

Myth as a Foundation for Astrology

The Mythic Signature in Your Birth Chart

By Demetra George, 2008

The astrological natal chart is a map of the heavens at the time and place of a child's birth, depicting the zodiacal positions of planets, asteroids, and fixed stars. Many of the celestial bodies in our solar system and galaxy are named after figures from Greek and Roman mythology. From early times, astrologers saw the mythic attributes of the planetary deities shine forth their individual meanings to human and terrestrial experience.

At the dawn of a recorded astrology in ancient Mesopotamia circa the second millennium BCE, there was a direct and explicit correlation between the planets and the deities. The planets were considered to be one of the manifestations of the gods or the places where they lived. When a planet made an appearance in the sky, the god was thought to be communicating a message. A cuneiform tablet tells us, "When Ishtar stands on high, lovemaking on the land." This was interpreted as when Ishtar, the goddess of love, culminates in the night sky, she inspires amorous activity on the earth.

The Babylonians identified the seven visible planets and gave them the names of their deities – Shamesh the Sun god of divination, Sin the Moon god of time, Nebu the god who invented writing, Ishtar the goddess of love, Nergal the god of the underworld and war, Marduk the supreme god of the pantheon who established order and decreed fate, and Ninurta the god of agriculture and death. When knowledge of Babylonian astronomy and astrology was first transmitted to Greece around the 6th century BCE, the Pythagoreans named the planets as the stars of the Greek gods who most closely resembled their Babylonian counterparts.

Planet	Babylonia	Greece	Rome
Sun	Shamesh	Helios	Sol
Moon	Sin	Selene	Luna
Mercury	Nebu	Star of Hermes	Mercurius
Venus	Ishtar	Star of Aphrodite	Venus
Mars	Nergal	Star of Ares	Mars
Jupiter	Marduk	Star of Zeus	Jove
Saturn	Ninurta	Star of Kronos	Saturnus

The word myth, meaning speech or message, has come to signify many things, but on the most basic level myths are a culture's oral stories of the lives and deeds of their gods, goddesses, and heroes. People in ancient times, as do many in modern times, believed that the one deity or the many deities were responsible for the generation and dominion of the world. The gods were their focus of worship, honored in ritual ceremonies and

prayed to for the aversion of troubles and the granting of blessings. Poets, artists, musicians, potters, sculptors, and playwrights portrayed these mythic motifs in their art, architecture, and literature.

With the development of Hellenistic astrology in the Mediterranean basin from circa 150 BCE – CE 600, Hellenistic astrologers for the most part defined the meanings of the planets in accordance with the deity after whom the planet was named. However, there was little if any explicit reference to the planet *as* a god, as had been the Babylonian tradition. Possible explanations for this omission may include the re-positioning of astrology as a scientific rather than a religious discipline. However the planet-deity correspondence continued well into the Renaissance, but went underground into the hermetic magical and alchemical traditions.

It was not until the last third of the 20th century that mythic archetypes as the foundation principles for planetary meaning once again entered into the astrological literature when the gods were reframed as the forces of the psyche. This movement was facilitated by the work of Carl Jung that proposed that myths were one of the contents of the archetypes of collective unconscious. With the waning of ancient religious beliefs, the gods now revealed themselves in the forms of neurosis. A new discipline of archetypal psychology developed that was predicated upon knowing the correspondences between mythic patterns and psychopathological symptoms whose aim was to discover which archetype (god) has been neglected and then honoring it. The symptoms are seen as messages from the psyche as to what the individual needs to attend to for greater psychological integration and healing.

In fact, this perspective was also known to the Greeks. The earliest literature of Homer alludes to the divine causation of disease as something sent by the gods as punishment for having failed to honor them. Cure of the disease involved a consulting an oracle as to which god had been offended, pilgrimage to the cult site of that god, making offerings at his or her temple, and perhaps becoming initiated into the rites. The modern word therapy is derived from the Greek *therapeia*, which means “attendance upon the gods.”

Ancient philosophies spoke of the cosmic sympathy that pervaded the world, whereby celestial bodies in the heavenly realm had a chain of correspondences in the terrestrial and human realms. It follows that the mythological stories associated with the planetary deities likewise shape the life experiences of human beings. The birth chart can then be used as a map to identify which planetary bodies are most prominent in the sky and correspondingly which mythic archetypes are most significant in the psyche. These mythological motifs are the major themes that overshadow a person’s life. The myths, as the archetypal expression of the psyche, represent the underlying reality of the human condition and provide the basic dramas or scripts available to humans through which to live out the meaning of their lives and recognize their path and purpose.

Before the 18th century, the astrological pantheon consisted of the seven visible planetary gods. The discoveries of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto in the next centuries added three more celestial gods to the symbol system. The first of the asteroids – Ceres, Pallas, Juno,

and Vesta – were discovered in the early 1800's, but astrologers would not have tables to place them into charts until 1973. Now zodiacal positions of thousands of asteroids are available, and many asteroids are named after a host of mythic deities not only from the Greco-Roman pantheon, but also from Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Celtic, Norse, Indian, and Meso-American cultures.

There are asteroids associated with healing motifs such as Asklepius, Hygeia, and Imhotep; asteroids like Pythia and Sibylla associated with divination; Moira and Fortuna address the themes of fate and fortune; Medusa, Hekate and Lilith speak to the issues of the dark feminine; Eros, Sappho, and Aphrodite tell us much about romantic liaisons and gender preference. In our rapidly expanding solar system, new comets and dwarf planets continue to be named after mythic figures such as the centaur Chiron as wounded healer, Eris the goddess of strife, and Seda the Inuit mother goddess of the sea.

Each of these deities has a story. When a certain celestial body is prominent in the sky at the time of your birth, the mythic biography of that deity contributes a shaping influence upon the course of your life and your destiny. For example when the asteroid Persephone is significantly placed in charts, just as this young maiden was abducted into the underworld by Hades, these individuals often experience some kind of early childhood tragedy that plunges them into a terrifying reality before they are emotionally equipped to understand or cope with the experience. While the body grows up, the emotions remain frozen at the age of the trauma. Just as Persephone refused eat while in her captivity, the body may be unable to partake of nourishment, which may manifest as an eating disorder. The therapy of the Persephone individual involves feeling safe and secure in order to heal both the psyche and the body.

What is your mythic signature? How can honoring a neglected part of your psyche that is symbolized by a certain archetypal deity facilitate healing? How can the discovery of your personal myth guide you to the fulfillment of your destiny?

Contact Demetra George for an astrological reading focused upon the mythic archetypes.