32 and 64 to be wonderful for people.

However, if there are challenges between Venus and Mars, or Venus and Mars have very specific challenges on the original chart, I'm certainly not telling someone at the age of 32 that they are going to be meeting their beloved. In fact, it could be the most difficult experience they have gone through in order to learn what there is to know about the inner sacred marriage process, or getting over taking things personally.

Age 32 and 64 is a powerful time of the re-creation of the original set of instructions for both Venus and Mars, happening together. Try it, check it out. If I have a client coming in at age 32, I have some really great material. It is a very potent time. Venus is dropping in at her deepest level for the 4th time, and Mars for the second time.

The time frame for the current Mars Return is May 22, 2016 to July 26, 2018. If, in that time frame, you are turning 32, 47, 62, 64, 79, you are in a Mars return cycle. Using these examples, the most practical element you can use right away is about whether you are in a return.

The meaning of it is: the re-creation of the original set of instructions, the signature you were born under, is being re-created closest to your birthday, the day the Sun is in the same place as your natal chart, and this year in the same angle in relation to Mars.

Well then, why don't we try adding Mercury. Mercury is more like Mars: erratic, different, not elegant like Venus. The average Mercury cycle is about 120 days. We have three Mercury retrograde cycles every year. Depending on where you start the cycle Mercury will go through every one of its phases in that time. In our school we begin a Mercury cycle with it going stationary direct. Others might choose another point to start it. The Babylonians also started with stationary direct.

Anyway, you go through literally every phase in about 120 days. You get about three of them every year meaning that the Mercury return does not last anywhere close to as long as the Venus or Mars returns. I was in a Mercury return in 2014. I was born with

Mercury in Scorpio retrograde and the very same cycle that I was born in happened at the age of 66.

But when is the first synodic return? It doesn't happen until the age of 7. It takes 22 cycles of 120 days to come out even at the age of seven.

Q. The ratio of pi is 22/7.

D. Yes and there are a number of different languages that have 22 letters, and there are the 22 major Arcana of the tarot.

The way this works astronomically is that you have these 120 days of the Mercury cycle, (imagine them as circuits), in and out of the Sun from earth's viewpoint, in and out and around the Sun. It takes 22 of them to get back to the starting point relative to the Sun at any one place in the zodiac.

I have a book that is describing how the original labyrinth was just that. In a labyrinth you'll go almost into the middle but then you have to twist around and go back on the outside and then you twist around and you think you are going to the middle. The circuits of the labyrinth were like the planetary circuits of Mercury. After 22 circuits you finally get to enter the middle of the labyrinth equaling the first Mercury return.

This also corresponds to the first Saturn square along the timeline of your life. Mercury returns to its original position relative to your Sun on your birthday and Saturn squares its natal position in your chart at the age of seven. This is quite interesting because of the correlation to the fact that a child's brain has reached a certain stage of development by that age that enables one to now understand more abstract concepts.

The next one is at 13. Think of all the ways 13 has been used throughout history in different cultures.

There are several Mercury returns that are really close: 26, 33, 46, 52, 59, 66. You really have to check the ephemeris for how it works in your own life because there is this pattern of Mercury returns that happens about every 7 then 6 years, 7 then 6. They keep jumping back and forth. Some of them are really close and some of them are a little bit further out.

Actually 52 and 59 can be a little bit iffy. Still they are close. Basically, what it means is that Mercury, when you reach your birthday on those dates, is where it was when you were born. It is that simple. It is the re-creation of the original set of instructions, the original Mercury/Sun angle. Generally what happens in a Mercury return, the original intent of your Mercury position is magnified.

I was in a Mercury return when I first was doing the synodic cycle research at the age of 46. It was soon after that that I was also empowered by the Jupiter return. I didn't tackle writing and speaking about Mercury until I was 52.

Mercury is very complicated. In fact, when I first put my intention on trying to figure out Mercury when I was 52, I got this insight as if it were straight from Hermes, basically saying, this is as far as you need to go. There is no need to go beyond this level of complexity. It is the outer limits of what your mind can handle as far as these particular circuits of planetary understanding.

So the dates of the current Mercury return are from May 22, 2016 through September 21, 2016. This one is 123 days. So within this time frame if you are turning one of these ages, you are in a Mercury return.

It jumps around, you have to check which one is closer. There could be one at age 73, even 74. There is really a great one at 79. It is easy to check in your own life by looking in the ephemeris at your birthday, year to year, and see how close Mercury is to its original position in your natal chart.

It's very mathematical. You can take any of these magical Mercury returns and look 6 or 7 years out. It turns out that certain ones you can count on as being closer. The way we have termed it in the school is a major return and a minor return. You have to check. What might be for one person a minor one is actually closer in another's chart. These are considered the major ones: 7, 13, 20, 26, 33, 40, 46, 52-53, 59, 66, 72-73, 79, 85, 92.

The pattern keeps going as long as you live. So, 46 is the absolute closest and 92 repeats that one. One of the things I'm hoping to inspire here, is that you will look and see what patterns are in your life and see which ones are closer. For Mars, it is particularly useful to look at age 62 and 64. Sometimes 62 will be closer than 64. Does that minimize 64? Age 64 is also when you have Venus returning. So you've got this fascinating thing where both are happening at the same time.

Cayelin: It also often happens at age 40 that the Mercury and Venus returns are very close.

Daniel: There have been books written and traditions that have to do with age 40 Venus and Mercury returns. This is called the *Shekinah*. So much magic here once you know what to look for in these planetary return cycles.

What makes it important is that it is all based on the visual observation of the planets. That is why we hardly ever use the conjunctions of the Sun. You don't see them. We

are way more concerned about morning star, evening star, things like that. It's the way the ancients, for thousands of years, have been seeing this stuff, not the more abstract way we do now in astrology.

Even with the New Moon, I don't know of one culture on the planet that used the exact Sun/Moon conjunction for their ceremonies. It was always the first crescent. There would be secret ceremonies that some would do, but as far as the cultural ceremonies it was always the first Crescent Moon. Islamic cultures still send out a runner to see who could be the first to see the Crescent Moon.

Now for a few other things we have noticed in working with these synodic cycles over the years through our research.

The emphasis we have always had in our school is on what we can see with our eyes. In my early years as an astrologer, a time period when we were critical of a traditional astrology that tended to be a monotheistic, Sun centered, and patriarchal, we looked for a way of integrating a lot of the female mysteries into the signs and the planets. Also, during the development of our understanding over the years we approached the problem of where do we find Pluto and Chiron if we can't see them?

We used these planets/bodies in our school and they undoubtedly work. The question is - how did the ancients know about these things if the story is not in the visible planets? How do you find in the Venus, Mars and Mercury cycles, for example, something that is like Pluto and Chiron, or even something like Neptune and Uranus?

6000 years ago, an entire constellation was allocated to Chiron known as Centaurus, a huge constellation. You can see little pieces of it here in Tucson. I'm living in the Philippines, and you can see the whole thing gloriously. But in 2000 BC, 3000 BC it was higher up in the sky in northern latitudes.

The precession of the equinoxes has caused it to dip below the horizon. Centaurus is an entire constellation dedicated to Chiron, the Shaman Centaur. When it disappeared they needed a Centaur so they projected the horse up onto the Archer which for a long time had just been an archer. There had been no centaur there.

I'm giving this as an example to illustrate that the mysteries of Chiron and Pluto are not new. The ancients knew of these things. How would they have seen it, astrologically, in the sky? I haven't cracked the code of all of these things that we are looking at but I know for sure of some. For example, if the chart has Sun conjunct Venus within 10 degrees or Mars within 15 degrees, from a visual perspective the planet has disappeared into the "underworld" behind the Sun.

You watch Mars cross the evening sky. Night by night, it gets closer and closer to the western horizon. Then, it comes to within 15 degrees of the Sun. You can't see it any more. The old stories were that it was in the underworld. Same thing for Venus in the morning sky as day by day it gets closer to the Sun.

We look at charts that have that signature of the long time period where Venus or Mars disappears in conjunction with and behind the Sun: Sun conjunct Venus within 10 degrees, Sun conjunct Mars within 15 degrees. And it's just like adding Pluto. It is an underworld signature.

Of course there are going to be individuals that have both Mars and Venus in the underworld, the re-iteration of the same theme. The person's life will undergo an initiatory process that is similar to what happens when you have the conjunction, square or opposition of Pluto relative to Venus and Mars.

So what do I mean by being in an "underworld initiation?" It means that an individual will go through experiences in their life that are irrational, chaotic, that induce surrender. The way I usually like to describe the underworld process, this signature with or without direct aspects to Pluto, is that the three main ways of handling challenges don't work. These three main ways would be:

1. People of action can use strength, muscle or will to remove an obstacle.
2. Thinking types will look at an obstacle as something to figure out, a puzzle to solve.
3. This one speaks to the varieties of denial. "I didn't care about him anyway, it's all good." Or the work-a-holic who stays really busy – they don't want to recognize this as some kind of a challenge.

Now I'm not intending to be negative or critical of any of those approaches. People do these different approaches all the time. These can be perfectly good ways to handle challenges. But, if it is an underworld initiation they don't work. I've seen almost no exceptions to this.

How do we apply the underworld initiatory strategy to that chart with Venus and/or Mars in the underworld? Wherever or whenever we have Pluto by aspect or transit or we find these planets in the "underworld" it is common to experience powerlessness, chaos, things are erratic and irrational.

A spiritual perspective is to see these experiences as conditions designed to induce surrender. It is really important to see that just because you cannot figure it out, it's not about having done anything wrong. It's not bad karma. You are not being punished for anything. It's not about deficiency. The least elegant I could be is to say that it's like the old bumper sticker "Shit Happens." But that signature of those two

planets being with the Sun, I'm convinced, is how the ancients perceived the underworld process. That is one piece of the puzzle that we think we have uncovered from synodic cycle research.

In a technological culture there's no trace of the underworld process in the main seven symbols. So we discover Pluto and for some reason it is named exactly the right thing. The same thing for Chiron.

Where we once had a massive constellation representing the Chironic mysteries, the constellation disappeared from the northern sky, but certainly not the mystery teachings associated with Chiron. With the naming of Chiron, the small body between Saturn and Uranus, we did not come up with something new. There were more temples allocated to Chiron in Asia Minor than any other deity (except the Goddess)until they were superceded by the patriarchal Zeus cult.

I would like to acknowledge where I got these insights from. Some of my first ones came from reading a book called *The Descent to the Goddess* by Sylvia Ferrara. Then I came upon a very rare book that has actually become required reading in our school. This is a book called *Star Trek to Hawaii*, by Clyde Hostetter.

That's a cool title, but you can't tell from that title what is in the book. In that book is a cosmological and astronomical key to the cycle of Venus and the journey of Queen Innana, a Sumerian story/myth.

Venus is Innana in Sumerian. It turns out all the characters in the story are planets. Ninshubur, her servant, is Mercury. Dumuzi, her consort, is Mars. We have even been able to speculate that some of the other characters may be Jupiter and Saturn. But the majority of the action that happens is around Mercury and Venus. There's the additional clue to the above interpretation of the underworld in that Inanna's sister, named Ereshkigal, goddess of the underworld, is the same as Pluto before she became a male, patriarchal god. The original understanding was that the prime deity of the underworld is female.

In Sumeria, at the very end of the matriarchal age, they held a ceremony every eight years when Venus rose closest to Spring equinox. (They began their year with the Spring equinox.) Then it would take five synodic cycles to get back to the starting point. You can consider this as the five seasons of Venus making the five points of a star inside of the circle of the zodiac.

These points are always shifting backwards a little but you will always have one that is closest to the Spring equinox. It takes 104 years for the placement of Venus in any one sign (anyone of the five points of the star) to precess backward all the way

through a sign. (More about this later.) There are remnants of this today from Greece. That is why the original Olympics were every eight years. The original “Year King” ceremony was every eight years

After Venus would rise heliacally before the Sun they would soon see the Moon conjunct Venus. And then there would be this looping pattern (lemniscate, figure eight like curves) in the morning sky that would involve Venus with the Moon over the next 260 days of Venus as morning star. There are always at least seven Moon/Venus conjunctions after the heliacal rise, after Venus goes direct.

In ancient Sumeria, the underworld would be a place that you reached by water.. There would be a series of locks. Each lock would take you down to the next level. If you see the Venus/Moon conjunctions in the morning sky you’ll notice that the Moon looks like a little silver boat.

Venus gets on the boat and she goes down to a lower level. Another month goes by, the boat takes her down to the next level, another month goes by and it takes her down to another level.

In the story of Inanna, at each gate she is asked to relinquish a vestment. At the first gate she took off her crown, then at another her breastplate. There are different tellings of the story. Modern renditions of it relate it to the chakras.

The final conjunction before going behind the Sun, where Venus has sunk pretty low on the horizon, in the last Venus/Moon conjunction, she surrenders her attachment to her life.

Then she goes into the underworld. And that is the time when Venus and the Sun are conjunct within 10 degrees. Then after about 3 months Venus rises in the evening sky and goes through another 260 days doing the same kind of thing. Each of the five Venus cycles has it’s own unique pattern. If you capture this with the aid of time-lapse photography, each of these morning or evening star loops look different depending on the season it is happening in.

So now again, in the evening sky, you would have the Venus/Moon conjunction; Venus, met by the boat, taken back up through the locks. After seven of these, always at least seven, sometimes a mystical eighth, Venus will go retrograde, and will dive back into the underworld but only for about six or seven days. Then she rises again as morning star to begin another 584-day cycle.

In this story, as told by the Sumerians, Ninshubur, Inanna’s servant, the one she gets to go for help, is Mercury. There are three times that Mercury meets with Venus,

twice before she goes into the underworld: at the beginning of the journey, and again just as she goes into the underworld.

Then there is a meeting of Mercury with Venus after she rises as the evening star. And that pattern did exist, very clearly, visually, around 3000 BC although it is not precisely repeatable now, which is very intriguing. There are certain details of the cosmological story that no longer exactly match with Ninshubur as Mercury.

There are some other characters, too. Mercury/Ninshubur was supposed to go get help from Jupiter, and tried to go get help from Saturn, and even the Moon God.

That is just the basic framework of it. This is how we use this cycle particularly at the eight-year point during a Venus return. Cayelin and Tami Brunk do a teleclass on it. They meet every month for each gate to ceremonially work with each phase of the cycle. Myself and Eric Roth, managing director of the school, are doing a Mars Teleclass, going through the Phases of the Mars Cycle.

We are also engaging with Venus and Mars ceremonially, as we observe how they are going through the sky. Venus is now (September of 2016) in the evening sky along with Mars and Saturn. Venus and Mars come together in the evening sky early in 2017. You can access all the recordings from the previous classes by signing up for the classes on the website.

One of the things that interests me tremendously is the visible, long term pattern between Venus and Mars in the sky. Sometimes Venus and Mars will be seen in the evening sky together. Sometimes Venus and Mars will be seen together in the morning sky in conjunction. Every six and a half years Venus and Mars are together in the underworld with the Sun. It is a repeatable pattern every six and a half years.

You can actually track this in the sky as Mars in this phase is in what we call the “Labors of Mars.” There are different phases of the Mars processes that will be the parallel, mythically, of what we were describing for Venus.

What is important about this, it’s so multi-layered and tells the larger story. If I am giving a talk about current events, I will use the Venus, Mars and Mercury synodic cycles to get clues in order to understand the intent of the time period that we are in. This material gives amazing clues about what is going on.

Then there is the individual part of it which starts when you are in a Venus, Mars or Mercury Return, that places you in the front lines of what is happening collectively. This takes you to another level, finding out where your Venus, Mars or Mercury positions are in the greater story. What do I mean by that?

It is remarkably difficult, until recently when there has been a synodic revival, to find very much information on the difference between morning star Venus and evening star Venus. My mentor, Dane Rudyar, wrote some things on it such as if you have a morning star Venus, whatever sign it is, add the qualities of Aries.

If you have an evening star Venus, whatever sign it is, add the qualities of Virgo. It's as if to say the morning star Venus implies action before thinking, and the evening star Venus is thinking before action. This actually corresponds to many clues from ancient traditions. The morning star Venus is often a war goddess, and the evening star is a love goddess.

There is a book that I have called *Venus Regulated Warfare*, about the morning star apparition of Venus. You can find in more recent astrological traditions possible interpretations of morning star and evening star Venus, but not a whole lot.

When I was doing this research, I came upon a Mayan codex called the Grolier Codex. In this codex is a perpetual Venus calendar, basically showing all the features of the Venus synodic cycles for over a 1000 years, describing every part of it.

The five places in eight years that Venus rises as a morning star will outline a pentagram within the circle, drawing it as you would a five pointed star. Each horn of the pentacle will precess backwards over the whole 360 degrees over the period described in the codex. Pentagram magic comes from the Venus cycle.

It is actually miraculous and amazing that such a thing actually exists with a planetary body, that it actually does that. Venus rose as morning star on August 21, 2015. It is the same pattern over and over again and it is only in certain signs.

Unlike Mars and Mercury, whose synodic overtones move more or less consecutively through the signs, the Venus overtones (where it rises heliacally) are sort of an irrational thing. It has not risen in Libra in over 100 years. It has risen in Scorpio a lot. I once tabulated all the places that Venus rose as a morning star. Since 1920 it has been in mostly non-traditional signs.

By traditional I mean the patriarchal view of the feminine. The most times was in Scorpio, and then you have a heck of a lot of Gemini, and Aries, Leo and Capricorn or Aquarius. Because there are only 5 Venus signs at any given time there is not an even distribution of goddesses being represented by the rising of Venus over a period of time.

Q. Does Innana's sister have a planetary representation as well?

D. Thank you for bringing me back to this, for this is something I definitely want to add to this story, particularly for astrologers. Erishkegal, her sister, is matriarchal Pluto in our view. But there's a whole other thing. It is said that Innana got the summons to go to the underworld to attend the funeral of Gulaganna, her uncle, consort to the Queen of the Underworld.

Guess who that is? That is the Sumerian name for the great Bull of Heaven. What was the funeral about? This is actually pretty intense. It was to grieve the end of the age of Taurus.

If you happen to be the Queen of Heaven and Gilgamesh is overturning your whole system, then it makes sense to grieve the death of the great Bull of Heaven that represented the age of Taurus. The constellation of the Bull is no longer the backdrop for the Spring Equinox. This is the reason for Inanna's journey to the underworld.

One of my greater influences has been this shamanic writer, Martine Prechtel. He speaks about Americans. He says that it will be really very difficult for any major changes in the American culture until grieving happens.

So we can say that if we are creating a Innana ceremonial with Venus, there must also be a place for grief. I don't necessarily know if we are grieving the end of patriarchy. The grieving is something more massive. We are grieving our disconnect from the Earth, grieving our disconnect from being part of creation, grieving of our disconnect from natural living, our disconnection from our connection to animals, grieving our disconnect from the land and sky, grieving the loss of our indigenous soul. I think those are among things we are grieving when we go into the underworld. We can choose to go there or be forced to go.

Q. Do you deal with Jupiter returns?

D. Yes. One of the most remarkable things that we discovered is that seven Jupiter cycles equal one Uranus cycle. In fact you will experience the wonder of it if you look at the ephemeris. Take any one place and then look 83 years later. You will experience an absolute surprise that Jupiter will be within one or two minuets of where it was originally. This makes me think that Uranus is the higher octave of Jupiter – because of the way the orbital patterns are.

You have to have seven Jupiter cycles to get a real synodic return, but the regular old Jupiter return is, of course, amazingly potent. It is one of the major tools we use. I love to tell people about Jupiter returns. The key phrase I use for it is “the activation of enthusiasm.”

The primary theme of a person's dharma is reiterated at that point. It could well be that the Uranus return in combination with the seven Jupiter returns is what Rudyar thought was the archetypical length of the human life, meaning that everything after 84 is a bonus. Essentially everything that you intended to go through to reach fulfillment in realizing life's purpose will have happened by that point.

There is an alternative view that the fulfillment of life's purpose comes at three Saturn cycles, at age 88, which is a true synodic return for Saturn. The question here is reiterating the difference between a regular return, when it returns to its original zodiacal degree, and when it returns to the original zodiacal degree really close to your birthday. That is the definition of the synodic planetary return.