

## Chiron in Aspect to Mercury

When Chiron aspects Mercury, this principle is often wounded and we may then see 'supermercurial types' portraying the various archetypal figures associated with it. In her book on Mercury, Pam Tyler describes two faces of Mercury – ruler of both Gemini and Virgo. She associates the god Hermes with the sign of Gemini, and the ancient Egyptian god Thoth with the sign of Virgo. Let us briefly contrast these two.

When in the cradle, Hermes is already up to mischief: he steals Apollo's sacred cattle and, when discovered, charms his way out of trouble, setting the precedent for many of his later misdemeanours. He outwits his superiors with guile; he rebels and subtly evades. He boldly invites himself into the Olympian circle, and later earns the title of 'Messenger of the Gods', many of them being indebted to him for being rescued from various tight spots. He finds a way out of deadlock or potentially humiliating situations, and is frequently a key figure in the unfolding of the destiny of other gods, arriving in the nick of time with a crucial message, or clinching an important deal. To my knowledge, there are no stories in which Hermes himself is captured or punished; he usually manages to wriggle out of the consequences of his actions. Yet he is also the god of boundaries – the name Hermes comes from the Greek word *herma*, a pile of stones used in ancient times to mark the boundaries of property. Perhaps this paradox explains Hermes' mobility: he passes unhindered everywhere from the heights of Olympus to the depths of the Underworld.

Thoth, on the other hand, represents Ra (another sun-god), acting as his servant and scribe. He is the guardian and enforcer of the laws of Ra, the upholder and administrator of his justice. It was Thoth who intervened in the struggle between Osiris and his evil brother Seth, and cured them both of the wounds they had received. In his association with Virgo, Thoth represents control, discipline and the productive use of mental energy; he signifies the

ability to withstand conflict, to encompass the duties of daily life with dignity, and thus to be productive.

With Chiron in aspect to Mercury, however, there is another archetypal figure which frequently accompanies this aspect: the Trickster. Jung points out that the alchemical figure of Mercurius contains many typical trickster elements, and this ambiguous figure was also an important character in the palaeolithic world of myth and story. Although represented as a fool, a lecher and wily cheat, he is nevertheless a kind of culture hero credited with bringing to mankind skills such as metallurgy, the use of fire and the reckoning of time. Remnants of the Trickster may be seen today in the carnival figures of clowns, buffoons, devils, imps, griots (Africa) and Pulchinellos. These mischief-makers turn things upside-down, bringing chaos and disorder; they break the bounds of convention and taboo with celebratory delight.

The Trickster is thus a universal figure like the shaman, with whom he shares certain characteristics. He represents a form of consciousness still connected with the animal kingdom and the instincts; he can change shape at will into an animal or another human form. His energy is chaotic and amoral. The parts of his body can be autonomous. For example, he is said to be able to remove his anus and entrust it with independent tasks; his hands can fight each other, and his penis can grow long enough to cause perplexing problems! Useful plants are also said to originate from his penis, thus connecting the Trickster with the creative spirit and fertility (remember that Chiron is also credited with originating the medicinal use of plants). Thus the Trickster initially represents a chaotic, fertile and emergent consciousness. However, he is eventually pinned down and tortured; through suffering he grows in moral strength and pledges himself to serving humanity. In a sense, his progression from primitive daemon and *enfant terrible* to a figure made sober, wise and responsible through his suffering lies behind both the wily Greek Hermes and the sombre Egyptian Thoth, for the cycle of his development contains all these aspects, and it seems we forget his origins at our peril.

Psychologically, the Trickster seems to represent that within us which works in a direction contrary to our highest and most noble