



Mars Synodic Return Cycle

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The Theory

Many astrologers run charts for their own, and for their clients, Mars Return. Commonly used, this is a chart of the exact time that transiting Mars returns to its original natal position. This happens about every two years. However, the *far more* important Mars Return event occurs when transiting Mars returns to the natal degree when closest to the date and season of one's birth. In the previous article we discussed how synodic planetary returns are part of the great ancient Hermetic and magical project of discovering and discerning how seemingly irrational cycles can reduce to whole numbers. Let us now explore how this works for Mars.

The Data

Unlike the elegance and relative simplicity of the Venus cycle and its synodic return pattern that is created by the nearly circular orbit of Venus, Mars presents us with a very different situation due to its extremely elliptical, eccentric and variable orbit. Mars makes its closest approach to earth, at opposition. The closeness of Mars to Earth can vary from 34,603,000 miles at its closest to nearly double the miles of 62,930,000 at its most distant.

The current Mars cycle (that started in March of 2012) is about as far away from the Earth as possible. Looking at the years from 0 to 3000 AD, Mars is furthest away from Earth in 2832. The closest approach of Mars to Earth was in 2003 and won't again until 2287 (according to the tables of astronomer Jean Muees).

Because of this variability, the pattern established by successive synodic cycles, of 779 days or a 26-month average, rarely if ever, appears in the same season, let alone within a few days of a target birthdate. With Venus, remember the synodic return is within 2 days every 8 years!

Mars does have its own unique pattern. It's roughly 15-17-15-17 - with certain years significantly closer than with others. After 7 synodic cycles, at age 15, Mars will return pretty close to its original degree in the same season and near the birthdate. This averages, over a long period of time, about 20 days before any one target date or birthday. Because the synodic cycle before and after the 7th synodic cycle are quite similar, it's also possible to have the synodic return within 20 days of the birthdate at age 13 and age 17. However, the center point of the Mars return process is at age **15** as described in the pattern of 15-17-15-17-15-17 when Mars returns within 20 days of the birthday. With this pattern in mind here are synodic Mars return ages in a person's lifespan:

13, 15, 17, 30, 32, 45, 47, 49, 52, 64, 77, 79, 81

Of these returns, the closest happens at age 47, occurring within an average of 8 days of the birthday, and at age 79, occurring within an average of 3-4 days after the birthday.

After working with this over 20 years, the returns at age 15, 47, and 79, are absolutely prime and major. From ages 30-34 and 60-64 the Mars returns are also of great importance along the Timeline of our lives. Some

individuals will experience the Mars return at age 30 to be closer than the one at 32 and vice versa. The same is true for the age 60 to 64 Mars returns. However, due to the synodic return of Venus at age 32 and 64 we have a special reason for considering the Mars returns at those ages as having more importance. Naturally more experiential research on this is needed.

Meaning and Practice

Since becoming aware of the synodic return, I have incorporated it into my practice in a variety of ways. Should a client be in the vicinity of one of the magic age zones for Mars, the Mars Return process takes center stage at the highest level of interpretation. Remember that the length of the Mars synodic return cycle lasts for the entire 26-month (average) time period. (See Mars Part 1)

A client in the prime ages listed above may be anywhere in the synodic cycle of Mars from the beginning to the end. This means the client's exact birthdate exists somewhere within the larger context of the 26 month synodic cycle of the Mars quest. The intention for Mars on the natal chart exists within the greater "story" of the unfolding Mars cycle playing out on the world stage (see Mars Part 1).

Mars Overtone

As discussed in Part 1, the synodic cycle of Mars begins at opposition and the sign Mars is in defines the dominant archetypal theme of the entire cycle. The sign Mars is in at the beginning of the synod is referred to as the overtone, similar to the family or clan. In March of 2012 Mars reached opposition to the Sun and was in Virgo. This means the overtone or clan or family of this 26 month Mars cycle is Virgo.

Taking this a step further, everyone has a personal Mars placement, and they also have a synodic overtone (or clan), that describes their synodic story at birth. For example, I have Mars in Scorpio on my natal chart. However, at the day and year of my birth, Mars was in the Leo overtone synodic cycle. Each synodic cycle will have a different overtone, progressing through the zodiac.

These are the dates Mars rises in the East at Sunset defining the Overtone of the Mars Cycle. Look for the Date before you birthday to find yours.

Mars opposite Sun					Mars opposite Sun					Mars opposite Sun				
		Sign					Sign					Sign		
Apr	21	1920	01	Sco	Nov	16	1958	24	Tau	Mar	17	1997	27	Vir
Jun	10	1922	19	Sag	Dec	30	1960	09	Can	Apr	25	1999	04	Sco
Aug	24	1924	00	Pis	Feb	04	1963	15	Leo	Jun	13	2001	23	Sag
Nov	04	1926	11	Tau	Mar	09	1965	19	Vir	Aug	29	2003	05	Pis
Dec	22	1928	29	Gem	Apr	15	1967	25	Lib	Nov	07	2005	15	Tau
Jan	27	1931	07	Leo	May	31	1969	10	Sag	Dec	25	2007	03	Can
Mar	02	1933	11	Vir	Aug	10	1971	17	Aq	Jan	30	2010	10	Leo
Apr	06	1935	16	Lib	Oct	25	1973	02	Tau	Mar	03	2012	13	Vir
May	20	1937	29	Sco	Dec	15	1975	23	Gem	Apr	08	2014	19	Lib
Jul	22	1939	29	Aqu	Jan	22	1978	02	Leo	May	22	2016	02	Sag
Oct	11	1941	17	Ari	Feb	25	1980	06	Vig	Jul	27	2018	04	Aqu
Dec	06	1943	13	Gem	Apr	01	1982	11	Lib	Oct	14	2020	21	Ari
Jan	14	1946	24	Can	May	11	1984	21	Sco	Dec	08	2022	16	Gem
Feb	17	1948	28	Leo	Jul	10	1986	18	Cap	Jan	16	2025	26	Can
Mar	23	1950	02	Lib	Sep	28	1988	06	Ari	Feb	19	2027	01	Pi
May	01	1952	11	Sco	Nov	28	1990	06	Gem	Mar	25	2029	05	Lib
Jun	25	1954	03	Cap	Jan	08	1993	18	Can	May	04	2031	14	Sco
Sep	11	1956	19	Pi	Feb	12	1995	23	Leo	Jun	28	2033	07	Cap

Only after 7 synodic cycles, is there the possibility of the same overtone clan reoccurring. Due to the erratic nature of the Mars orbit, the overtone is not always the same at the 7th synod. There is a greater likelihood of the same overtone occurring at the Mars synodic returns of age 47 and 79 than the other ones.

So far in our research, the original (birth) overtone carries through the entire life. But if there are differences in a later synodic return, there is a sense of the evolution of the overtone clan over the course of a lifetime. For example, my natal Mars is 25 Scorpio with the overtone at 28 Leo. Each person can explore their own pattern of Mars returns and note what their experiences have been.

Age	Mars Overtone
birth	28 Leo
15	15 Leo
30	2 Leo
32	6 Virgo
47	23 Leo
62	10 Leo
64	13 Virgo
79	11 Virgo

In Shamanic Astrology the archetypal sign of the overtone is used to help understand the larger cultural/global context of a 26-month time period. Unless a person is in a synodic return, I don't usually integrate the overtone meaning into a reading. For practical purposes, the sign and aspects of the natal Mars does work! But it can be very fascinating indeed to see where you are in the overall story of your Mars clan, or overtone, throughout a lifetime.

Mars Return for Men

The meaning and purpose of the synodic Mars cycle is different for men and women.

For men, this is when the primary archetype of the Masculine (natal Mars) that is intended for the current life, reconstellates or "drops in" at a deeper and more comprehensive level. It is important to note that nature of the initiatory process will differ depending on the age.

For example from age 13 to 17 the Mars return occurs around puberty.

An entire article could be developed describing just this Mars return time. Shamanic Astrology envisions a wide variety of Rites of Passage at puberty, each based on the specific archetype of masculinity arising from 13-17. For example, a boy with Mars in Aries or Leo, might desire to excel at a competitive sport or get the lead role in a school play. If Mars is in Libra, this might be the time for an early soul-mate projection that could dominate their experience. The Rite of Passage for a boy with Mars in Cancer might be to take care of a garden, or the family pets.

The idealistic intention is to recognize and honor the specificity and diversity of the archetype of Mars. A one-size-fits-all approach would not work in supporting the activation of the individual Mars expression. For example, in some patriarchal African tribes, the puberty Rite of Passage sent all boys to the jungle with the instruction to bring back a Lion. Return to the tribe was not permitted unless this was accomplished. In a culture that desires to have only warriors this was an extremely intelligent technique! However, this also weeded out many other authentic expressions of masculinity.

This Table Shows the Most Significant Mars Returns of a Person's Life.

Age	Where Mars Return is on Timeline	Intent
13-17	Within the 1 st Saturn opposition	Puberty
30-34	Follows the 1 st Saturn Return	True adulthood
45-49	Follows the 2 nd Saturn Opposition	Full power and second puberty
61-65	Follows the 2 nd Saturn Return	Full Maturity
77-81	Follows the 3 rd Saturn Opposition	Wise Elder and Completion

Notice how the pattern of significant Mars synodic returns also tracks the Saturn return and Saturn opposition.

Therefore, for men, the synodic return cycle of Mars wonderfully articulates the developmental process of becoming an adept in their intended archetype of masculinity as it unfolds along the Saturnine structure of the generational timeline.

Mars returns for Women

For women, the Mars synodic return cycle primarily involves, at first, a relationship with the projected “other” without reference to gender. Her natal Mars represents her relationship to the outer “masculine.” Eventually, the cycle necessitates the internal incorporation of this masculine archetype. This is a process in Shamanic Astrology called the *Sacred Marriage* and parallels the Venus synodic return for a man. For women, the Mars synodic return process is a most potent time for creating inner wholeness or an inner marriage with the *inner other* with or without a partner.

The previous schemata for men applies for women regarding the life phases, but with a few additional features as described in the table below:

Age	Intent	Results
13-17	The projected “other” appears as an archetype usually different, but not always, from “father”.	Sexual and emotional attraction to the other appears
30-34	Encounters the full power of the projected other	Beginning of Sacred Marriage
45-49	Post-Saturn opposition menopausal time re-orienting feminine identity in relationship to masculine principle	Greater Awareness of need for Sacred Marriage
61-65	Accomplishment of the Sacred Marriage	Full Maturity of Sacred Marriage
77-81	Completion of the masculine archetypal investigation	Attaining Wise Elder

Everyone's journey to wholeness is different, and the above is a very general map. Some “get it” sooner than others. With the exception of age 13-17, the sacred marriage potential of the Mars synodic return process can occur anytime. Each synodic Mars Return offers very real conditions and experiences for powerful inner work.

Interpretation

When I first started working with the synodic return cycles, in my usual idealistic way, I thought this was invariably a great and enjoyable cycle. I have learned this is not always the case. After years of experience with this, what I have noticed is that if the natal Mars position is relatively free of challenges, then the cycle **IS** enjoyable. This is also true if there are no challenging dynamic aspects happening to Mars during the return cycle. Natal challenges to Mars appear to be amplified at the synodic return, and if there are dynamic transits to Mars at the same time, then the synodic return cycle is a maximum intensity initiation event.

I have also noticed a certain somewhat “spooky” reoccurrence of the same themes that keep coming up again and again at each Mars synodic return. (This is very much the case with synodic Venus Returns as well). Each return offers up an opportunity to handle and perhaps even resolve the issue. Yes, the planet is very strong, and it is also encountering its primary challenges and possibilities.

Thoughts About Age 2

Even though the synodic cycle will not arrive back to the vicinity of its starting point, until the 6th and 7th cycle (age 13 and 15), something worth adding to this exploration is what happens with the first Mars Return after birth.

The cultural story identifies this time as the “terrible twos.” The astrological correlate that happens around age two is the first Mars Return. Because the average synod of Mars is 26 months, it does not necessarily return all that close to the birthdate (certainly not within 20 days). However, when and how the “around age two” Mars return occurs seems to relate to a process that psychologists call “rapprochement”.

This is the time when the toddler develops an initial urge to separate from mother and tries to get away from Mom. Some children will get very far away from, others not so far, before realizing that they can’t yet make it without Mom. The theory is that the distance of separation before needing to get back to Mom becomes the spatial and psychic distance that will exist throughout the life, with reference to personal and intimate relationships.

One can easily see how the sign of Mars and its aspects at birth can magnificently describe the nature of rapprochement in each individual chart. I suggest looking at your own age two Mars return, noting when and how the first return happened for you. You are looking for the time when natal Mars first returned to its sign degree, even if it’s some weeks before or after the actual 2nd birthdate. Be sure to check the transiting aspects and remember to include the natal Mars aspects as well, particularly with reference to the archetype and sign of the Moon. You may find this to be very illuminating.

This view of the first synodic Mars cycle, while not actually a true synodic return, demonstrates the added importance of the time period of 13-17 as being the actual initiatory window of separation and individuation from mother and father.

Final thoughts

The use of the synodic planetary cycles is relatively new in modern astrology (though not in ancient astrology). Because of this much of our understanding is experimental. In the Shamanic Astrology Mystery School we are learning more about these cycles all the time. Please do share your feedback and any findings either from your own life or work with your clients. Thanks!