

The Saturn-Neptune Square of 2015-2017

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In astrology, Saturn represents the physical realm, what is often called the “real world” — not theoretical, not philosophical, not poetic, and not intangible, but instead, the nuts-and-bolts construction of reality at its most dense level.

Saturn is about limitations and the hard work of building something over time, through sustained efforts that accrue, step-by-step, or brick-by-brick. This is ambition: the will and focus to achieve a goal, whether that means success in business — with all its accompanying rewards of income, prestige, and respect — or in some other arena of achievement, such as intimate relationships. In either dimension, and for better or worse, the results will be tangible, visible for all to see.

Saturn teaches us the importance of the passage of time, and about both the fulfillments possible in life and the harsh realities that life sometimes imposes.

By contrast, Neptune is the symbol in astrology for the urge to return to a state of undifferentiated oneness. That can mean sensitivity to the underlying connectedness of everyone and everything, or it can mean the wish to escape from the troubles of individual life by a return to the comforts of the womb.

Neptune is about possibilities, not realities — dreams, fantasies, and perfect ideals. It is about invisible rather than visible worlds, the intangible rather than the tangible.

From Saturn’s specific point of view, Neptune is crazy — lost in dreams, seduced by unrealistic fantasies, and wishing to escape from life’s responsibilities. From Neptune’s more universal perspective, Saturn is cold and pessimistic, an overly harsh and critical taskmaster, and far too black-and-white. For Saturn, the glass is always half-empty, while Neptune sees it as half-full. Saturn is like Newtonian physics, while Neptune is similar to Quantum Mechanics. Saturn wants proof; Neptune wants faith.

Saturn is walls, Neptune is windows. If Mr. Saturn and Ms. Neptune are sitting together in a room inside a house, and Mr. Saturn says, "I wonder if it's raining outside," Ms. Neptune looks out the window and says, "No, the sun is shining." Saturn responds by saying, "How can you possibly know that without going outside?" Neptune replies, "I looked out the window." In the experience of Saturn, everything is discrete and separate. Inside is different from outside, self is different from not-self. For Neptune, however, everything merges together — inside and outside, self and not-self are fused, or merely illusory facets of the ultimate oneness.

When we're young, Saturn's position in our natal charts shows experiences that we believe everyone else can have (and is having), but we can't (and won't). In some way, either obvious or unknown, we are unacceptable, too much one thing or not enough of another. We feel flawed, imperfect, and somehow fated to be shut out. It's as if we've lost the race before the starting gun even goes off.

These are areas of life where we're overly sensitive and too attached. We take the experiences linked with our Saturns so seriously that we can't relax into them. Rather than flowing into the experiences, we seize up in anxiety. We're pent-up and frustrated by our fear of failure. Curiously, however, we're also afraid of the responsibilities that come with success. It's a little like having a car that holds only a single gallon of gas. We're scared of running out of fuel (and often do), but when we fill up, we can only put in one gallon. More than that just spills out on the ground and is wasted. The challenge of Saturn is to achieve one or both of two changes: either slowly increase the capacity of our tanks over time or learn to live happily within our limits. Either way, this is a de-sensitizing process. We care too much and would be much better off caring less.

Neptune, on the other hand, shows where we have infinite capacity. No limits, no boundaries. Anything is permitted, and everything is possible. Life is a dream. But with Neptune, the dream itself is what's important. Reality hardly matters at all. With Neptune, the inspiration of and faith in a bountiful universe are direct payoffs. Whether or not the universe actually proves to be bountiful in fact is much less important.

Many people report that faith is a bulwark of their lives, and that they wouldn't get through the hard times without it. From the standpoint of believers, faith is the true floor upon which they stand. For non-believers, pure faith may be considered groundless, but that doesn't necessarily invalidate its benefits. The "placebo effect" has a well-documented ability to produce measurable positive effects, even if those are not guaranteed. Hard-core skeptics may decry the validity of simple faith, but most will agree that life is complex and often beyond our comprehension. Neptune is where mysteries reside. Hope springs eternal for many human beings, and that realm cannot be eradicated by science, rationality, or pragmatism. Belief in the transcendent is an element of who we are.

Obviously, Saturn and Neptune are not natural playmates. Both are part of our nature; both are entirely reasonable within their own realms. But together? Since they're inherently antipathetic, how can they possibly be combined?

When Saturn and Neptune are considered as a planetary pair, especially in their shared cycles through time, the question posed is: *Can fantasy and reality cross-fertilize successfully to produce a better, more perfectly-realized offspring, that of an improved life through hard work and imagination, or will they prove toxic to each other, with each realm (the real and the imaginary) ending up diminished, tarnished, or invalidated, and with nothing good emerging from their association?*

The Saturn-Neptune Cycle

Saturn and Neptune have a cycle whose average length is 36 years, with quarterly phases of approximately 7–10 years. Each time the cycle begins, a characteristic tone is set for the following 27 years, with the last quarter of each cycle (the winter phase) representing a transition away from the current meanings in preparation for the next cycle to come.

Below is the timing for the three Saturn-Neptune cycles that began in the 20th century, with keywords and brief comments about each:

From August 1916 to August 1918, Saturn conjoined Neptune in Leo. Keywords for that cycle were Patriotism and Nationalism. The period from World War One through the end of World War Two dramatically changed the map of the world, eliminating entire empires and reshuffling national boundaries. Millions were sacrificed for the dreams of national honor.

From July 1952 through December 1953, Saturn conjoined Neptune in Libra. Keywords were Balance, Equality, and Justice. The period from the early 1950s through the late 1980s framed what was called "The Cold War," a fearful competition between the Soviet Union and America, with their nuclear deterrents and carefully maintained balance of power. That period also saw the rise of various significant social movements in the U.S., from civil rights to equality for women.

The current Saturn-Neptune cycle began in Capricorn from October 1988 to December 1990. Keywords might be Traditions, Institutions, and Economics. The long-held dream of a global economy was actually created, and with it, the fantasy of unlimited wealth. The end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by a period of exuberant celebration for American capitalism, which led to excesses of every kind. The result has been a bounty of extraordinary corporate power and riches for the few, but the many have been largely left out. This cycle includes many paradoxes: In the western world of liberal modernity, social mores have moved forward, but not without heated

challenges from more conservative factions, most of which are based in traditional religious authority.

In November of 2015, Saturn reached a 90° arc (called a "square" in astrology) from Neptune, which marks the beginning of the phase change into the Winter Quarter of the current cycle. That square will end (and culminate) in September 2016.

The period of transition into the Winter Phase is a time where the confluence of dreams and realities reaches unanticipated proportions, with both comic and tragic overtones. The real and imagined have been cooking together in the same pot since 2005, and we've been eating that stew. Now we're reaching the bottom of the pot, and the dregs of the stew are beginning to taste funny. Are we witnessing a documentary or a complete fiction? Hard to tell.

Where is truth during this 2015-2017 transition? Oh, it's still around, as always, but it's obfuscated (and often overwhelmed) by exaggeration, hyperbole, innuendo, and outright lies.

We are on the verge of a new phase that will last through 2024 where we will see which of the dreams begun at the end of the 1980s were fulfilled, and which came up empty or even harmful to our collective reality. The question that will emerge in the Winter Phase is: *In the wish, intention, and effort to convert our dreams into realities, where do we pull back, and where do we move forward? How do we change what hasn't worked, yet keep what has?*

During the transition period, which will play out through the end of 2016 and most of 2017, we're collectively unable to answer those questions. Astrologically, the period of Saturn and Neptune's perpendicular last-quarter alignment is a time of confusion rather than clarity. We see what's happening in the world, and we know that it's meaningful, but we don't yet have any consistent or overall agreement about what the meaning is nor what to do in response.

By itself, the changes of the Saturn-Neptune cycle are meaningful, but less as dominant themes than as modifiers to longer and more important alignments. That's the case in the 2010s, which are dominated by the first-quarter transition of the Uranus-Pluto cycle. Astrologically, this decade brings to a head and thrusts into our collective awareness the various ways we've used our power wisely, versus the many ways we've used power foolishly. The thrust of the Uranus-Pluto transition is determining what is necessary to restore balance and support our collective well-being. That process is being sparked into action by a series of shocks, some of which occur through events, but the bulk of which arise through an eruption of emotions in a groundswell of spontaneous social movements. These movements are often triggered by current events, but they're based on fundamental precedents that date back over the past five decades to the 1960s.

Their re-appearance in potent new forms during the 2010s is surprising in its suddenness, and the force with which they arise is unanticipated.

All the dominant institutions of culture — government, business, education, medicine, etc. — that represent the status quo of how we structure our societies are under tremendous pressure, either by depredations from within or assaults from without.

Trust in and respect for institutions will reach an all-time low over the 2010s. This is already underway and apparent throughout our society, especially in the politics of our current presidential campaign. Never in the past century have we had two major-party candidates for the highest office in the land who were both mistrusted by a majority of voters. Significant disapproval ratings for politicians are nothing new, but the levels of disapproval for Trump and Clinton respectively in this election are stunning. Clearly, the public has little faith in either candidate, nor in the political parties they represent.

An increasing percentage of the public feels that our institutions and those who run them no longer possess the will, ability, nor even the inclination to serve us effectively. We may still purchase the shiny products of consumerism, since that remains a dominant theme of the status quo dream, but even whiz-bang techno-toys cannot keep people as docile as they did over recent decades past. By the time we reach the end of this decade, certain harsh truths will have become obvious, and we will be faced with the necessity of hard choices.

This summer, as we near the third and final pass of the three last-quarter squares that mark the beginning of the Winter phase of the current Saturn-Neptune cycle, we are still caught in the confusion of competing dreams and conflicting beliefs. We may recognize the importance of unity in moving ahead to solve our problems, but we are still painfully divided.

Over the coming year, as the Saturn-Neptune connection fades away, that fog could be dispelled. Although we might consider that a gradual process, the many awakenings — bringing restoration of greater clarity in realizing what is necessary — will probably occur in fits and starts, through sporadic shocks. I hope, of course, that these shocks will be relatively mild and benign, at least from the standpoint of the collective, but I really have no idea.

These days, even seemingly small shocks may lead to significant awakenings. And once awake, it becomes difficult to go back to sleep.