

Essay Series

PPP: PAIN IN THE NECK

Personally Processing Pluto, Part 4

Welcome to Planet Earth, Sagittarius 1992

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November 18, 1992. I sit here stiffly at my office desk, neck supported by a brace. I can still feel the inflammation in the large muscle in the back of the right side of my neck, though it is subsiding and the chiropractor, whom I see twice a week, says the muscle is no longer rigid. I asked him how long he thinks it has been rigid. "Oh, a long, long time!" he said. I keep the brace on because, for the past two months or so, my neck has become so unstable that it "goes out" again within hours of a chiropractic adjustment. The brace makes me feel safe, secure, enclosed. This surprises me; I thought it would feel strangulating.

Ten days ago, the muscle inflammation and spinal instability were joined by a terrible sore throat. Today is my second day back in the office after that latest siege.

In the in-box sits a letter from the doctor who checked my thyroid gland a month ago. I had been feeling low, no energy. My acupuncturist thought the gland was enlarged. The doctor says no, it is normal sized, and smooth, but much firmer than usual in a woman my age.

Also in the in-box sit recent letters from my family, unanswered. The last one from my father. Within hours of receiving my father's letter my throat was raging.

Transiting Pluto opposes 23°02 Taurus Moon, now within four minutes of exactness. Taurus governs the neck and throat. The fifth chakra, expressing one's truth! Thyroid gland. Extreme spinal instability. Sore throat. Muscle inflammation and rigidity. Rage. The body expresses my emotional condition.

Meanwhile, transiting Mercury retrogrades now over my Mars/Uranus in Sag/Gemini, to stop and turn directly across from my Moon, in Scorpio. The timing is, as usual, uncanny.

I am in the midst of what appears to be a Plutonian transformational process centered directly on my neck, throat and thyroid gland. Long held patterns of stubbornness, rigidity and emotional suffocation have lost their vice grip. The brace, by holding my neck firmly in place, mimics externally that long standing condition. Inside the brace, my neck feels as weak and fragile as a newborn's.

Six weeks ago, while undergoing an hour-long castor oil pack on my thyroid gland, I directed awareness into that gland, centering there for the duration of the pack. For many weeks, I had been feeling energy in that part of my neck, and a few days before this, the right side of the thyroid had begun to pulsate! It was like a drum beat, calling attention to itself, asking me to pay attention, to listen . . .

As warm oil seeps into the tissues, psyche diffuses, seeps into the cellular realm. I sense myself entering a vast microscopic space . . . a space clogged with energy, energy compressed and stranded in an extremely dense state inside the enormous space within the molecules of each single cell.

A few days later, this dream:

I am on my third round of slowly going round a big circle of valves, each sticking out of the ground, turning a certain mechanism within each one a certain amount to let the steam off. It is exhausting tense work; as if I make the least little mistake there will be a nuclear explosion . . .

When I was two years old HIroshima blew. And Nagasaki. I was consciously aware of these events. My imagination, from that day forward, went nuclear. The explosion I

feared outside was my own energy inside, compressing: only one month after Hiroshima, my father came home from the war — and began to “discipline” me.

Now, 47 years and three months later, my energy, long compressed into a black hole inside the cellular spaces within my neck, reaches critical mass. The fission process has begun.

On election day, November 3, a simple “accident” finally forced me into the neck brace. I had been teasing my partner, Jeffrey, from behind, tickling him. He backed up suddenly, forcefully, and that action hit my head, in a sort of motion which was part twist, part compression, and caused pain to radiate down from neck through my left shoulder into the hand. Pain so severe I almost blacked out. Immediately, within me, arose a terrible rage — against him, against the entire male species. “You are so violent!” I burst out, and then burst into tears. The crying went deeper and deeper, flooding my face with tears. I was going down, down into a place which, I knew, was not related to now. Knew that now was the trigger for then, that time, that rage, layer upon layer of which had been compressed and stuck in my neck. While I was crying I kept having the impression of being “cuffed around on the head,” a form of physical abuse which is probably not that uncommon from German fathers of my father’s generation.

Picture this: Jeff and I driving to the place where we would vote, me still alternately railing at him and telling him not to take it personally — I’ll never forget the sight of him sitting there, hunched over, gripping the wheel grimly, stoically seeing this through. I was still furious with him, feeling he is not in touch with his power, that he attempts to deny it, not acknowledge it, and so what happens? “See what you do, you hurt me!!” Even so, I knew my rage was inappropriate to the situation, and, in between bouts of rage, would tell him so.

This event triggered feelings stored in me from the time when my father came home from World War II and found me, two years and nine months old, a spirited child, a child whom, he tells others, “he took six months” to gain her respect.” I’ve known about this traumatic period in my life for many years. I’ve worked with it consciously off and on during that time. I thought I was done with it. Ha!

This blow on the head, and the resulting explosive cellular and emotional release, was the second one I had undergone recently. The first was even more dramatic.

Jeff and I had been putting in a new stove pipe in our yurt. This required me to sit on the stove and hold the pipe up, while looking up to see whether or not the screws he was drilling from the outside were going down in the right places. My neck was out, had been chronically out for months. The act of continuously looking up was excruciatingly painful, and becoming more so with every minute.

Jeff was having trouble getting the drill to work; the screws kept snapping off. Internally, I was becoming more and more furious, at the time he was taking, at what I took to be his real incompetence in this physical task. I was enraged. Wanted him to be more at home in the physical world. Wanted him to take care of me, support me, make me feel safe. Instead, he was acting like an idiot!

My rational mind kept censoring these feelings: what are you talking about? This is gender-based conditioning. You have no right to expect him to be any more at home in the physical world than you are. So stop it! But I couldn't stop it. The feelings were real. I felt like I was two years old — furious for having to hold up the whole thing, for not being able to relax, for not being taken care of properly.

I started to go out of control, raging at him. But even here the censor was at work. Instead of saying “totally incompetent,” I softened it to “relatively incompetent.” And knew, even as I did it, that this was what my mother had done for years, protecting my father's ego. Not wanting to hurt his feelings, even as he was cuffing me around, using physical force to try to break my spirit.

At this point Jeff ran out of drill bits. I stopped trying to hold up the pipe and got off the stove, raging and crying. By this time I am giving him my feelings as I am having them, and also — as if the two sides of my brain were operating in tandem, first one, then the other — telling him I knew it wasn't fair to expect competence from him in this area, but I couldn't help it! Right now this *is* what I'm feeling, that my little girl needed his protection and support.

From my journal of that day: *Descending deeper into sobbing; him freaking out; me coming back up to tell him “when I go down like this I need you to be the adult, maintain your center, contain and support me here. I do this for you; I need you to do this for me” (“Otherwise,” as my friend Claudia says later, “it’s mass hysteria”). (This all happening while transiting Mars at 4° Cancer, conjunct his natal Mars; opposite my natal Venus/Mercury, square my natal Neptune/MC). Going down further, breaking through into a deeper older reality; and meanwhile having to come up again to “make sure he’s okay” and tell him what to do, how I need him to be; he is still essentially immobilized, looking passive and defeated. Me railing at him — “be here with me, be here with me, don’t just tolerate what is happening, shield yourself against it, wait until it’s over — I need to feel it’s safe to do this in your presence — I don’t want to always have to watch myself so I don’t go too far and freak you out! (like I had to do with my mother, protect her emotionally when Dad was gone to war and she was crying all the time; like she had to do with him when he came back, protect his enormous ego . . .). For the first time in my life my psyche is free of any particular state of awareness; instead, it is slipping up and down the scale of dimensional awareness, briefly entering one dimension and working there, then out again up or down to another — up to see him, see where he is, speak with him, down again into the pure raw terror and rage and grief I am moving into — and meanwhile there is another impartial part of me witnessing the entire situation: the scene with the pipe, my feelings about his lack of competence — expressing that but not completely. Protecting him even as I give it to him watered down. My knowing how unfair it was of me to expect this of him, why should he be more competent than I? Then the dim recognition that all this is catalytic, triggering me to drop down into ancient, long-held emotions that need to move, now!*

Getting down in there. Lying down on my back, still sobbing, I break out into great wracking, weeping, wailing — mouth in a big round “OOOOO” as big a mouth as possible, my back arching with each wail, as if I am orgasming through my mouth. This whole process takes about an hour, gradually subsiding.

Ever since that day, Jeff has been utterly present for me whenever I have needed him. He has truly become my partner. We are learning how to process together, *whatever* comes up.

The backdrop for the current Pluto transit over Moon was set last February, when my entire family — parents, seven brothers and sisters and spouses — took a cruise down the Baja as Pluto hit a retrograde station at 22°56 Taurus, 7 minutes from being exactly opposite my Moon. I described that journey in Part 3 of this series. Marveled at what seemed to be a feeling of unconditional love enveloping us all. At the end of that article I mentioned a dream I had afterwards, which surprised me at the time, and which I now see, was prophetic. In the dream I was . . .

. . . in a foreign hotel. Going down to the lobby I am surprised to see that my family is there too! They are having a family reunion to which I was not invited! My sisters and brothers are all sitting on a couch, lined up like ducks in a row. I am so upset by the family rejection that I lose my purse, my money, my identity . . .

The family cruise occurred during the first time Pluto came to within a hair's breadth of my Moon, and, I can see/feel now, Pluto was still operating underground. Rather than being immersed in pain, we were immersed in what seemed to be paradise. The family reunion was wonderful. Perfect. Magic! We all agreed. Now I can say that Pluto was manifesting invisibly, *as its very opposite*, so that when it happened again, now, the light of last February would be entirely eclipsed by darkness. The absolute contrast between my experience then and now is inescapable. My smugness back then, that we had truly worked through our family karma, is offset now by the feeling I have not learned a thing in the past 30 years! That I am still back where I began when I left home for the first time.

Last night, this dream:

I was off somewhere, and had to go home (to the house we lived in when I was a teenager). Suddenly I realize I am naked — and ashamed. How can I get there without being seen? Suddenly I am flying through the air. Feel wonderful, powerful, and no one sees me! Land in the garage. Now my body is covered by a light cotton shift. I go in

the door. Inside is a large room (not the way it was in reality) with lots of little kids, my siblings. Tiny children's beds line the walls. My mother is there, looking like she did back in the '50s, sewing. The atmosphere feels close, steamy. Seeing her I suddenly realize something, and say it to her: "What I need is to leave here, not live here anymore." "Yes," she says matter-of-factly. "That is what you need to do." The feeling is I'm too old to be here; that I'm an adult and they are all children. I look around for my bed; can no longer remember which one was/is mine.

I have to leave my family now. I never really did leave. I thought I did, but I didn't. I've been "doing my thing" as a good Pluto in Leo (those born 1938-1958)], and yet I've been trying to bring my family along, to maintain a connection with them, to get their approval and support. What a fool! they are who they are and I am who I am, and it's time I realize it, and let go.

In "real" life, there is now a tremendous tension and hostility between my mother and me. Never before have these feelings between us been allowed to surface. (She has a fixed T-cross: Mars in Scorpio, Saturn in Leo, Uranus in Aquarius, all in the early 20s of their signs and thus my Taurus Moon completes this cross of hers.) Pluto is activating her, too — her long buried, and long frustrated anger (Mars), explosiveness (Uranus), and emotional control (Saturn) issues are surfacing. Her gracious Libra Sun can no longer cover what lies smoldering underneath.

And yet I need only to enter my dream life to realize that though our personalities are now, for the first time, overtly clashing, and so it feels terrible, terrible! — our souls have agreed to let each other go. That on the soul level, there is no attachment, and thus no suffering. Simply, the time has come.

When I listen to my dreams, I know my direction. Always.

Exactly on the day Pluto turned stationary direct this past summer at the end of July (three degrees away from my Moon), I began to process emotionally what it felt like for me to have my MC/Neptune at 2° Libra exactly conjunct her Sun, when Dad was away in the war. Began to consciously immerse psychically in our early symbiosis, to relive this feeling as a sort of quicksand, sucking us down into a bottomless abyss. From my

journal: *The feeling “I would die without her” (as in her feeling she would die without her husband) — and the original relation with her being this morass of feelings that she was left adrift; rudderless, without his presence she was confused and going nowhere. This whole complex of feelings lodged in my heart, solar plexus, chest.*

By the end of August, I was deepening into the feeling tone that must have been there when he got home from the war. How difficult it must have been for them to reconnect with each other, given their different experiences during the war, and the fact that there was now another baby, my sister Marnie. And the worst difficulty they faced, I am sure, was how to handle me. How to align me within the family dynamic they were attempting to forge. I wasn't going along with it. I wanted my head. And he was going to make sure that I didn't get it.

His methods, given his German heritage, were much more overtly cruel than, I am sure, she liked. And yet, she couldn't go against him, as he was, after all, her savior. She couldn't even admit that she didn't like what he was doing to “discipline” me. So, in order to help him do the job, and lessen his need for control over me, she began to undermine me, my confidence in myself. The Neptune/Sun abyss of the war continued in a new configuration: by subtly undercutting me (Mars in Scorpio!), she kept me in the same confused, anxious, demoralized state that *she* was in while he was gone. The greater her success here, the less trouble I would be.

The night of October 3, this dream:

I am getting together with my family after a short while apart. I am hearing from various members, delicately, that Marnie is upset with me, that I am in trouble again — Dad is especially sanctimonious about this — that the last time I stayed with Marnie I left my traces around, didn't clean up after myself. At first when I hear this I doubt myself, begin to take on guilt. Then I carefully comb through my memory of that time, and realize I did not do that, that I cleaned up very carefully! I become more and more sure of myself, am absolutely determined to acquit myself here. When Marnie comes back from church — looking young, vulnerable, a new mother with a new babe on her chest — I tell her curtly that I want to speak with her. I take her aside and proceed to talk, at first politely, then savagely lighting in to her, telling her what she says is

totally untrue, I am now forcefully yelling at her, I want all the others to hear, too — wanting them to know that I will never return until everyone takes his or her piece of the family shadow, that I will never serve as scapegoat again. As I am yelling this, I am savagely kicking her ankles as she is trying to walk. Meanwhile, the prospect of spending holidays in exile, alone, feels both terrible and absolutely necessary.

Marnie was the baby back then. Mom probably favored her, left me to my Dad. No wonder I hated Marnie when I was growing up. Yet, in reality, I was furious with my mother for not protecting me from his cruelty. Meanwhile, even in my dreams, I now note with chagrin, I don't dare kick Mother's ankles; I still displace this ancient rage onto my sister.

November 13: Jin Shin Jyutsu session with friend Lyn, the day after more sore throat and resultant cold in chest began to ebb. From my journal: *I describe to Lyn how I felt my father was stomping on me from above and my mother undermining me from below. The situation felt impossible. We were both at a loss as to what was the way out. Then, during the session, I felt first my heart and lungs wanting to open, then actual chest, wanting the cavity to open — and then fell into a rich, fertile loamy darkness and stayed there for the rest of the session. At rest. When I came to, she said she had been doing a flow for neck and chest as a grounding. I realized then that the rich, loamy feeling was my immersion in earth, soil. That my soul had come to these particular parents to literally put me in the ground — him tramping me down, her digging my grave — that the only reason the conflict between us exists is because I have been trying to stand up under it, to fight it. Need to yield to earth, to the Taurus Earth Mother, to this extraordinary weakness in my neck. There will be my nourishment, my protection.*

November 20, 3 A.M. (the very day Pluto reaches my Moon at 23°02 Taurus for the first time exact!). I awaken. Feeling the pain within my family again. How hard it is for all of us. How my parents have no idea what I'm going through, and no way to understand even if I told them. That they would look at this situation through the paradigm of guilt and blame. Feeling my fury with both of them, how that is still there, still surfacing. Feel him, his pain, hers, mine. Feeling it as all one thing, our psychic

mucous ball of pain. Feeling suffocated by it. Jeff awakens, asks what's wrong. I tell him. He suddenly says: "Do you think they told you you were a pain in the neck?"

Then begins an extraordinary dialogue which neither of us can recreate now, but which felt guided during that dark hour. He asked me a series of questions, and through my responses gradually directed me to the point where I was face to face with my mother . . . where I was feeling her numbness towards me when I was little, feeling it as a defense against the pain she felt when she allowed herself to feel me. Feeling my pain at being emotionally abandoned even in her presence, and in feeling her, contacting her pain, her anxiety, her confusion. I was feeling a conscious contact with my mother for the first time ever, a contact immersed in mutual suffering. And then, the miraculous thing: somehow through that very suffering contact with her, I felt released. By really letting her in, I could finally let her go.

My eyes welled over and I cried a few tears. In a few minutes even that was over. I rolled over on my side and Jeff put his arms around me. And then the second miracle — and I say this not lightly, as this feeling has been so rare for me as to be almost nonexistent — I lay back and relaxed in his arms, surrendered to his loving support. There were no aches and pains in my body. There was no nagging or pricking thoughts in my mind. My spirit was clear. I had come home.