

DREAM WORK: INTEGRATING NEPTUNE

By Dena DeCastro

The topics of astrology and dream interpretation were simultaneous interests for me in my teenage years. I read voraciously about astrology and I practiced interpreting charts of friends and family. It was a long-held tradition among the women in our family to practice what I now recognize as Dream Work. We would tell each other of our significant dreams, then try to decipher their meaning for each other. Even then, I recognized astrology and Dream Work as complementary paths to self-understanding, even if I couldn't yet put into words how these esoteric traditions were related.

Whenever I have a vivid dream, I still feel both excitement and awe. It is as if I have been given a direct message about my life by some greater, wiser intelligence. I am keeping my mind open as to what, exactly, that intelligence is. Those who are spiritually inclined may call it God, Spirit or the Mystery. Those with a New Age perspective might believe dreams to be sent by our Higher Self, guides, or angels. Secular materialists would say that dreams are simply our neurons firing randomly in the REM state while our brain processes the events of the day, like a computer defragmenting its hard drive.

But no matter what I know to be the source of my dreams, my strong emotional response to them is undeniable. I am experiencing a feeling of connection to something greater than I.

In astrological terms, this feeling of connection is the same state of being I attribute to a positive expression of Neptune. Throughout my work as an astrologer, I have consistently recommended Dream Work to those clients with a prominent natal Neptune, or to those undergoing Neptune transits. Dream Work is the process of actively engaging one's dreams. This can be done by various means including: journaling, active imagination, group work and ritual. In this article, I'll describe some of the ways in which Dream Work can be a useful modality for working with Neptune. I will also expand upon some of the ways to practice working with one's dreams.

History and Background

When I wrote my Master's thesis on divination practices throughout the history of the Christian Church, my intent was to show that astrology was

once an accepted means of divination within Christian practice. What I found, in addition, was yet another way to understand dreams as a Neptunian phenomenon. Early Christians believed that God spoke through omens, portents, signs. One of the ways it was believed God communicated was through "heavenly portents" (astrology). And another way was through dreams. In the Bible, there are several instances wherein God speaks to his people through dreams, both in symbolic language and in straightforward messages. Because these biblical references to dreams were well-established, *oneiromancy*, the interpretation of dreams as prophecy, became a regular practice within early Christian tradition. (DeCastro, 2007, pp. 46-48) [1]

In those times, astrology and dreams were both looked at as a means to foretell the future, to *divine* in the true sense of that word (as the root of *divination*). In the early modern era, our use of both astrology and dreams shifted toward the psycho-analytical approach. The pioneers of psychology, Freud and Jung, used their client's dreams for analysis and diagnosis. Freud used dream analysis in his work and wrote extensively about the topic. And of course Jung used both dream analysis and astrology in his work.

Today, with the rise in our orientation toward personal development, the opportunity is to move astrology and Dream Work beyond being tools of prediction or even purely self-analysis. Instead, we can work proactively with the symbols of our charts, and our dreams, in order to achieve personal growth and spiritual evolution.

Dream Work and Neptune

Dreams open us up to messages from our unconscious that the conscious mind, ruled by the ego, filters out. When we are asleep, symbols and images can emerge from the deep waters of the unconscious, as the ego is no longer running the show. Through dreams, we receive messages from a place beyond the ego's reach. Dream Work—the act of bringing our nighttime dreams into our waking life—helps us to temporarily let the rules of the daylight world dissolve so that we can hear these messages from beneath the surface.

Through Dream Work, we can achieve a flow state, a Neptunian place where we can → page 7

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release our identification with the day world of the ego. Therefore, Dream Work is by its nature, a Neptunian endeavor. The wisdom of our dreams can then help us integrate Neptune and navigate Neptunian times. And we do need guidance: Neptune is often a difficult energy with which to grapple because of its ego-dissolving nature. As Robert Hand writes in *Planets in Transit*:

"The difficulty of the planet's influence arises from the fact that Neptune dissolves whatever Saturn builds, such as your ego, your sense of duty and responsibility, your sense of a definite reality and everything else about the world that is definite, clear and predictable....It dissolves or threatens to dissolve your ego, so that initially you feel lost, confused or defeated. But this effect can also make you feel exhilarated and at one with the entire universe. It depends upon your level of consciousness (Hand, 1976, p. 425)." [2]

Dream Work helps us to bridge that expanse between ego and the transpersonal, offering a handhold as we let go of our grasp on ordinary reality and open to a Neptunian mode of perception. And through this process, we can raise our level of consciousness to achieve a feeling of oneness with that "something greater."

Still, Neptune can be especially abstract and difficult to interpret. For example, we read and hear many vague descriptions of Neptune being "about spirituality." What does that mean, exactly? When one is undergoing a Neptune transit, an astrologer might say that this is a "confusing" time. But what can be done about it? When Neptune is conjunct the client's Sun, we may speak of the client as having "psychic abilities" or being "sensitive." But how can we help the client to utilize these abilities, rather than be at the mercy of them?

As an Evolutionary Astrologer, I aim to offer practical suggestions so that the client can engage their natal charts proactively. I steer away from description and prediction, and I instead focus on offering strategies for personal development. When Neptune is focalized by its natal placement and aspects, or by factors within the client's forecast, it is important to give the client

a means to bring this potentially heady, abstract energy down to earth. In my work as an astrologer over the past 20 years, I have found Dream Work to be a reliably helpful strategy for those clients with major Neptunian themes in their natal or forecast chart.

Dream Work Practices

The following is not an all-inclusive list of every practice but is a compilation of the most useful methods of Dream Work that I have personally used and have recommended to clients. I have also incorporated these techniques into my ongoing Spiritual Direction client work. These are the methods that have yielded the most positive feedback, and sometimes instantaneous epiphanies communicated by the client.

Active Imagination: The dreamer imagines themselves going back into the dream to rectify or change anything that distressed them, rewriting the dream script. They can do so in a journal or share the experience with a Dream Work partner. This method is particularly useful in processing nightmares. The dreamer can experience a sense of relief and even healing after working in this way with a disturbing dream.

I Am the Other: The dreamer imagines themselves as another person within the dream (if the dream has more than one character involved). Then, they write a description of themselves as the other person, looking at everything within the dream from the other's perspective. From this, one can glean a sense of seeing oneself in the other, and the reverse. This method also offers clues about those qualities we wish to disown or project onto others.

Incubating a Dream: This is the classic "sleep on it" method of problem-solving. The dreamer sets forth a problem or issue before going to sleep and asks their unconscious for guidance to come via their dreams. Upon waking, the dreamer writes down whatever they can remember, even if it is only a fragment, even if nothing yet seems to make sense. Sometimes, the answer is not initially discernible, but some percolation time throughout the day is required in order to glean the message. Other times, the dreamer can quickly get an answer, especially once they have a bit of practice in reading their own dream symbols. → page 8

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Journaling and Reflection: The dreamer keeps an ongoing dream journal, making notes at the end of each entry with any insights. Insights might include observed patterns, synchronistic connections between one's dream and waking life, and self-awareness regarding one's fears and neuroses. Becoming aware leads to the ability to work consciously on these issues.

In each of the above methods, we can see the mark of Neptune. "Active Imagination" asks the dreamer to exercise their imaginative capabilities by letting go of the scripted story of the dream, opening a space to improvise a new story. The "I Am the Other" approach invites the dreamer to let go of ego identification, encouraging the view that we are all one. "Incubating a Dream" necessitates that the dreamer trust in the wisdom of the unconscious mind and be willing to let go of the ego's need to have all the answers. And "Journaling and Reflection" emboldens a deep-dive exploration of one's unconscious material, bringing that material to conscious awareness. Each of these paths can help a client to grapple with the sometimes-murky presence of Neptune by offering grounded ways to work with the material in their own psyche.

Projective Dream Work

By far the most Neptunian of Dream Work practices, however, is a modality called *Projective Dream Work*. This model requires at least one other person besides the dreamer (sometimes called a "dream buddy"), or preferably a small group, in which to share one's dreams. It is helpful to have a short-term commitment, at least, of a few sessions in which to do this work. This commitment creates a greater feeling of safety and trust amongst the group and between individuals.

I spent several years participating in various dream groups wherein we used the Projective Dream Work model. This practice was defined and created by author and Unitarian-Universalist minister Jeremy Taylor [3]. There are rules to this practice, and they are as follows:

- The dreamer shares their dream with the group or partner, speaking in the present-tense.
- The dreamer tells the story of the dream without background explanation or self-interruption.
- Once the dreamer has shared, the group (in turn) or partner offers their impressions of the dream starting with the following phrase: "If I am the dreamer. . ." All statements about the dream are made from the first-person position, imagining oneself as the dreamer. In other words, the participants project themselves onto the dream.
- The participants do not analyze the dream, nor do they make statements such as: "I think your dream means..." The intention is to imagine one is the dreamer, and to share impressions from that perspective.
- Once insights and impressions have been shared, the

dreamer may offer their feedback about what they received from the session.

What makes this type of Dream Work especially Neptunian in its orientation is the very important rule about using "I" statements, putting oneself in the place of the dreamer. This forces the participants or the dream partner to imagine themselves in the dreamer's shoes. In doing so, each participant or dream partner also receives insights and wisdom, not only the dreamer. In looking through the eyes of another, the dream workers are also able to learn about themselves.

Based upon my experience in several dream groups using this method, I have suggested Projective Dream Work as a tool for clients to use in navigating their own Neptunian passages, or in working with their natal Neptune. I explain to them this method of working with dreams, and I recommend a "dream buddy" or a dream group. I recommend the other methods as well. But Projective Dream Work is an especially potent and efficient system for helping us to bring the Neptunian realm into our daily lives in a tangible way. ☘

Citations

1. DeCastro, Dena. (2007) *Mystical Discernment in Christianity: Ancient Ways of Knowing within Christian Practice*. (Master's thesis) Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, OR.
2. Hand, Robert. (1976) *Planets in Transit*. Atglen, PA: Whitford Press.
3. Find out more about Jeremy Taylor and his work at: http://www.jeremytaylor.com/dream_work/

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