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At the Crossroads of Life ... Keep an Open Mind!

By Nancy R. Fenn

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MERCURY HAS MANY MEANINGS

The planet Mercury is a complex and enigmatic planet that has much more to do with our lives than just "communication", like faxes, emails, answering machines, telephones and media.

Mercury in ancient astrology was the Winged Messenger of the Gods. In the Iliad and the Odyssey when someone had a bright idea, instead of a lightbulb appearing over their heads, the Greeks and Romans sketched in an imaginary god, Mercury, who had just arrived on the scene with inspiration from "on high". After all, how could a mere mortal think of some of these brilliant solutions?

MERCURY HAS A CONNECTION WITH WILY ULYSSES

Ulysses in the Odyssey, whose familiar epithet was "wily Ulysses" is a typically mercurial character. The Greeks greatly prized the qualities of flexibility and ingenuity which Ulysses exhibited. The next time you're in a jam, think of some unusual and clever way out of your circumstance and you are honoring the god Mercury. People born in the Oriental Year of the Monkey are great at this!

The Greeks and Romans, at a different stage of evolution than us, externalized some of their urges, desires and powers which they couldn't explain in ordinary terms. For example, Socrates was depicted with a "daemon" always at his side that spoke to him. His "daemon" was a "gift" he had had since childhood, that acted like a cross between an alter ego and a guide.

SOCRATES' EVIL TWIN WAS A "DAEMON"

Rationalists and academicians can have a terrible time dealing with Socrates' "daemon" precisely because it is so irrational, but that's exactly the point. In all of us there is a committee which reaches our decisions for us. There are many voices. Many votes. Some people would like to think we arrive at our decisions through logic but rarely is this the case. Certainly any important decisions in life are made based on values, emotions and instincts and then later justified with reason.

At the Crossroads of Life ... Keep an Open Mind!

Mercury and the sign Gemini symbolize the duality within us. Sometimes this is experienced as a conflict between our head and our heart, sometimes between our better side and our worse side.

Gemini is the sign that deals with "duality" in its most basic terms: good and evil. The humorous statement "my Evil Twin did it" is very close to the psychic truth of this sign. Many Geminis keep their evil twin out of view or even their good one, but you can be sure they are at some level mortally engaged in the process of reconciling good and evil in the world but most of all within themselves.

THE BATTLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

This battle between good and evil is also characteristic of the introvert temperament group which is

called infp or the Healer. Myers–Briggs and Keirsey Temperament Theory describe the characteristics of introverts in 8 different categories that are similar to the Jungian personality theories and infp is one of them.) To learn more, visit my website www.theintrovertzcoach.com.

This dialogue between opposite viewpoints and the forces of good and evil go on inside all of us at certain times but Geminis and infp's deal with this on a lifelong basis. If you doubt me, find one and ask them about the problem of good and evil. They will laugh and have much to say or in the case of the introverts, much to write!

In ancient times, inspiration from outside the self which was very valuable was attributed to the god Mercury. This is the kind of information that comes from "stepping outside yourself" for a few minutes to get another viewpoint on things.

THE HERM

There is another aspect to Mercury which is less known and actually more important. The god Mercury also ruled crossroads. The Greeks erected little phallic statues (no pun intended) honoring the god Mercury along the side of the road and at crossroads to honor the god of travelers.

TRADE ROUTES

There were a few very well known major crossroads or Trade Routes in ancient times. For the most part they are clustered around the east end of the Mediterranean Sea in an area also called the Levant.

Let's take a look at them.

The King's Highway was the route from Egypt to the Euphrates River

The Silk Road was the route from Baghdad to Kashmir in China

The Way of the Sea was the route through Palestine along the coast of Syria

The Lower Road was a later version of the Royal Road

The Amber Road was the route from northern Italy through Yugoslavia to the Danube in Hungary

NOTE: If you'd like to get a real feel for these trade routes, visit a fascinating site which attempts to

give you a virtual experience in photos: <http://www.ancientroute.com> You can see what it is like to really travel one of these routes.

IMAGINARY TRADE ROUTE BETWEEN AMERICA AND RUSSIA

To make it easier to imagine, suppose for a moment that a road could connect America to Russia and that people walked back and forth on it. Sooner or later it would be discovered by people to the south and north as well. Eventually there would be crossroads joining this major route with roads leading "up" from the Middle East, Italy and Spain and "down" from England and Scandinavia.

The crossroad where the Middle East connected would have different energy than the one where Italy connected or Spain, England and Scandinavia. People would be differently dressed, riding different animals, speaking different languages and hawking different goods.

Information is exchanged at the crossroads as well as language, customs and commodities. People get along well with one another. In ancient times there were often special rules governing "host" and

"guest" and giving crossroads people such as ambassadors, messengers, tribunes and native guides safe passage through certain territories. Crossroads people have a flexibility that is often missing in the village or city where everyone and everything is the same.

LINGUA FRANCA AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES

In ancient times the crossroads were places where very important information was exchanged, information that might never reach a town or village. To facilitate this, a common language developed. Called a lingua franca, such a language permitted people from different countries to understand each other well enough to do business. [According to lingua franca expert, A. Harrak, as excerpted from his "Contracts between Cultures -- West Asia and North Africa, volume 1" in a lecture delivered at the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies, Toronto, 1990, "Lingua franca, [was] "ur-pidgen" ... a chameleon-like, ill-defined entity, a trade language consisting of elements of various languages, mostly Romance, which was used for centuries in the Mediterranean littoral.]

In addition to learning a common language like lingua franca (Latin was the lingua franca of educated people in Europe for many years), crossroads experiences stimulate a desire to learn a foreign language. Did you know that learning a foreign language increases your intelligence? One reason is that it builds bridges of communication between the right and left side of the brain, increasing flexibility. A person who can come at a problem with right and left brain flexibility has double the resources of someone relying on just one or the other. In addition, on the Gemini side, you learn to speak another language but on the Sagittarian side, you develop the telepathic ability to understand someone else's language. This ability often transcends the words being spoken and heard as many people with language ability will tell you.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION IS EXCHANGED AT CROSSROADS

Here is an example of some of the kinds of important information that are exchanged at a crossroad.

At the Crossroads of Life ... Keep an Open Mind!

Be careful, it is no longer safe to drink the water at xx

Be careful the king of xx is dying and the country is run by renegades who no longer honor our trade agreements

Warning, there was a spring flood which washed away the trail at xx

Good news! The mountain pass is clear now.

Good news! The king of xx wants trade in his country and has cleared the bandits out of the gulch at xx.

The price of amber has dropped. Don't be fooled into paying high prices.

The market for silk has shifted further west ... be careful not to buy more than you can sell.

Xx's supply of xx is terrible this year. Best go in another direction with what you have to sell.

People who stay at home in the town and village don't need this kind of information. But if they are wise, they listen to news from travelers because it can portend things in the future. For example a traveler returns and says, "I have been to xx and they will pay fabulous sums of money for this stuff that washes up on the shore around here [amber]". Or he might say, "There are restless tribes marauding close to here. We need to be careful or they will wipe us out." There is no way for a connection to be made between towns and villages if someone doesn't travel.

THE INTERNET IS RULED BY MERCURY: IT IS MERCURIAL

Today of course the internet is very Mercurial. It brings information back and forth between people who

find each other through common interests. They are traveling the air waves, so to speak.

A characteristic of staying at home in the village is that things change very slowly in the village. Along the trade routes there is constant change. The energy is "mercurial", fast changing along trade routes. It is like quicksilver where cultures collide. People learn to borrow good things from one another to improve their own. There is an open mindedness among traders and among people who live along all the borders of the world. Such places are ruled by Mercury. What can we learn from all of this?

The planet Mercury rules the sign Gemini. There are 12 signs but there are really only 6 "polarities". Gemini and its opposite sign Sagittarius make up one of these polarities and it is best to understand these two signs as complimentary opposites. They are different degrees of the same qualities.

Therefore, when we speak about Mercury, which rules Gemini, there is always a Sagittarian flavor in the stew.

PETER THE GREAT WAS A QUINTESSENTIAL GEMINI/SAGITTARIUS PERSON

An example of a quintessential Gemini/Sagittarius individual is the Russian Tsar, Peter the Great. Peter the Great (1672–1725) had his Sun and Mercury in Gemini in the 3rd house opposite his Moon in Sagittarius. Peter was a genius and master of many trades. He was an innovator and facilitator. He traveled to and borrowed from various countries in Europe, bringing back the best of England, France, the Netherlands and Italy. He consolidated Russian territory, created the Russian Navy, dredged the city of St. Petersburg from the swamps and introduced new styles of dress and customs to his people. He was "ahead of his times".

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The flexibility and open mindedness of someone like Peter the Great are characteristic of the "crossroads" energy ruled by Mercury. In a manner of speaking, Peter the Great visited everywhere and took the best of everything. His open mindedness and flexibility were winning qualities and they are "crossroads" qualities.

Peter had both Gemini and Sagittarius qualities. A typical Gemini trait was his interest in "curiosities". At a time when many rulers created museums to preserve freaks and oddities of nature, Peter was no exception. You can still visit his museum in St. Petersburg today. Peter was a Sagittarius in his love of everything "foreign" and in his mastery of many different talents.

SPREAD OF IDEAS, INFORMATION AND DISEASE ALONG THE TRADE ROUTES

For a graphic idea of the spread of ideas and information, consider the spread of the black plague contagion which began in 14th century Europe by following the caravan routes. From the lower Volga River basin in 1345, it spread to the Caucasus and Crimea by 1346, Constantinople by 1347, Alexandria in the autumn of 1347, Cyprus and Sicily in that year, Italy by winter 1347, Marseilles by January of 1348, Paris in spring 1348, followed by Germany and the Low Countries in that year, Norway in May 1349, eastern Europe by 1350, and finally Russia in 1351.

Epidemics have been tracked historically and illustrate the principle of exchange or cross pollination that takes place at the crossroads.

MERCURY IS THE GOD OF BORDERS

Mercury is also the god of borders. Living in Southern California, our population is a mix of Caucasian,

Arab, Mexican, African-American, Oriental and Island people. I can't say that we get along easily all the time, but we do get along. Hopefully Southern California gets the best of all these cultures and wins. When I leave California I miss the stimulation of border/crossroads energy. If I go someplace homogenous like a town in the midwest, I find it fascinating by contrast. The upheaval and change that occurs when 7 different cultures "collide" has its special challenges and gifts and a homogenous culture has its stability.

MERCURY REMINDS US: WHEN YOU STAND AT THE CROSSROADS OF LIFE, KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Mercury is also the god of symbolic crossroads. This reminds us how important it is to be open minded when we stand at a crossroads in life. Mercury reminds us that keeping our minds open to as many choices as possible is the best way to face the unknown.

Nancy R. Fenn is an astrologer and intuitive consultant in the San Diego area. She enjoys working with creatives, intuitives and visionaries to help them discover their mission in life.

Midlife is a Crossroads, Not a Crisis

By Dr. Jim Manganiello

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MIDLIFE IS A CROSSROADS—NOT A CRISIS

Part one

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The common notion of "midlife crisis" refers to the feelings of stress, chaos and disequilibrium that typically accompany this special stage in our lives.

The turmoil of midlife usually enters into our consciousness as anxiety over who we are. It is better to think of midlife as a psychological and spiritual time rather than a biological one. Some people enter this important stage at 30 others at 70.

The key to transforming midlife stress into depth and meaning is to understand that midlife is not a crisis at all—it's a crossroads of the soul, a crossroads that's too often misunderstood and unacknowledged.

During adolescence we go through a development change called puberty, a change that's clearly recognized because it's physical and so visible. At midlife we go through an even more powerful developmental stage, but it's primarily an inner one. Because this stage isn't visible, it often goes unrecognized and unacknowledged for what it truly is.

At midlife our soul thrusts an important question at us: Will we come home to our deeper identity and live the second half of our lives as the real thing or as a dress rehearsal? Midlife chaos comes as a result of our soul's efforts to liberate us from a conditioned identity that's too small for who we truly are.

During midlife we encounter a natural movement from within ourselves to leave our surface identity and journey to our innermost identity—the Heart. This movement often meets with strong resistance from internal forces that naturally seek safety by maintaining the status quo. These forces need to be educated to see the big picture so they can become allies in helping us to grow and Craft the Good Life.

Midlife changes require us to leave known for foreign territory. They can be a changes filled with doubt and fear. They involve experiences of turmoil and inner stretching that, if negotiated properly, can yield something of enduring value. It's as if our identity loses its solid ground while we are in movement between different possibilities within ourselves.

During midlife confusion we occupy a psychological location that is like being on a suspension bridge. Any emotional upheaval is like a strong wind that can leave us feeling out of control as the familiar images that have defined us in the past no longer seem fixed, stable and reliable.

If we resist change and rigidly hold on to our old self-image, we run the risk of living the second half of our lives confined to an identity that has trouble taking advantage of life's deeper opportunities. We can

then develop a kind of chronic dread about having to face growing old and inevitably having to die. This dread steals life's bright colors and makes it something that we merely endure rather than live with any vibrancy or passion.

Our deepest possibilities often emerge most clearly during times of psychological and spiritual confusion. Many of us enter midlife with well established patterns of identity. Our work and family life have become predictable sources of externally based identity and enjoyment. Then all of a sudden we can begin to feel depleted and out of sorts. What we have worked hard for, and what we have valued, begins to seem lacking in some vague way.

Our lives begin to feel like a drama that someone else has arranged. We lose energy for what we do every day. It becomes repetitive and boring. Even our most prized possessions may all of a sudden appear to be just "things" that no longer mean very much to us.

It can almost feel as if we have lost something that we then struggle to get back. But typically that doesn't work. We can find ourselves stressed out as the old wounds in our self-image begin to feel very sore again. As a kind of panic sets in, we might find our connections to people in our family and work lives feel strained. We begin to question everything that seems to have a hold on our time and energy. And we can feel a strong appetite for freedom.

Midlife is a time when the old images that we had come to rely upon for self definition no longer seem to work well. But, as yet, there are no new images on the scene that could provide us with a clear sense of identity. As a consequence, our experience of ourselves, of the "I" or "me" that we tend to identify with can become uneasy and indefinite.

It is a little like discovering that the solid ground that we were standing on is actually a large turtle's back that is moving. What results is a subtle sense of stressful panic as we lose our balance and the certainty of who we are.

Next month we'll continue exploring the fascinating territory of midlife in part two of this series.

After many years of study and work in the best of the western and eastern psychological, spiritual and well-being traditions, I created the Good Life Process™, a life enhancement practice that brings together ancient wisdom and cutting edge knowledge. The Process is a powerful tool for negotiating midlife change and for creating a life that can be well lived, loved and understood.

Dr. Jim Manganiello is an award winning depth psychologist, Master coach, and meditation instructor. He works with people who want to craft their life into a work of art. Jim created the amazing, 5 part, Crafting the Good Life Course, now available at www.craftingthegoodlife.com. The Course features a powerful life enhancement practice, The Good Life Process™ Sign up for the Jim's Newsletter and get Part One, Step 1 of the Process FREE.

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