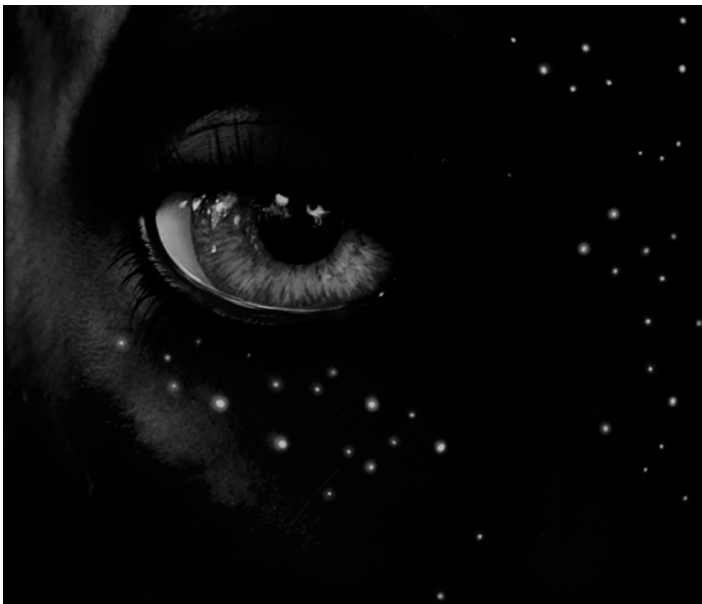


# Night Sky as Alchemical Mirror: Sophia's Dreaming

by Monika Wikman, Ph.D.

There is a Secret One inside us;  
the planets in all the galaxies  
pass through Her hands like beads.  
That is a string of beads one  
should look at with luminous eyes.  
—Kabir



## The Star Strewn Sky

For us humans throughout time, *universal* is the experience of awe when we look into the night sky. Our little earth from which we gaze, as the indigenous soul sees it, is more than a objectified object in space. To many indigenous Native American people, such as the Iroquois, the earth is sky turtle discovering new substance in the creation matrix to put on its back—*ah, earth!*—to catch *first woman*, falling out of the sky. And onto turtle's back she lands, and first woman rides the earth world as turtle spirit through the cosmos.

The Sufi tradition likewise emphasizes an attitude of inquiry that opens consciousness to the *felt presence* of the divine in and beyond form, simply advising when relating to the natural world and the many other dimensions of existence, “Don’t ask *what* or *why*—ask *who*.” This attitude of “I–thou” curiosity

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helps awaken us to the unique unfolding presence in all things, the felt presence of the macrocosm in the microcosm.

Living in northern New Mexico where the stars are searingly bright, due to such low moisture and nearly nonexistent light pollution, experiencing the night sky continually shocks one into a sense of awe. Going out to feed horses before dawn and after sunset, I am grateful for these moments as the stars seem to come down from the heavens shining brightly on the low horizons right over the horses’ backs, and in *this way* I feel myself daily as blessed.

I know as a child this was for me the single greatest wonder: to sleep outside in the oak tree fort and gaze all night from my cozy sleeping bag into the starry void. Through the night, while dreaming and waking, I felt the presence of the canopy of stars relating back and forth with me, and somehow and the great ache I carried as a child came into some new balance.

Years later I was touched by another woman’s childhood love of the stars. In the early 1990s I asked Gret Baumann, Jung’s daughter and an astrologer, about her dearest memories of her father. She said unequivocally what came to mind was being with her father outside at night under the stars around the campfire. These were the moments that impressed themselves into her, and she spent her adult life practicing astrology as a result. This has been true for me too, and I imagine, for many others interested in astronomy, astrology, star myths, and the star body/subtle body mysteries.

We just have to recall the image from the film *Contact* for a perfect portrayal of the poet as the valuable lens through which to take in the mysteries of the night sky and many worlds. Jodie Foster as scientist is rocketing through the wormholes into other dimensions, and as she is shot into the awe of it all, and mutters to herself in a confession of conversion, “They should have sent a poet.”

When we look mythopoetically into the names and myths of current night sky discoveries, synchronicities and meaning may arise and open us to the changing god image in the human soul, to the unfolding cosmic myth of our time. Jung, of course, was deeply interested in this phenomenon and explored extensively the mythic meaning in the changing god image as we move through the procession of the equinox into the Aquarian Age.

More recently, Richard Tarnas's book *Cosmos and Psyche*<sup>1</sup> tracks this phenomenon through the discovery of the major planets in our solar system with tremendous research and ingenuity. And Melanie Reinhart's work on Chiron<sup>2</sup> and other asteroids and planetoids, such as her recent work on Orcus, is seminal for depth psychology.<sup>3</sup>

### The Gnostic Myth of Sophia: The Divine Feminine Emerges

The recently discovered (and astronomer-named) dwarf planets and planetoids reveal faces of the divine feminine that parallel the Gnostic myth of Sophia that resides at the foundation of Western alchemy.

To drop into this myth, we'll go by way of the backyard garden of some friends of mine in Devon, England. About ten years ago, Julian David and his wife Yasmin hosted a week-long gathering for analyst friends with their creative works. On the opening night, gathering in the exquisite hand-hewn garden, tended completely by Yasmin for decades, the candles were lit, the banquet table set, the central fountain aglow in the moonlight. Introverted Yasmin was nowhere to be found, having grown shy and weary of company. I hoped that her sense of overwhelm would subside and I would get a chance to connect with her.

A few hours into the gathering a little face peeked around a post in the kitchen. Yasmin said, "Monika, *psst*. Be careful of falling into the organic beauty of things!" And then off she went back into the quiet. Even in this brief encounter, I felt profoundly visited by a nature spirit: with her artist's eye and gardener's heart and hands, she had spent her life deeply loving the beauty of the particulars in the natural world. When Yasmin died years later she was fittingly buried in a sheet in her own garden among the flowers.

This statement by Yasmin stuck with me and is echoed in the Gnostic myth of Sophia: "*Be careful of falling into the organic beauty of things!*" In the myth, the divine, in creating the manifest world, falls in love with creation. The divine's feminine half, Sophia, looking in on the newly created world of spirit, is so attracted to the world that she leans forward so far she finds herself falling into creation. As she tumbles via love and attraction into the manifest world, she enters all forms, every sentient being. In the world of form, she partly gets trapped in matter. Sophia is simultaneously in her divine spirit form in perfection and also in matter, in every cell of creation in the time-space world.

Now importantly, along with Sophia, human consciousness in the time-space world tends to forget its origins and become fixed, limited, encapsulated, or cut off from the flow of the eternal. And so here in the embodied world, Sophia seeks the presence of humans who cultivate the expanding field of awareness, that unites her upper and lower selves in a third field, her subtle body.

*Salve e coagulatio, separatio e coniunctio* (dissolve and coagulate, separate and join, differentiate and unite)—the alchemists say that this paradoxical process is the heart of the great work that grows the third field, a mysterious unifying field of the subtle body between polarities, between personal and impersonal worlds. where healing, vision, wholeness, creative generation, and

fresh infusion from and insight into the larger cosmos opens to us.

We can see from the point of view of Gnosticism that the manifest world is the playground for the divine's own awakening, and the field of imagination is where she plays, suffers, heals, creates, and grows her subtle body with the help of humans. The Sufi creation myth sees it this way also: The manifest world is the *Tajalliyat*, the mirror for the divine to find its own face.

So the night sky, with discoveries of new planetoid bodies being named for the divine feminine, in a way, shows us particular faces of the divine feminine personified in the imaginal field with us. With the discovery of Eris in 2003,<sup>4</sup> and then with Ceres promoted from asteroid to dwarf planet, children nowadays grow up learning the planetary pattern as including both Eris and Ceres as part of our solar system, with the "largess" of Eris's discovery having also dwarfed Pluto. The Western sky as we know it is changing!<sup>5</sup>

### Sedna, Indigenous Shamanic Goddess of the Inuit

In November of 2003, a new minor planet was identified in the sky circling our sun at the furthest known regions of our solar system and named for an indigenous goddess of the oceans, Sedna, or *Mother of Deep*, as she is called. The astronomers (Brown, Trujillo, and Rabinowitz) who discovered this minor planet named her Sedna. The official astronomical classification for Sedna as a trans-Neptunian object, cloud object, or dwarf planet is still to be determined, with evidence for each held by various astronomers since her discovery. Trekking the farthest edge of the known and unknown of our solar system, its icy body navigates the coldest regions, thus the Inuit goddess of the deep, cold arctic oceans seemed a fitting name to them for this new discovery.

There are many versions in Canada, Greenland, and Alaska of the creation story of Sedna, but they all share the same archetypal pattern and ending. In one version Sedna is dissatisfied with men and so marries a dog. Her father is so angry that he throws her into the sea, and when she tries to climb into his boat he cuts off her fingers. Her fingers become the walrus, seals, whales, dolphins, and other creatures of the deep. And she becomes a mighty sea goddess who roams the deep arctic oceans; her hair is entangled with the seaweed and the "sins of humanity." Sedna carries the grief of the world in her hair as she swims the depths. Shamans know it is to her they must go when they need a healing, or when food is sought from the ocean world, or when they are in need of direction, energy, and guidance from the spirit world for the well-being of themselves and tribal life. And so, trekking into the ocean worlds in subtle body states the shamans go, knowing to bring with them compassion and a comb. For when they meet up with her, if they offer to comb out the sins of humanity from a few strands of her tangled seaweed hair, she may become appeased and hear their requests.

In some versions she is a rejected orphan who meets the same fate with her hands, which are dismembered by the village people, and she sinks into the sea and experiences the same fate as sea goddess, mother of the deep.

In the great depths, Sedna takes up residence as a shamanic goddess.

If we descend with compassion for our intertwined plight and bring a comb to untangle a few strands of Sedna's hair tangled with our fateful troubles, we may give an offering to the spirit of the depths. In turn the "mother of the deep" may be appeased and give with both hands for the healing of many worlds.

Cosmologically and psychologically Sedna holds a wounded healer archetypal pattern in the depths of the psyche in which *the divine seeks visitations, or co-participation with humans, in healing and visionary states of consciousness*. This requires a dismemberment sacrifice of our old consciousness so the new can be re-membered in union with the spirit of the depths.

Recently in a Canadian gallery for Inuit stone carvers, I saw images of Sedna in black stone portraying her many forms, including what the Inuit see of her as we meet up with her and comb out the transgressions of humanity from her hair. As the people learn to honor her, meet her, and feel with her, she heals. Her hair is braided and Sedna's mirrored grief becomes sonar ocean songs as she swims the icy depths with melodic resonance emanating love for all creatures. She never loses her capacity to discover new songs in the icy oceanic netherworlds. Her resonant tones of blues and blacks in the unfathomable depths are like no other being, they say.<sup>6</sup>

This indigenous feminine “mother of the deep” portrayed in our night sky changes the pantheon, changes the face of the divine for our current times—a face of the divine swimming in the nethermost regions, an indigenous, shamanic, divine feminine face who holds the dissociative icy depths of the psyche, the cut-off feeling and suffering that, when faced, potentially may lead to healing and the recovery of soul among the human, plant, animal, and archetypal spiritual worlds.

Sedna's presence also strikes to the heart of what Jung knew to be true about the importance of the indigenous soul in our times. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*<sup>7</sup> he said that people in the Americas had the fate of bridging the intellect of the West with the soul of the indigenous *that lives in the land itself*.

### Awakening to the World Soul

To work our own wounds that intermingle with the greater grief of the world soul links us to the flow of life. There are mysteries inherent here that bring to light the human and archetypal co-created field of healing and realignment, as we give back our healing to the *anima mundi*.

The ecological myth of our time seems to me to be mirrored in Sedna's pattern. To open our eyes to the suffering in the world and to its beauty is often something the psyche just plain insists on during individuation. Sedna feels to me to be part of this awakening to the world soul. Felt experiences of inclusivity, subtle body states of healing and visioning, and a vibrant healing song at the bottom of creation are her gifts.

I had a dream four years ago that illuminates this awakening on the web of creation to the felt experience of the world soul. In this dream:

*I was standing with the inner teacher who said to me, “I am here seeking to put super glue in your eyes.” And as I contemplated what that might mean, and how strange it seemed, I agreed and said, “Well, OK.” The teacher put glue into my right eye and my left and then showed me that one eye was for the inner world and was oriented inward to that, which seemed normal to me in the dream. What was a huge surprise is that one eye with this super glue oriented to the outer world of forms. The teacher told me: “One eye will be kept to the inner world and one to the outer. You are to identify with neither, and with the one to the outer, you are to witness both the beauty and*

*the suffering with their distinct particular manifestations that are in the world.”*

Since that time I have literally had my eyes opened to the revelation of the beauty and suffering of the divine in the natural world. There is a spirit of the in-between, of the third world, accompanying this eye-opening experience. Von Franz found that the individuated person lives in a state of active imagination in which outer and inner reality have become one. Here the intensity of the ego decreases in its intensity and the wisdom of the collective unconscious flows through.<sup>8</sup> Jeff Raff likewise states that the conscious ego, which is united with the manifest self, experiences life from a central position that is based in the imaginative worlds, and that neither identifies with the outer life events nor with inner archetypal states. The ego's union with the self would not simply be expressed in a state of awareness, but in an ongoing creative and imaginative experience.<sup>9</sup>

This vision born of the third world is actually ages old. As Rumi saw it, “There is an inner wakefulness that directs the dream that will eventually startles us back to truth of who we are.”<sup>10</sup> The alchemical myth through the ages is turning in our times toward current-day mysteries. What *is* this new myth that requires our eyes to open in ever new ways and pushes now for us to live more and more awake in the psychophysical unitary reality, and more and more capable to feel the soul of the world?

Something in the heart of creation in our postpostmodern world, loves to reveal itself to us, to have us co-participate with it and find inclusivity and mutuality with all sentient beings.

Recently I had the good fortune of teaching with Andrew Harvey, and something he said stuck with me. He asked participants to look at what in relationship to the world breaks their hearts, and then to let it—the heartbreak—break their hearts open to the flow of love in the psyche, in the world. I carry that as a gem, a prayer bead now, and it feels linked to the medicine of Sedna, and to connecting to the realms of the deep that know archetypal grief. We are all aware one can drown in these depths, but when the spirit of the deep and our dreams assist us, we also may find another way so that the deeper music informs and enriches our human lives.

Feeling the presence of Sedna within and without, and using the eyes of the imaginable, I turn toward something in the world soul that breaks my heart, the life of our literal oceans.

So much changes during a lifetime. My grandmother remembered horse-drawn carriages that carried the milk to her door. What we will say at the end of our lives as we look back at what came into our manifest world? In a recent pod cast interview on the *anima mundi*, I brought this topic up.<sup>11</sup> I imagine myself looking back and saying to the next generations: “I remember when we had this archaic toxic material called *plastic*, and we used it in everything for convenience without thinking! We finally realized there was no ‘away’ to throw plastic to, and our earth cannot take it back. We polluted our oceans with plastic, killing animal, plant, mammal, and bird plankton, without thought or feeling. This dissociative state collectively was mirrored in our oceans. At one time we even had two huge vortexes in the oceans the size of Texas, and plastic soup so pervasive that sea animals could not avoid it and died horrendous deaths in numbers too large to calculate.”

During these times we are currently in, remarkable people rise up in the face of the impossible collective blind zeitgeist and address this collective possession One filmmaker, Chris Jordan,

stands out with his film on the animals of the oceans. He opens our eyes to their plight.<sup>12</sup> Patrick Furlotti is another example of creative, youthful energy unable to turn a blind eye to this collective dissociative psychosis. His aim with his foundation (Global Mana), his research, and his films is to help catalyze humans to awaken their ability to *feel* and *act on behalf* of the health of our oceans. Patrick is working toward finding solutions to clean up the vortex of plastic garbage in the South Pacific, a problem that the collective sees as too big to solve. One of these acts in the face of this collective problem is an enormous specialized ship set to venture out into these vortexes to suck up plastic and take it ashore, where it can be recycled. He also brings awareness of the dangers of plastics for all living beings by swimming long ocean distances, from island to island, through these polluted waters to help illuminate the problem.<sup>13</sup>

Plastic is a symbol, of course. Overly processed petroleum leads to a substance the earth cannot take back, which can be seen to represent false self-attitudes and substitute gods that need to be dealt with so that the religious attitude of life lived close to the soul may grow instead.<sup>14</sup>

While writing this essay, my own unconscious responded powerfully and with humor. I had just been to see the film *Lincoln* with its portrayal of the legislated eradication of slavery. In my dream:

*I am talking about what will we see when we look back over our lives, developments of human beings able to feel and act for the world soul. And as I am speaking, the voice of a wisdom figure beside me on my right touches my arm and says, "Yes, remember there was a time when blacks could not vote, and there was a time when women could not vote! And there was even a time when animals could not vote!" And with that the scene opened to a round table where the animal spirits each took their seats. They had out their voting ballots, and each was actively voting with their fins, paws, hoofs, etc. One of the animals there, a female dolphin, looked at me as she voted and gave me a smile that radiated happiness and some spirit of recognition between her and me.*

I awoke with a laugh. Psyche has such a sense of humor amidst these processes of awakening. "Remember a time when animals couldn't vote!" Of course, this is true on an inner level; animals as instinctual allies in the human psyche do vote within us at every turn for the shape of the life to be lived, if we will only listen and take their votes into account. And when we tune into the voices of the outer-world sea creatures, clearly we know they do vote "no" for toxic plastic that decimates their worlds and lives. There can be dream and vision experiences, too, of seeing how decimated species and peoples go on to live in wholeness in the realms of the psychoid. These dreams evoke a felt sense of the larger cosmos and bring us back to daily life with open eyes and hearts more capable of love for this world, among the many realms of existence.

### New Unities with the Divine Born from Darkness

Years ago I experienced an important crisis and eventual healing during a divorce process that involved the presence of one of these dark goddesses, or "mothers of the deep." I was just coming to terms with the fact that my long marriage was

over. A descent into the unconscious made itself known in the grief, and down I went, step by step, as the sacrifice was demanded of the life and identity I had formed. I suddenly became very ill and I nearly died. The ordeal turned out to be an incarnational choice point at the crossroads between life and death.

After weeks of recovery when I finally returned home that first night, I recall laying alone in bed feeling immense vulnerability—*how precarious my tiny little human life truly is*. I lay shivering under the covers with this felt realization. Then suddenly in the dark alone, I began to feel like I was in a psychic free-fall into greater darkness. It took my breath away. I heard clearly that I was to go with it and I did. Free-falling into the great blackness I went. I fell and fell, and finally the darkness itself caught and held me.

The darkness became a Presence, a feminine Presence that was Blackness. As she held me, the "me" disappeared, dissolved. She had no face, and neither did I. I could feel my essence become one with Her Presence of blackness. It was an utter death, and in the surrender there was cool, calm, abject peace with all that is so and not so, and with living or dying. I then sensed Her face emerging in the blackness, some sense of Her eyes and Her compassion emerging into features in and of the blackness. Her face became my face in this utter darkness. And my face was somehow both mine and Hers. With this moment of re-creation something deep, deep down among the many worlds sighed a sigh of compassion and release. And with this spirit of love I was released back into my bed, into the time-space world, and I was changed, utterly.

A few months later, my friend Robin van Loben Sels introduced me to the myth and image of Aditi. Aditi is a Vedic goddess whose name means *free, unbound*. She is the boundless heaven compared with the finite earth. She is the primeval generator of all that emanates, the eternal space of boundless whole, an unfathomable depth signifying the veil over the unknown. She is the mother and father of all gods, as the *Rig Veda*, a collection of ancient Vedic hymns, describes her. Aditi is implored frequently for blessing children and cattle, for protection and *forgiveness*.

There are images of Aditi as the throne of darkness. Supplicants or initiates approach icons of her throne of blackness and upon it there is a veil. If one pulls back the veil and looks into her dark body, a mirror is there, and she may or may not show you your new face from her dark mirror. Her mystery is at the heart of the alchemical mysteries of the *nigredo*, the black alchemy, in which alchemists exclaimed, "If your stone goes black, rejoice, for this is the beginning of the work." The spirits of the *nigredo* that come to meet us during times of great change, individually and collectively, appear with grace in the alchemical mirror of the night sky, within and without, with new star nurseries birthing. These new unities born from the great void, as Jung states, represent "the metamorphosis of the gods" and of our humanity.<sup>15</sup>

I will close first with a few words from Jung, found in *Scrutinies*, and then with the image of Aditi. And I hope you, dear reader, recognize your own story/Aditi's story in this offering:

"Prayer increases the light of the star. It [the star] throws a bridge across death, it prepares life for the smaller world, and assuages the hopeless desires of the greater."<sup>16</sup>

**Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* (New York: Viking Press), 2006.
- <sup>2</sup> Melanie Reinhart, *Chiron and the Healing Journey* (London: Starwalker Press), 2010.
- <sup>3</sup> Melanie Reinhart, *Orcus, Companion of Pluto*. Retrieved January 20, 2012, from [http://www.melaniereinhart.com/melanie/Orcus\\_000.htm](http://www.melaniereinhart.com/melanie/Orcus_000.htm).
- <sup>4</sup> Named for the goddess of strife and discord (Eris is excluded by Zeus from a wedding feast because she is “unpleasant”; in retaliation she throws in her nasty apple to the wedding, which brings out the worst in everyone and eventually leads to the Trojan War), she seems to me to be a face of the feminine inside postmodernism.
- <sup>5</sup> New children’s books were quickly published to help children learn the new planetary pattern, and *National Geographic* children’s books had a contest for a new verse that would help children remember the planetary pattern. Maryn Smith, age 11, from Montana, came up with this: “My Very Exiting Magic Carpet Just Sailed Under Nine Palace Elephants” (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Ceres, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto, Eris).
- <sup>6</sup> Interview in 2011 with an Inuit stone carver, Ikirnujik.
- <sup>7</sup> C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Random House), 1965, p. 252.
- <sup>8</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemical Active Imagination* (Boston: Shambhala), 1997, pp. 147–148.
- <sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Raff, *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination* (York Beach, ME: Nicolas Hays), 2000, p. 62.
- <sup>10</sup> Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi* (New York: HarperOne), 2005, p. 158.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.shrinkrapradio.com/2012/11/09/325-reflections-on-the-anima-mundi-with-jungian-analyst-monika-wikman-phd/>.
- <sup>12</sup> For Chris Jordan’s film, see <http://www.midwayfilm.com>.
- <sup>13</sup> See Patrick Furlotti’s foundation (<http://www.globalmanafoundation.com/index.php>) and his activist efforts on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGDUM319XRU>).
- <sup>14</sup> See my book *Pregnant Darkness: Alchemy and the Rebirth of Consciousness* (York Beach, ME: Nicolas Hays), 2005, pp. 49 and 197.
- <sup>15</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self: The Problem of the Individual in Modern Society* (New York: Signet), 2006, p. 110.
- <sup>16</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Red Book* (Norton, 2009), p. 354.