

Leonard and the Muses



Leonard Cohen has always had the support of the Muses in song. In the above photograph he is surrounded by The Webb Sisters and Sharon Robinson, some of the hauntingly beautiful feminine voices backing up Leonard's gravelly tone.

At his birth the Muses also danced around his rising Sun. Erato and Melpomene are two of the nine mythological muses who give their names to asteroids. Each asteroid is within a degree of the Sun -Ascendant. Erato, the muse of lyric poetry, expresses the force of love through emotional and romantic poetry. Her sphere of influence links her closely to Eros, the multi-faceted god who incarnated as the primal force of creation. The asteroid Eros had risen a few minutes earlier and is conjunct Leonard's Anti-Vertex, symbolizing an intoxicating erotic force behind his Virgo persona. Melpomene is the muse of tragedy who celebrates in dance and song. In fact all the Muses rejoice when they dance with Apollo, the Sun God. The Muses revealed themselves to Leonard in so many ways.

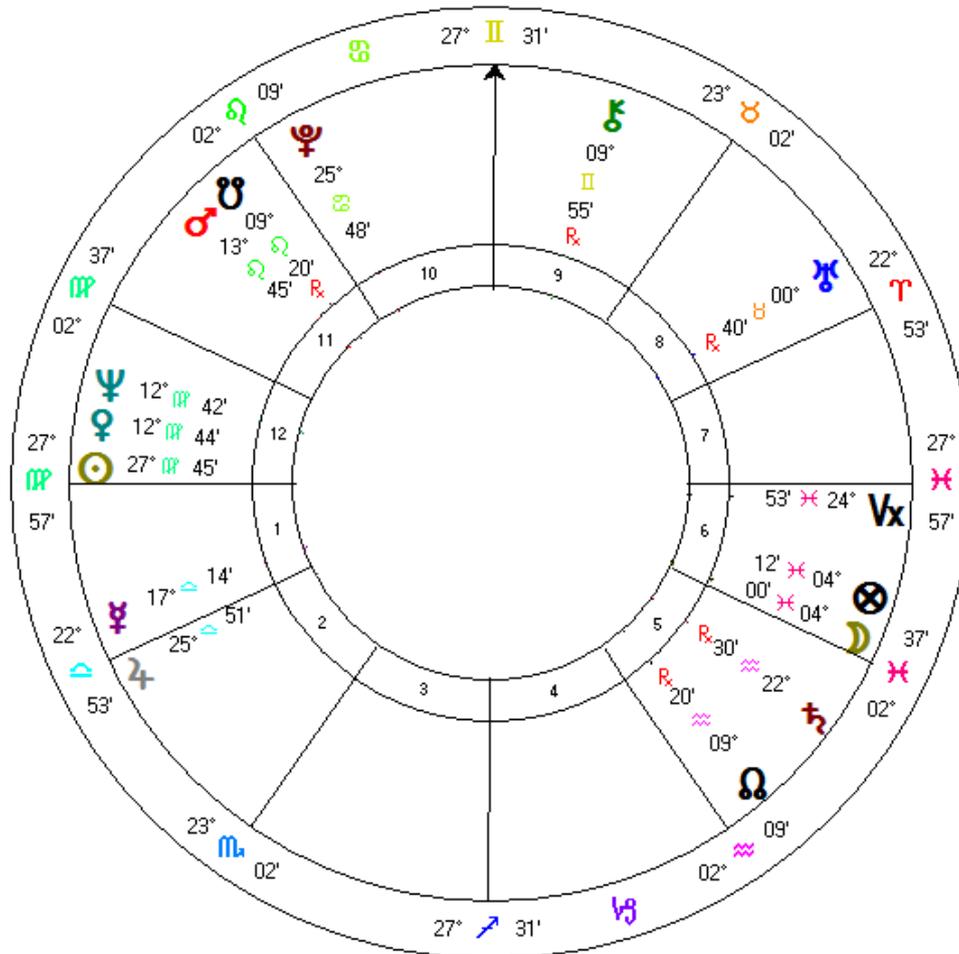
Leonard had his own inner Muse, well portrayed by his Neptune-Venus conjunction in the 12th house, which we hear in his impassioned lyrics. This is an imaginative and endless archetypal combination, of sorrow and love, dance and music, and a combination that is evoked through the poetry and beauty of his songs.

Following is an excerpt from my book *Vocation* which looks at this poetic and timeless aspect of a great poet, wordsmith and poet.

Leonard Cohen: An Aspect of Vocation

Leonard was born on 21 September 1934 in Montreal, Canada. His time of birth is quoted as 6.45 a.m. 'according to the records'¹ or 'from memory'² However, I have often wondered if the records and the memory have, like Leonard, become romanticized because this moment happens to be the same as that of the rising Sun.³

Looking back, this image is reminiscent of the many rebirths in Leonard's life and in a way is symbolic of his first birth into a prominent and distinguished Jewish family, with a proud paternal lineage. Like the dawn, Leonard inherited a rich tradition. But what would he make of this new day for the rest of his life?



Leonard Cohen, 21 September 1934, 6.45 a.m.; Montreal, Canada

Leonard came from a strong religious tradition. His mother was the daughter of a rabbi and his paternal grandfather had taught in a rabbinical school in Lithuania. Sagittarius on the IC ruled by Jupiter in the 2nd house is fitting for a family who 'built synagogues and founded newspapers'.⁴ This inheritance would find its own expression through Leonard's personal religious quest and his diverse publications of poetry, fiction and songs. Religious iconography would be transferred into his words and lyrics in a subtlety unique way. Turning to his horoscope, let's first analyze the major vocational statements before focusing on one aspect in the horoscope: his Neptune-Venus conjunction in the 12th house.

Vocational Factors

As already mentioned, the Sun is conjunct the Ascendant, symbolizing a vital and charismatic personality. When cold, one is attracted to the warmth of the Sun, and this is an image of Leonard's innate ability to 'heat up' his surroundings. It also

suggests the foundation for an appealing personality and a creative and life-affirming outlook.

The North Node is in Aquarius in the 5th house, the natural house of the Sun, where the potential and development of personal creativity, self-expression and performance are located. In Aquarius, the North Node suggests Leonard's path leads him in many alternative directions, some of which are rebellious, anti-establishment, but highly unique. It is an unconventional path and sometimes one in which he stands alone, yet which beats with the heart of the collective. The North Node's traditional ruler Saturn also occupies the 5th house in Aquarius, its own sign, contributing to a disciplined and self-assured approach to his creative projects. At its highest peak is mastery of the creative form; at its base is the path which takes a slow and challenging climb.

The South Node is in Leo, the sign of the Sun, so in various ways the solar energies are intricately woven into the fabric of Leonard's vocation. Mars is also in Leo on the South Node, an image of the warrior-soldier which he strongly identified with in his life and his songs; he entitled one album *Field Commander Cohen*. Whether he was with soldiers in Israel or Cuba, he was fascinated with war and violence. 'War is wonderful' he told a *ZigZag* journalist⁵ and told another of having a 'deep interest in violence'.⁶

A childhood story encapsulates this archaic image of his soul: his father was a commissioned officer in the First World War who still kept his wartime gun in the cabinet beside his bed. As a young boy Leonard stole into his bedroom, took the gun out of the cabinet and, cradling it in his small hand, he 'shivered, awed by its heft and the feel of the cold metal on the skin'.⁷ Such is the nature of psyche's powerful images that move us to explore life's taboos and boundaries. Mars on his South Node stirs deeply embedded images that will seek expression through his vocation; when consciously honoured and directed, they are not violent nor warring forces, but challenging and compelling drives. In the tail of the dragon he finds an abundance of masculine erotic power, evidenced in his writing, his songs and his life.

Mercury is the ruler of his Ascendant and MC. It is widely conjunct Jupiter, the ruler of the other two angles: the IC and Descendant. Both archetypes are interested in learning, thinking and conceptualizing; but together they are concerned with meaningful ideas, cross-cultural concepts, visionary ideals and hermetic notions. Both rule all the angles, directors on the course of life. As ruler of the MC and Ascendant, Mercury is expressed through the public and personal roles. Jupiter is in the 2nd, squaring Pluto in the 10th. Mercury is drawn into this aspect as well, endowing its expression of ideas and language with breadth and depth, a feature of Leonard's writing.

In company with Jupiter and Pluto in vocational houses is the Moon in Pisces in the 6th, reflecting light on his everyday life, which had been strongly secured by his

relationships with his mother and elder sister. As a symbol for everyday life the Moon in Pisces seeks its daily dose of inspiration, creativity and formlessness. In a way it suits the demands of a creative life because security can be held by the instinctual knowledge of life's rhythmic yet uncertain tides. Women have played a major role in Leonard's life as nurturers, lovers, muses and 'robbers', and became the creative inspiration for much of his life work. At the beginning of 1978 his beloved mother died; by the end of the year his partner and mother of his children had left him. That year, his poetry book *Death of a Lady's Man* was released. Saturn had entered his 12th house and was opposing the Moon; in many ways being a Lady's Man brought an emotive and powerful sensitivity and feeling to his writing.

The 2nd and 10th house cusps are in Air but Water is on the cusp of the 6th and, as mentioned previously, this combination is difficult because Air looks for separateness whereas Water seeks engagement. Intellect and feeling will be strongly featured in the vocational landscape. The 6th house Piscean Moon supports imaginative work while the 2nd house Libran Jupiter finds value and worth in philosophical ideals. Pluto is in Cancer, which is intercepted in the 10th house and ruled by the Moon in the 6th. When the planets in the vocational houses can find a united voice, their alchemy produces haunting and inspired images and words.

Mercury as ruler of the MC and the Ascendant is a powerful indicator of Leonard's call to be a writer, an in-depth and evocative storyteller. But it is the bittersweet lyrics, aching melodies and passionate poetry that infuse his writing. A strong aspect in his horoscope speaks to this and shows how a powerful alignment of planetary archetypes needs to be considered when thinking about vocation.

An Aspect of Vocation: Leonard's Neptune-Venus Conjunction

Lyrical poetry, artistic expression, beauty and musical love affairs are the legacy of Neptune conjunct Venus in the 12th house, a bittersweet blend of passion and sorrow, devotion and escape, sacrifice and longing, and Love Itself,⁸ all reproduced in his lyrics and his lovers. This conjunction echoes throughout his artistry, his spirituality and his prosperity. The oceanic 12th house tides sweep this conjunction up in fantasy, deceit, romance, bleakness and the yearning for what is unattainable. Poetry and music would become the instruments to express these formless, haunting soul sounds.

Leonard Cohen was 15 when Chance revealed her hand in a used book store in his hometown of Montreal. Amid countless volumes he found a book of poems by the Spanish bard Federico García Lorca. Between the pages he was introduced to the *duende*, an earthy spirit who seizes artists, confronts their mortality and inspires them to create passionate 'black sounds',⁹ possessing not only the artist but its audience as well. The soulfulness and depth of imagination represented by Leonard's Neptune-Venus conjunction in the 12th house resonated with Lorca's poetry. Three times in that year Saturn traversed this creative 12th house combination, giving the image a form and legitimacy in Leonard's life. Saturn would

transit this house twice more in his life, and at each of these times his connection to the *duende* would be strengthened.

Along with his Moon in Pisces, the Neptune-Venus conjunction characterizes a strong feminine spirit, a creative and spiritual essence, a muse and inner guide. For a man in the first stage of life, the muse is generally projected onto women, who are ethereal and enchanting. In Jungian terminology this is his *anima*, the feminine soul, so aptly imaged in the horoscope as Neptune conjunct Venus. The feminine muse is a central character in his career and has inspired, frustrated and assisted his expression of the divine through poetry and song, a living testament to the 12th house conjunction ignited by Lorca's poetry.

Some of Cohen's mortal muses are named in song, some are not. Suzanne is perhaps best known. She was a bohemian dancer who, as in the eponymous song, designed her gypsy clothes from second-hand fabrics bought at the Salvation Army Store on Rue Notre Dame. Suzanne lived in Old Montreal near the St Lawrence River. When Leonard visited she would invoke the Spirit of Poetry before tea and mandarins from Chinatown were served.¹⁰ Suzanne embodied Leonard's inner feminine, ultimately the reflection of his own half-crazy gypsy dancer. Intimate in song, yet never in reality, Suzanne was an early personification of the enmeshment of love with fantasy, thematic in his lyrics and poetry. 'Suzanne' would also mark a turning point in shifting the ballast of writing from poetry to song. With his strong Neptune it would be done in ways Leonard could not imagine and through the agency of women.

'Suzanne' was published as a poem in 1966 but recorded the same year by Judy Collins. The opening verse was a poetic account of the time he spent with Suzanne in the summer of 1965, just before the first of three Uranus-Pluto conjunctions in Virgo. Pluto had gone direct, having excavated his Neptune-Venus conjunction during the previous two years; Uranus was also going direct and transiting the conjunction for the last time while Saturn was retrograding in opposition. Starting in 1966, Saturn would oppose the Sun as it began its ascent over the Descendant; Leonard was being identified.

Ironically, Leonard's partner and mother of his children was named Suzanne. This was not the muse who inspired the song, perhaps not even a premonition, but the personal motif that would be enmeshed with the archetypal one. When they separated after Leonard's mother's death, Saturn was again in his 12th house, traversing the Neptune-Venus conjunction, just as it had done when he first encountered Lorca and the *duende* of the poet. Personal feelings of love and grief, emptiness and sorrow, loss and creativity, became entangled with mourning for his inner muse.

It was 1967 and the 'Summer of Love'. Judy Collins was organizing a workshop at the Newport Folk Festival where Leonard would participate and perform. Author, poet and songwriter, he was now emerging as a singer. Another workshop member

was Joni Mitchell. Like Leonard, Joni was on the cusp of becoming famous. On 16 July 1967 their paths crossed at the festival and they became lovers. He took her to Montreal and his room at the Chelsea Hotel. Joni also has a Venus-Neptune conjunction. Her Venus at 28°♍29' wraps around Leonard's Sun-Ascendant and her Piscean Moon sits exactly on his Vertex, near his Descendant, which highlights the poetry of this destined connection. Both Canadian, they share a Moon in Pisces and the *duende*. For the first time he became the lyrical inspiration for another's music in Mitchell's songs like 'That Song about the Midway', 'A Case of You' and 'Rainy Night House'.¹¹ Neptune is a shape-shifter; now Leonard becomes the muse, a recollection that the muse is part of himself.

Thematic in many of Leonard's poems and lyrics is the split, sometimes the amalgam, between the saintly and the sexual feminine, which is another symptom of his Neptune-Venus. But in the song 'Chelsea Hotel', his sexual partner had no angelic aura. He once named Janis Joplin as this woman in the song with whom he shared a one-night stand. Being attainable and carnal, she did not reflect the sacred side of his Neptune-Venus. In 1994, Leonard apologized for the indiscretion of naming Janis publicly, but it was an apology to a ghost. Janis had died on 4 October 1970 as Pluto lay exactly on Leonard's Sun-Ascendant.

In that same year, 1994, Chiron transited his Neptune-Venus. His religious search led him to Buddhism and by 1994 he had taken up residence in a Zen monastery on Mount Baldy. Dwelling in his 12th house, he reflected on his obsession with unrequited love and his helplessness in responding to love that was offered. He self-analyzed that it was due to 'some fictional sense of separation'.¹² He was masterful at weaving fiction into his personal life and his songs. Leonard's muse was holy when unattainable but unsustainable in the flesh. It was the dilemma he expressed in many songs; for instance, 'I long for love and light, but must it come so cruel and oh so bright'.¹³ Venus-Neptune may fear being annihilated by the loss of love or drowned in its oceanic feelings. This imagined or fictional loss is repeated in each encounter, making it feel real. In the transition from Leonard's love life to his monastic life he began to become aware of the truth his music had always known.

His five-year relationship with actress Rebecca de Mornay had faded before entering the monastery. Rebecca has four planets in Virgo, spanning his 12th house. They share Venus in Virgo and her Mars is conjunct his Sun-Ascendant; hence another suitable muse for his soul. Ironically, he remembers meeting her when she was very young at a boarding school in England. Rebecca was about six, but he was in his early thirties and performing a concert at the school she attended. Years later, when Rebecca asked Leonard how he could remember her from twenty-something years before, he said: 'It was something about your light'.¹⁴ The light is not light seen with the eyes or rationally recollected; the memory belongs to the soul.

The monastic life gave Leonard the opportunity to express his Neptune-Venus conjunction in another way. Yet, while he was becoming spiritually affluent, his financial resources were being siphoned away. As his value for the spirit was

enriched, his finances began disappearing. When Leonard left the monastery to rejoin the world, it eventually became apparent that his manager Kelley Lynch, a former lover, friend and helpmate, had depleted his bank accounts. Love and larceny could also be attributed to his Neptune-Venus conjunction, as the financial affairs of this aspect are difficult to value in a material way. Yes, there is the possibility of deceit and deficit; yet, equally, there may be magic and salvation.

As a way to regain his financial footing, the theft propelled Leonard back into the public spotlight. Being in his seventies, robbed of his life savings, he still had his vocation and the call to perform. On 11 May 2008, at 8.05 p.m., after a 14-year break, he took centre stage in Fredericton, Canada, to commence his world tour that would last nearly three years. This tour would be drug-free: no escape into alcohol or cigarettes. He would rely on the truth that he now knew: he could not command the music; rather, he was its instrument. The 15-year-old boy who discovered the *duende* was still alive in Leonard.

When he stepped on stage the applause was thunderous. At that moment in the sky, Venus was setting; Neptune had reached the lower meridian. And transiting Saturn sat again on the cusp of his 12th house. During the tour it would transit his 12th house for the third time, evoking the first cycle when he encountered the *duende*, the second cycle when he began to know that the anima-muse was his own soul, not the outer woman, and now. Impoverished, yet enriched, he nervously began to sing his ode to Neptune-Venus, 'Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin ...'.¹⁵ Reviews of the tour likened his concerts to a love-in, a religious ceremony, a papal visit. The *duende* was moving through Leonard and casting its spell on his audiences. He was its channel, not its casualty.

Leonard not only recouped his losses but he became applauded and appreciated in new places and new ways. The chords of his Neptune-Venus had found another octave and the muses once again danced around the Sun.

ENDNOTES

[1] Sylvie Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, HarperCollins (New York: 2013), 4.

[2] Lois Rodden's Astro-Databank is now maintained by *astro.com* and the chart is listed as 'A' data. Available from: www.astro.com/astro-databank/Cohen,_Leonard [Accessed 9 January 2016].

[3] John Etherington, Leonard Cohen's 'Secret Chart', *Apollon*, Issue 1, CPA (London: 1998). Available from: www.cpalondon.com/Issue%20One.pdf [Accessed 9 January 2016].

[4] Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, 6.

[5] Robin Pike, *ZigZag*, October 1974, as referenced in Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*.

[6] Donald Brittain and Don Owen, *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr Leonard Cohen*, documentary film, 1965, as referenced in Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*.

[7] Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, 9.

[8] This is the title of one of Cohen's musical poems that captures the archetypal essence of this 12th house union. See Leonard Cohen's 'Love Itself', from *Book of Longing*, Penguin (London: 2007), 54.

[9] This is Lorca's own expression – see Federico García Lorca, *In Search of Duende*, New Directions (New York: 2010). See Liel Leibovitz's description of the *duende* in *A Broken Hallelujah*, WW Norton (New York: 2014), 54.

[10] Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, 124-7.

[11] All songs written and copyrighted by Joni Mitchell. See www.jonimitchell.com [Accessed 9 January 2016].

[12] Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, 413.

[13] Lyrics from 'Joan of Arc' by Leonard Cohen, © Leonard Cohen Stranger Music Inc, Sony Music Inc.

[14] Simmons, *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, 375.

[15] Lyrics from 'Dance Me to the End of Love' by Leonard Cohen, © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Stranger Music Inc.