

NEPTUNE



THE DREAMS THAT STUFF IS MADE OF

What is the future? What is the past? What are we? What is the magic fluid that surrounds us and conceals the things we most need to know? We live and die in the midst of marvels.


NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

Neptune presides over the oceanic realm of dreams, imagination, vision, and myth, inspiring in us the poetry, art, and music that bring conscious kinship alive in our community. The Zulu word for sleep is *butongo*, which means “the state of being one with the star gods.” When we sleep, we restore our memory of kinship with higher forces. But when we enter the illusory waking world, we forget. One way to carry the memory of kinship into the waking world is through the arts. The earliest word for “dream” (from the Old English word *drieman*) also meant to make music, which invites the notion that making music is a way of dreaming the world into being. Neptune is the part of us that sleeps, dreams, creates myths, then makes music and art to bring those myths alive.

A culture or an individual without a guiding mythology of kinship and the art to make it manifest is like a boat with no rudder

PLANET: NEPTUNE

SIGN: PISCES

Glyph: 

Key words and qualities: Dreams; vision; imagination—which lays the tracks for the Reality Train (Saturn). Any art form that inspires yearning and reminds us of the reality of our mystical kinship with all beings. Transcendental beauty. The ocean.

Color: Magenta; all diaphanous or iridescent shades of color.

Metal: Anodized metals that gleam with iridescent teal and purple.

Physical body affinity: Feet

Day: Every day; or any day spent at the beach.

Way of honoring: A daily dose of vastness; reverie; staring out the window; being at the ocean; ecstatic self-loss.

Shadow, when not honored: Without a guiding, living vision, a culture, family, or individual gets “hooked” on Neptune’s trident. Dangers include addiction to substances, or to romantic melancholy, passivity, disappointment, glamour, or bad, loud music.

being tossed upon Neptune's waves. The Neptunian realm is an infinite, diaphanous sea of dream material, constantly flowing into form and then dissolving—morphing from one incarnation into the next. In this dream world, life assumes form in response to our imagination.

The early Cabalists, in pondering how God could create the universe using nothing outside of God, mused, "How do we humans create, using no material outside ourselves?" They answered: with our imagination. We (and everything else) are made in God's image, meaning not that we look like old men with beards, but that we are dreamed in the imagination of the divine. By analogy, our imagination is the divine part of us that links us in a collaborative endeavor with God to co-create the most ingenious ongoing symbiotic evolution possible. As we are dreamed by the gods, we in turn dream reality into being.

We are constantly summoning and invoking through our imaginings, but often in an inconsistent and confused manner. Our lives, therefore, assume a corresponding design of confusion. One law of the dream world is that our personal lives are expanded or constricted by what we imagine to be possible. By analogy, our collective life is limited or expanded by the images that circulate through mass culture. Therefore, to have maximum radiating effect in our communities, we must lean into the strategic acupressure spot of public imagination.

The very fun Harlem minister Reverend Ike says, "If we can dream it up, we can dream it down," and his audiences chant this with him. Try chanting this aloud now, just for the hell of it: "If I can dream it up, I can dream it down." According to Neptune, if you don't like it, undream it and dream it again.

Neptune invites us to be public dreamers, dream artists who are willing to entertain the possibility that popular culture may be a theatrical venue for collective myth. We are invited to become Neptune's agents in the social world, ambassadors from the dream

world, stretching back imaginative boundaries, thinking of ourselves as mythmakers.

DREAM TIME

Neptune will be traveling through Aquarius from 1998 until 2012, which happens to be the end of the Mayan calendar (as well as the year Social Security is due to run out). During this time the Myth God wants to enter fully the community of humans by enlisting the aid of all those willing to change the entire climate of culture. Raise your hand if you are interested.

A Mayan vase shows the seven Lords of Time gathering on August 14, 3014 B.C., to create the world, with the promise that they'll be back at the end of time, December 23, 2012. The inscription on the vase suggests that on that date, the Lords of Time will come back to the world to host a huge party to reinvent time. Everyone's invited. Don't be late.

Neptune in Aquarius says we have a lot of dreaming to do in order to get the world-house in order for that party. We begin by asking ourselves, "Is *this* the most beautiful and loving world we can imagine and conjure?" If not, let's conjure a new shape for the world. The Neptune who lives within us constantly proffers a vision of how it could be, inspiring yearning and aspiration. Holding a vision of the desirable world allows the Neptunian protoplasm of current reality to begin to morph into that template.

Pluto moved inside Neptune's orbit in 1979, making Neptune the farthest-out planet until January 14, 1999. The farthest-out planet corresponds symbolically to the farthest-in force within our psyche. This time period makes widely available the truth that imagination presides over power. If we can dream something, we can summon the power and the means necessary to accomplish it.

While these dates mark times when Neptune's energy is especially intense, Neptune's dream world is always available to us. The

trick is, we need to step out of time to find this part of ourselves. If we pose the question, "Do we have enough time?"—to save the world, answer our mail, return our phone calls—Neptune responds that it depends on what kind of time we are invoking. If we think of Saturn time—realistic, tick-tick-tick time—then the answer is, "Of course not." But if we think of Neptune time, dream time (which in Chinese fairy tales is called "irrational time"), then the answer is, "Yes, we have all the time we need." In fairy tales, people step into magic caves or through the backs of wardrobes, have countless adventures in the fairy realm, but return to their "normal" daytime world to find that only a few minutes have elapsed.

Neptune wants us to think renaissance rather than apocalypse: "Not the end of time, but the end of the domination of time." The nineteenth-century magician Eliphas Levi said that leading a magical life requires that we not be frightened of time, but that we "conduct ourselves as though we were kings and queens with all eternity before us."

When we pause in dream time to gather our wits, we are reminded that beauty is abundantly available to the unhurried mind. Conscious reveries, trance—any portal to ecstatic self-loss, such as diving through a sun-dappled wave—are all forms of worshiping Neptune. Neptune rewards us for these acts of reverence with inspiration.

REVERIE, REFLECTION, AND REVERSAL

Neptune's realm is the unhurried, imaginative dream state, which is always available to us through the act of conscious reflection.

All cultures have their biases—preferred energetic states and qualities of mind—encouraging some, while emphatically discouraging others. Mainstream Western orthodoxy, for example, has had little tolerance for the crucial part of us that communes with the world through associative reverie.

While gazing out the window in fifth grade, gathering inspiration during a test, I remember being interrupted by the teacher's harsh voice: "Casey, what are you doing?"

"I'm thinking," I responded.

"Oh, I thought you were looking out the window," the teacher said with triumphant sarcasm.

"Some of us can do both," was my snappy rejoinder, causing me to be sent once again to the principal's office for the Neptunian crime of daydreaming.

Our culture often views going to the beach (or gazing out the window) as "escapism," while Neptune says *not* going to the beach, literally or metaphorically, is escaping from necessary reflection. Neptune presides over the realm of water. As water reflects a reverse image, so gazing at water induces a reversal of consciousness, a hypnotic state of reverie. Neptune says that the reverse of common sense is wisdom.

Dartmoor is a wonderfully spooky, mysterious, fog-enshrouded place in the southwest of England, where tradition holds that pixies and trickster spirits will lure you off the path into quicksand if you are not reverent. It is a disorienting place, reminding us that we have to get disoriented before we can get oriented. Local advice is to turn your clothes inside out before you enter the moor; this act of reversal serves as a respectful ritual obeisance to the pixies, who then treat you respectfully as well. The principle here is that reversing ideas about reality reveals truths that grant us safe passage.

In his book *The Soul's Code*, cultural agent/provocateur James Hillman reverses an orthodox psychological theory. Winston Churchill was a tremendous stutterer when he was little, and yet he grew up to be one of the most brilliant orators of his time. The great bullfighter Manolete, as a child, was a pathetic weenie, clinging to his mother's apron strings. Yet he grew up to face thousand-pound bulls in the ring. Conventional psychology would say that both

men, in working to overcome their afflictions, overcompensated, and thereby created their destinies.

Hillman posits the opposite: when we are little, some part of us knows our destiny and feels daunted by it; hence, our destinies invoke our afflictions. Some part of young Winston Churchill *knew* that he was going to grow up to address thousands of people as a great orator and was so daunted by his destiny that it made him stutter. If we are a young boy and part of our psyche *knows* that we are going to face massive horned bulls in the ring, we're likely to hold tight to our mother's skirts. It is useful to extend this "daunted by destiny" theory beyond the realm of childhood to include any time in our lives when we feel intimidated. Think of it as a temporary shrinking from the potential greatness of our mission.

We recoil before we take action. The snake coils before it strikes. Coiled reflection precedes fast, effective motion. The Zen monk reflects for six months, and then executes the masterful painting in five minutes. The invisible broods the visible. Reality gestates in the dream world.

A friend of mine had long been estranged from her son, which caused her great sadness. One day the situation was no longer tolerable. Remembering that the invisible world would like to help, but that spiritual etiquette requires that we ask, she asked for a dream that would clarify and guide her to resolve the situation. That night she had a dream in which she saw her son with an octopus wrapped around his heart. When she awoke, she recalled the dream with a shudder, and then thought, "Hmmm. What to do?"

While recalling the dream, she entered a state of active imagination in which, in her mind's eye, she shape-shifted into a porpoise who butted at the octopus until it let go of her son and swam away. The next day, in "real" life, her son called for the first time in years and they began a loving dialogue to resolve their differences.

The imaginative implications of this story are manifold and heartening. Once we translate reality into Neptune's language of meaningful dream metaphor, Neptune's magic becomes available to transform our lives. Any quandary—personal, spiritual, or political—can best be resolved once it is viewed symbolically, as though in a dream. Once we have translated it into imagery, we can work on it imaginatively, bypassing the tyranny of depressing realism.

Imagine that all of us, together, are dreaming the news: "We dreamed the Arab and Israeli parts of ourselves were causing each other violence." What part of each of us is symbolically Palestinian? Jewish? How might we reverence these parts of ourselves and bring them into accord? We supplicate Neptune to give us the healing dream that contains the answer. When we enter the dream world, we become co-creators of Mythic News rather than passive consumers of the eleven o'clock news.

Once I was in a rural pub in Ireland. The regular patrons and I talked astrology long into the night. The cast of astrological characters was wonderfully literal: the Taurus was a farmer, the Gemini was a newspaper reporter, the Scorpio was a detective, and so on. We all got on so famously that I was invited into the back room, where I was introduced to some IRA men "down from the North." We spoke of the Troubles, for which, they said, "There's no solution." "Well, if there's no solution, then the only resolution is prayer, music, and magic," I said. They raised their drinks and said, "That's exactly right." And we all toasted, "To prayers, music, and magic as the only solution to the world's ills!"

CONSCIOUS KINSHIP

Neptune says that the greatest of our illusions is separateness. The African teacher Sobonfu Somé tells us that in her village in Burkina Faso, if a man mistreats his wife, all of the women in the community show up on his doorstep to counsel him and give his wife protection until the situation is harmoniously resolved. The same

would be true if a man were mistreated by his lover; all of the men would show up to defend him and offer wise counsel. Neptune invites us to heal the illusion of isolation through such pragmatic forms of imaginative intervention.

Nathaniel Hawthorne reminds us that "man must not disclaim his brotherhood even with the guiltiest." In one of the high forms of Japanese language, every verb is prefaced by saying "played at." I "played at" going to work. I "played at" getting married. Even, with full Plutonian bravado, "I hear your father 'played at' dying." Having everyone "play at" everything reminds us that we are all on the same team.

Neptune says that even players currently in bad positions are still considered part of the team. One of the joyful teachings of the Buddha is that everyone, even the most villainous badass, eventually becomes enlightened. All are on the team of creation. The bodhisattvas are those who patiently wait for the last straggler before stepping off into the joys of complete merging. Neptune reminds us that we are both the straggler and the compassionate one who waits.

Conscious kinship applies equally to our relations with other people as it does to our relations with the natural world around us. The British philosopher Sir Herbert Read said, "Only people serving an apprenticeship to nature can be trusted with machines."

For as long as we have had poetic memory, human imagination has been tied to the sea. Just as we have poisoned the oceans, so have we poisoned our imaginations. The opposite also holds true: only the death of imagination could have allowed humans to poison the seas. Neptune would say that we have devolved because we no longer have a vital mythology of kinship. Neptune calls upon us to reverse the war on nature.

Neptune also says that whatever we wish well will reciprocate. Once I was snorkeling in Hawaii, following a serenely graceful sea turtle, when several yahoo tourists swam up and shouted to their buddies, "Hey, over here, a sea turtle! Let's mess with it." When they

began to chase and grab at it, I felt a Kali-like protective rage boiling inside me and, mustering some pretense of officialdom, yelled, "Hey, I'm from the Department of Kali, quit harassing that turtle!" They whined and complained, but went away. I continued to watch the turtle, who glided off in a different direction. Then it looked back at me to make sure I was following. I am really quite sure.

We slowly swam a labyrinthine path and emerged through an opening in the reef to find hundreds of sea turtles swooping and gliding amid towers of coral honeycombed with caves. It was as though the turtle said, "Well, you did me a favor, and now I'll take you to Sea Turtle World." Whatever we protect will guide us.

A friend spent two years of her life seeking and achieving the release of an elephant, Fanny, who had been miserably chained in a Rhode Island zoo. My friend's reward was that, upon being unshackled for the first time in thirty-three years at an animal sanctuary in Texas, Fanny was united with another elephant that had been released from similar bondage. Fanny had not seen another of her species since the age of four, when her family was killed in order to cull the babies and sell them to zoos. Yet when the two elephants first saw each other, they trumpeted, entwined their trunks, fed each other straw, then frolicked in the lake together. It's never too late to have a good time.

One might wonder about the utility of such devotion—spending two years seeking to heal the dire circumstances of one animal. But Neptune's truth is that we are all one, that we share the misery and ecstasy of all creatures. Good done lovingly for one is good for the whole team.

A Sufi story tells of a student who complains to his teacher about the cruel realities of the world. The teacher replies, "Yes, of course, but if it weren't for the hidden work of those who pray, imagine, dream, and act compassionately when the opportunity presents itself, things would be *much* worse."

Everything that we do, in private or in public, affects the whole of creation. This awareness can give us the fortitude to act on our own behalf when we would not feel justified making the effort purely on our own part. I often tell clients suffering from abuse, "Look, you owe it to the whole team of people in similar circumstances to emerge from passivity and take creative action." Our personal problems are never strictly personal, but are imbued with the nobility of having taken them on for us all.

BUILDING AN ALTAR TO THE GOD WHO'S BEEN OPPRESSING YOU

The *Odyssey* provides a Neptunian initiation tale. After fighting the Trojan War, Ulysses' single goal is to reach home. But because Ulysses has angered Neptune by blinding the one-eyed Cyclops, one of Neptune's children, the sea god sends disorienting winds and extravagant, weird, erotic adventures to distract Ulysses and blow him off course. Who can't relate?

Finally, Ulysses consults Tiresias, the blind Underworld prophet, a kind of Pluto figure, who says, "You have angered Neptune. Here's the ritual you must perform. Take an oar, a symbol of the sea, and walk it inland. When you get to a place where no one has ever seen the sea, there you must build a temple to the god who has been oppressing you."

So Ulysses does this, walking inland until somebody asks him if the oar is a piece of a windmill, so he knows he has found the right place. He builds a temple to Neptune, the god who has been oppressing him, and it works. In an act of reversal magic, Neptune becomes his ally and sends him sweet winds. Ulysses sails for home, where he reclaims his kingdom.

Our task is to reflect upon what it might mean to build a temple to the god who has been oppressing us. What kind of oar do we take inland? The Neptunian part of us says that to liberate our-

selves, we must carry our vision inland to where nobody has ever heard of it before, and give our gift there. It is easy to hang out in a homogeneous neighborhood; go somewhere new.

TRANSCENDING CERTAINTY

Neptune represents our alliance with mystery's capacity to perpetually garb itself in fresh incarnational metaphor. When the old myths have degraded into belief or ossified into dogma, they no longer have the vitality to catalyze our dance with the divine. In fact, doctrinal rigidity or certainty is the toxic impediment to the effective dreaming that can truly change the world. Neptune reminds us not to hitch our star to a wagon of certainty, for the Neptunian imaginative capacity thrives on ambiguity.

In tarot cards, the Emperor is shown in profile (with only one eye showing), ruling over a desolate landscape. This reminds us that any view is necessarily one-sided and incomplete, and that reason without imagination creates a barren and sterile wasteland. Neptune tells us not to settle too surely into one vision.

An alchemical aphorism states that "dissolution is the secret of the Great Work"; first Neptune dissolves certainty so that a new, larger vision can emerge. As we recall (from the Pisces section), Neptune's primary demon is addiction to anything in order to numb the pain of not having a sustaining vision. Neptune would remind us to beware the addiction to certainty.

"When someone is honestly fifty-five percent right, that's very good and there's no use wrangling. And if someone is sixty percent right, it's wonderful, it's great luck, and let him thank God. But what's to be said about seventy-five percent right? Wise people say this is suspicious. Well, and what about one hundred percent right? Whoever says he is one hundred percent right is a fanatic, a thug, and the worst kind of rascal."⁸

As prophecies and predictions rise, remember to vote for reality with your imagination. Neptune instructs us to honor dark likeli-

hoods not by ignoring them, but rather by using them as catalytic incentives to dream up something more desirable.

Neptune says, "Divine inspiration is preferable to divine intervention," and would dissolve all myths of alien saviors—or even one embodied savior. According to Kafka, by the time the Messiah shows up, we will no longer need him. Neptune warns that to yearn for the external *deus ex machina* is an abdication of our imaginative responsibility to dream a better world into being.

TRY THIS AT HOME: FEEDING THE GOD

To be effective agents of change in our personal and collective lives, we need to feed our Neptunes a daily dose of vastness, beauty, and reverie to balance the hyper-yang stress of modern busyness.

I am always learning from my clients. Those who do well when everyone else is having a hard, spaced-out, or stressed time tell me, "I'm spending most of my time doing Zen gardening," or, "I get up every morning and spend two hours writing down my dreams and then I can function," or, "I spend a lot of time gazing at the moon."

Malnourished Neptune gives rise to feelings of alienation. The comedian Steven Wright said, "I woke up this morning and discovered that all of my things had been replaced with exact replicas." Some mornings are like that.

Anomie is a word that sounds like what it means: "Ah, no me," or loss of self. Feed your Neptune if you experience any of the following symptoms: loss of sense of self or purpose; feelings of being awash or messed with by aliens; feeling spaced out; having no traction and no motivation; experiencing disorientation and lack of focus.

When we cannot focus, Neptune asks, What are we meant to focus on? What is trying to get our attention? Honor your feelings of disorientation by diving into them more fully, rather than suppressing them with drugs, irrelevant attempts at normalcy, or perkiness.

All of us probably know the experience of coming into a room and forgetting what we came in for. Neptune's diagnosis of this experience would not be premature senility, but rather that the part of us that needed nonguilty reverie and staring-out-the-window time was underfed. We neglected it, so it took space-out time in the midst of focused activity.

By analogy, the U.S. government has lost hundreds of pounds of plutonium, the most lethal toxin known. In a sense, the government has come into the room and said, "Gad, I completely forgot where I put the plutonium." The Neptunian diagnosis would be that this must be a mythologically illiterate culture that undervalues contemplation and reverie, or it would not have lost the plutonium.

Our challenge is to stake out time for dreaming, poetry, music, and gazing into the distance. In return, Neptune will grant crisp focus when needed.

We know Neptune is at work (or play) in our lives, when we feel "at sea." If we are relaxed, confusion and disorientation may be experienced as a sense of mystery, sent by Neptune to remind us that we are much larger than our current circumstance or self-definition.

Each of us has an important vision for the community, and a part to play in the guiding mythology of kinship. The Lakota seer Black Elk said that we all, at some point in our lives, have a great vision for the well-being of our community. But we often go to sleep to our dream, rather than awakening it through creative expression.

Many Buddhist texts end with fantastic descriptions of beautiful heavenly gardens suffused with refined, fragrant incense (not coconut) wafting everywhere. The very last section of the sutra will say in effect, "And you are there now. Can you relate?" Christian mythology says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Imaginative reverie melts the world's illusory realism, so that the garden shimmers around us all once more.