

North Node As *Numinosum*

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As an astrologer at the Millennium, I am consulted for different reasons than in previous decades. Whereas earlier the questions mostly concerned the Big Three - work/money, sex, and health - there is a distinct shift towards asking astrology to direct a client's spiritual quest and to describe the native's place and purpose in a larger cosmos. Over the past twenty years, I have started most every astrological reading with the question: "Why are you here today? What would you like out of this reading?" The issues raised by this inquiry have hitherto centered largely on the aforementioned emotional issues. The contemporary answers I am getting and the connections they have to our time is the topic of this article.

Also at the Millennium, there is a prevalent looseness with philosophical terms. While science and the language of the politically correct seem to be getting increasingly specific with new words added all the time, in the philosophical community, old words such as soul, psyche, collective unconscious and spirituality are being re-applied and peddled to the public *en masse*. Let me therefore define the terms *spirituality* and *spiritual quest* for the purpose of this article. I will use the term spirit - loosely meaning filled with air - as that which is opposed to matter, that which transcends the physical form. While when many speak of reality they are referring to

scientifically measurable earth matters, the spiritual reality I am referring to here is that lightness of being we enjoy when we step outside of our body and transcend the physical: in memories, in daydreams, and in fantasies. Because we are not restricted by the limitations of hard matter, in this spiritual, airy world there are no limits to our weightlessness. We can conjure up ideas, juggle them in the air, and have anyone we please drop in for a chat, like Mary Pop-in-s, We are connecting to an unlimited experience beyond the physical world to which we are attached, quite literally, by gravity, or *gravis*, and where our body ends up in the grave. We are able to feel connected to what is beyond us and this, like a breath of fresh air, fills us with a sense of freedom. While some term these escapades flights of fancy, others call these experiences religious. No matter the label, they are experiences of transcending.

The way to this “other” realm has, through the ages, been linked to the element of each particular Age. Going back to the Age of earthy Taurus, (very roughly 4000-2000 BCE), the *post mortem* voyage into the unknown was accompanied by a plethora of objects, entombed in large earthy vaults, and hidden in - or beneath - huge earthy structures. In the Age of fiery Aries (very roughly 2000 - 0 BCE), burning bushes, fiery rituals, and myths about lightning bridged us to the other world. At the current Millennium shift, as we leave the Age of watery Pisces, we are only beginning to awaken from the emotional, blurry era from which we are barely emerging. We are surfacing from a submerged time where symbols of fish, the discovery of the unconscious and a climax in unbridled capitalism that uses watery symbols - liquidity, banks, frozen assets, and cash flow – were paramount. Now, at the dawning of the Age of airy Aquarius, the philosopher is seeking to go beyond by reaching towards the stars and thinking about things in new ways. Airy connections are now made between previously unrelated issues and between before unrelated individuals, peoples, and galaxies. Tools such as the Internet, mass transportation by plane

and an unprecedented access to information and places is freeing great masses of the shackles that governments and religious institutions once held over them. No longer are we bound by place, tied to our homeland, and rooted to the family. One of the many flip sides of this latest revolution is a delirious high from information overload, a guru-infested mega mall of ideas where hyperventilating masses pass out.

Astrologers must keep up with the shift in Ages that is reflected in the shift of the collective consciousness. Mostly, we have been counseling in a muddy, earth-watery, and emotional world thereby working side-by-side with psychologists, clergy, and others in the helping professions. By delineating a person's personality, how her inner characters are combined and interacting on her inner stage, we astrologers have provided a service for a long time. We described how the native was best to handle money, where her strengths and weaknesses were in relationships, and how best to deal with a difficult health issue.

At the dawning of the Age of Aquarius - as its symbols are appearing virtually, literally, artistically and architecturally (*c.f.* Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum and the new Rose Center for Earth and Space in New York City) - we also had a significant conjunction of Uranus and Neptune in Aquarius in the mid nineteen-nineties. While Richard Tarnas has aptly described the Uranus-Neptune conjunction cycle as an indicator of times for the imaginal to break through to the masses, a simple analysis of the answers I get to my introductory questions before readings may serve as hint of what the latest conjunction is heralding.

Increasingly, people are searching for spiritual meaning. They are seeking to connect with their spirituality. They want to move beyond the physical where the world is awash with

capitalism, and where organized religion is drowning in a sea of skepticism. Slowly, the idea is sinking in that perhaps happiness is not found in a new car. Increasingly, individual human beings are awakening to the realization that something is not good simply because it makes money. Therefore, the more we are threatened to drown in pop-psychology, religion, and capitalism, the more perhaps we yearn to be lifted beyond into the world of spirit, of air.

The new answer I am getting in my brief interview is: "I am here to talk about my purpose in life, why I am here, what my place is in the larger order of things." A recent article in a national publication asked the question: if you could talk directly to a higher power, God, infinite being, the divine, whatever, and ask one question, what would you ask? The top question, hands down, was: "What is my purpose in life?" Perhaps, as astrologers, we now have a new task to perform and a new set of answers to provide. But, are we equipped?

For over twenty years, I have focused my astrological practice on precisely this question. While I am interested in personality and how we psychologically create and interact with the world around us, I have always been most interested in the question of what a person's purpose is here in life, their calling. There has always been, I figured, a place where the soul wants to go to in this lifetime. I define soul here as that part of us which is immortal and extends beyond our physical life, both before and after. Soul: a backpack into which we gather experiences along our lives paths. This is a view of soul that extends its existence through many lifetimes and comes to the western world from India and Buddhism. Twenty-five-hundred years ago, Gautama Buddha awakened many to the ancient mysteries that held answers to life's most basic question when he described life as an episode, what the Orientalist often refers to as a bead on a string of pearls.

Here is an image: let me describe a set of train tracks to you. Suppose your soul is traveling on an endless train track. It comes from infinity and goes to infinity. If you are so inclined, you may call this infinity the divine, God, the Universe, whatever. This reminds me of the words of T.S. Eliot:

*And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

The important part is to see a continuum with ever increasing *knowing* along the way. Not information, *knowing*: those numinous moments that fill you with awe because their sacred power has been experienced by you. Like great sex, where you know the other person (in the biblical sense, so to speak), or when you know a symphony. On this train track, in a certain time and place, the soul bursts through a membrane stretched across the track and gains a physical body. You are born. At another point along the track your soul breaks through another membrane and leaves your body. You die. The period between these two points we call life on Earth and we are here in linear time. The process is repeated several times until - following ancient esoteric teachings - we have learned all our lessons on the cross of life (described by the intersection of the MC-IC and ASC-DES axis in astrology) and become enlightened or once again part of the place I loosely call the divine. The two key parts of this image are a place of learning towards where your soul needs to go, and a place of gathered experiences from where your soul originates. This place of origin carries with it all experiences and knowing from previous incarnations.

There is also a train on the track. In the dining car of the train, there is a group of characters. Some call them “parts of me,” some call them planets, some call them archetypes, some

call them actors on a stage, and some call them personality traits. No matter what you call them, they are inter-acting in distinct ways. Some are at war, perhaps having a food fight; some are flirting in the corner. One character is perhaps even turned away and not wanting to talk to anyone. This scene is described in your natal chart as your inner play, your inner workings: all the struggles, harmonies, rifts, feuds, romances, seductions, and any other human emotion you can name. Behaviorists study what the characters do and try to change the script by offering chocolate. Gestalt therapists buy a ticket, get on board, and get emotionally involved in the ongoing interactions.

But remember the train is on a track. The soul has laid out a specific direction for you. There is a calling to be hearkened, a purpose to be fulfilled, and a mission impossible to be tackled. At birth, the train leaves the birth station and is immediately on its way to your final destination - destiny. The question is, do the characters on board know where your train is headed? Perhaps you are approaching your mid-life crisis; do you know where your track is going? There are also switches along the train track. Sometimes there's a choice between two directions: sometimes there are eleven choices. And there are also signals along the way. Some are quiet and we zoom by, others are loud and flashing neon signs. We call these signs calamities and dreams. We may or may not change direction. We may be so caught up with our personality that we simply have no idea what the soul wants to learn.

The soul's learning is described by the end station of the track. It is the description of a place, not a personality trait. Your life purpose is not a specific career, you are not called to be something particular. You are called to explore a place. If I say Paris or Florida, you will conjure

up different images of these places. Your soul is here to learn what is indicated by its place of destiny.

Such becomes now the millennial Astrologer's task: to conjure up the description of places that the soul needs to learn about, thus answering the predominant question of our time. But how?

Enter the Moon's Nodes and the power that these curvy glyphs in the chart hold. *The North Node is a signpost that quietly indicates your calling, where your soul wants to go, your purpose in life.* It is as powerful as that, seemingly as simple as that, and immediately as complex as that statement. Rather than attempt to make a case here for why this is so by going back to Indian mythology, Rahu and Ketu, and dragons, I instead challenge the reader to an experiment. Seasoned astrologers will perhaps find it worth their while to look over a dozen familiar charts under this proposed light. Novice astrologers or laypeople interested in their purpose may find it beneficial to have someone tell them where their Moon's Nodes are (there are two Moon's Nodes, the North Node is where you are headed, the South Node is where you are coming from – they are always exactly on opposite sides of an astrological chart), and to guide them in the integration of the chart as described below. In case after case and story after story, I am repeatedly humbled by the power of the North Node. I have focused my entire practice on learning about how a native's personality - traditional makeup of the chart - helps or hinders the soul in its quest to get to the North Node. For instance, having three planets on the South Node might translate into a giant rubber band that pulls your train back to where you were at birth. As such, this constellation can remind you of issues that you have dealt with in previous lives, things that come easily, naturally but where you “can't get no satisfaction” in this lifetime.

Or, Neptune conjunct your North Node can put the train station of your destiny into dense fog, leaving you lost about your purpose and demanding of you special courage to head forward into the fog, trusting that the tracks will roll you into the station in due time.

Because of our physical anchoring in the earthy, material and sensual world, the house position of the North Node is more important than its sign. This is misunderstood in many texts. Because you need to have the birth chart to describe the North Node's house position and a simple table can let anyone easily find their North Node's sign position, there tends to be a focus on the sign before the house in most textbooks. I cannot emphasize enough how much more important the house placement is when helping a client understand their destination. The house points out where in the world your soul wants to go. If you align your personality with this place, there is a sense of contentment, of being in the zone, of being congruent with your purpose; a sensation that is hard to describe but recognizable by most. There is also a certain reverence or even fear inherent in this place. It is the sensation of stage fright. You know you have to do it but you resist. The serenity you feel when you do go is in part due to the overcoming of the fear and the awe-some feeling of doing that which you must. Finally, the astrological sign of the North Node then adds flavoring to the description of its house placement: is it Libran/Venusian? Cancerian/Loony?

Once I know my purpose in life as described to me astrologically by the house position of the North Node, I have only just begun. There is not a quick formula to answer the complex question of purpose. There are not twelve callings because there are twelve houses. The variable is the personality. What kind of gear do I have to get there? Anyone on board know about trains? Is there an engineer in the house? As a psychologically aware astrologer, I must learn to integrate the complete chart into this one place. Is this a wild man traveling to Paris? An Eskimo

going to Florida? The overriding idea here is to create congruency between personality and purpose, between what you want and what your soul needs. The ride is neither a straight line nor a quick journey. At times, we back-track, are sidetracked, get off track or even lose sight of the track. Mostly, I tell my clients: this is a life long trip; it may, in fact, take more than one lifetime to fully explore your destination as indicated. The grand photographer Ansel Adams was once asked what the most important item was in his dark room. His response was simply, "The trash can."

There are also those who prefer to reverse the train to the place of departure and not set off in any direction at all. I have found this to be true particularly for natives with a very harmonious chart. This is what some have poignantly called a "cruising life." On the other hand, natives with much tension in the chart, with experiences of pain, separation, death, and other milestones along their tracks seem more akin to exploring their North Node. Most often, when I describe the North Node to these natives, they have an intense emotional reaction, frequently including tears of relief. How many times have I heard, "I knew it!"?

Some astrological callings go against the current dictums of society. This alone may prevent a person from following their track. For instance, a 1st house North Node may call you to explore being more self-centered and saying, to yourself and the public, this is I! Of course, this is not a very Piscean, self-sacrificing purpose that might be politically more correct. However, for every 1st house North Node native, there is (at least statistically), a 7th house North Node native whose purpose is to be less selfish and take her cues from the Other.

Perhaps the reader will allow me to share a few observations I have made over the years. First, it is quite often the case that the North Node is in the *element* (by sign or house) that is the least represented in the chart or that is otherwise not present at all. This observation cements the

importance of the North Node. Here the North Node also indicates the place where you can explore the element you lack. Second, the native must learn how to understand the South Node. This place shows an area of refuge, of illusions, of quick fixes. For instance, I can help a desolate client feel better if I offer them activities indicated by the South Node. By moving, even temporarily, to the place of comfort, the South Node, we can quickly feel OK but in the long run our life seems to lack meaning in that place. We feel as though we have been sitting on a couch too long in need of a good stretch. Say, for instance, I have the North Node in the 6th house. I am thus called to service and to work diligently in my surrounding world. If I am in crisis and feel overwhelmed with the busy, busy life I find myself in, going off to sit in isolation in a place of worship (12th house South Node) would give me an instant sense of relief but would not, in the long run, fulfill me. Finally, transits to the Moon's Nodes can be paralleled to shining light at the areas indicated. For example, if transiting Saturn is conjunct a client's South Node (and therefore opposing his North Node), I tend to explore with him the meaning of his South Node. This may not be the best time to travel towards his purpose, but instead this is an excellent time to focus on and resolve what is keeping him from going there.

How does the North Node relate to the spiritual world? If the purpose in life is to use our personality as best we can to travel to the soul's destiny, then we are learning the greatest possible lessons in this lifetime. The North Node becomes a numinous awe-inspiring place, because of the intense knowing we experience when we operate in that part of our chart. The German theologian Rudolf Otto in his 1917 book, *The Idea of the Holy* describes the numinous as “a fundamental and distinguished experience common to all religions.” C.G. Jung was much inspired by Otto and later developed the idea of the Numinosum, which some claim is the essence of his whole work. Otto says that the numinous creates in us a feeling of being created.

This, he says, is a feeling not just of dependency but also of the creature's nothingness in the face of its creator. The presence of the creator is experienced as a *mysterium tremendum*, that is a feeling of awe and shuddering. This is what I refer to as a feeling of awe before *that which is unspeakable*. But, says Otto, in contrast to the *tremendum*, the numinous is simultaneously experienced as a *Fascinans*, that is as something that attracts and fills with blissful exaltation. The numinous is also felt as *a confrontation with an unsurpassable value, to which absolute respect and obedience are due out of a feeling of inner obligation*. It is precisely to this inner obligation that I hope to awaken my clients: an inner obligation to stretch with all our abilities towards that which is to be learned here in this life. To get as uncomfortable as necessary and to dare to go forward. Just how much effort will have to be expended to travel to the numinous North Node will have to be seen in the rest of the chart.

There are also other needs to be met in the chart. The personality can not be ignored. There is often something in our heart that calls out to us and that may be different from our North Node. Our personality can be quite noisy. James Hillman, in his book *The Soul's Code*, elegantly describes this inner push to that which must be unfolded. If you have six planets in the 4th house of roots and home and your North Node is in the 2nd house of money and values, we can not ignore your real need for family, a secure home, roots, and ancestors. But, perhaps your way there is by getting a job where you get paid well, by buying a nice home and by hiring a gardener and a genealogist. An effort to integrate the chart into the numinous experience of being part of a bigger picture, this gives us the awesome experience of being on track.

