

Essay

PLUTO IN LEO: AIDS and the Me Generation

Welcome to Planet Earth, July 1987

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Introduction

A heart pulsating with the circulation of sap and flow or rivers? A body with the rhythms of the earth in its movements? No, instead: a mind, shut off from the oxygen of alert senses, that has wasted itself on ‘treasons, stratagems, and spoils’ — of importance only within four walls. A tame animal — in whom the strength of the species has outspent itself, to no purpose.

Thus does Dag Hammarskjöld, legendary former Secretary General of the United Nations, describe how his own life was sacrificed. Hammarskjöld was unusual: He was acutely aware of a loss of contact with the original springs of his own nature. Others are so numbed by the treasons of so-called civilization that they have no idea what has been forsaken.

For those who think that Hammarskjöld was talking only about himself and other old fogies, a second quote, from the poet Robert Bly, is aimed precisely at us, the Pluto in Leo generation, those born between 1938 and 1958.

Sometimes when I look out at my audiences, perhaps the young males are what I’d call soft. They’re lovely, valuable people — I like them — and they’re not interested in

harming the earth, or starting wars, or working for corporations. There's something favorable toward life in their whole general mood and style of living.

But something's wrong. Many of these men are unhappy. There's not much energy in them. They are life-preserving, but not exactly life giving. And why is it you often see these men with strong women who positively radiate energy? Here we have a finely tuned young man, ecologically superior to his father, sympathetic to the whole harmony of the universe, yet he himself has no energy to offer.

If one had predicted what would be happening in the '80s from what was happening in the late '60s, Bly's remarks would have been viewed as nonsense. The heady and revolutionary '60s would, of course, after 20 years, have metamorphosed into the extraordinary and creative '80s. After all, we have Pluto in Leo as our original group signature. We are special, we are wonderful, we are dramatic and theatrical and just loaded with promise, inner wealth.

And yet, strangely enough, it turns out that Bly is right. We who in the '60s were so full of ourselves, who insisted that we be given room to "express ourselves fully," are now, in the '80s, dispirited. At some fundamental and little understood level we are weakened, afraid. Why do I say this? Because almost every last one of us is either contracting or carrying or cringing from AIDS. AIDS is the new bogeyman, out to get us. As if there is nothing we can do about it. As if, at a deep unconscious level, we feel we even deserve it.

History of Our Generation

Pluto defines the outermost boundary of our solar system as we know it. With a cycle of 248 years, it moves so slowly that it remains in one sign for many years, affecting entire generations according to a certain sign placement. Pluto is the energy of power, transformation. Working with extraordinary intensity on an underground level, it turns the searchlight on long buried matter and brings it to the surface. Karma: we reap what we sow. For us, Pluto in Leo: We must transform the very self, that which lies closest to our hearts, our spiritual identity.

In the beginning we were narcissistic, indeed so self-centered that we baffled our parents — for whom, remember, Pluto is in Cancer, where the root value is not self, but family. We were the “me generation,” and proud of it. Coming of age during the ‘60s, we wanted to “take our own space,” to “do our own thing.” And we did — with a vengeance. Acting out our revenge against the repression of our fathers, we hated old traditions and institutions for “keeping us down.”

No doubt about it, we were energetic during those times. Bly would not have accused us of being wimps then.

In the ‘70s we grew reflective, introspective. As the civil rights and anti-war movements gave way to feminism and the primacy of feelings, we touched into our own very personal pain through primal screaming and group encounter sessions. Turning to the East and absorbing its message of inner peace through meditation, we began to recognize that the enemy was us. Instead of reacting to what was outside, we refocused, to look inside. Jane Roberts, who channeled Seth, told us one thing, over and over again, in different ways. “You create your own reality,” he said, and therefore you are responsible for what happens to you.

Seth’s message turned our world upside down. Gradually, throughout those years, we came to realize the ramifications of this extraordinary way of perceiving the world. Cause and effect were hereby reversed. External realities became recognized as effects of internal states, rather than the other way around. What happens inside produces what happens outside. To really grok what Seth meant, we had to realize that we were not powerless in the face of the huge, ponderous and implacable reality of old traditions and institutions, but power-full. We were full of power, and creating reality as we go. But all this, in the ‘70s, was mere theory.

Now, in the ‘80s, we move from theory to action — mobilized by the reality of AIDS. For if the initial and naïve burst of energy outwards during the ‘60s was thesis, and the inner searching of the ‘70s was antithesis, then the increasing polarization occurring in the ‘80s between the weak and the strong, the well and the ill, is ultimately to affect a synthesis. As Wavy Gravy, of *The Electric Acid Kool-Aid Test* fame, put it a few years back, “The ‘60s was mere prelude to the ‘80s.”

We are older now, we are seasoned, and we can use the energy of our original Pluto in Leo to affect the kind of transformation we have been after all along. We even have a word for it now, one which entered the vernacular precisely as Pluto entered its ruling sign Scorpio: **empowerment**.

By empowerment we do not mean “come up from under,” overcoming oppressors by taking power over them. We know now, with Gandhi, that “an eye for an eye just makes the whole world blind.” To empower ourselves is, somehow, to surrender, to the power of the universe.

The Timing of AIDS

AIDS burst into public consciousness several years ago, coinciding with the entrance of Pluto into Scorpio, the sign Pluto rules, and in which its extraordinary underground intensity is most at home. Pluto’s journey through Scorpio occurs only once every 250 years. Only four times each millennium do we encounter — and possibly, transform — our individual and collective karma so profoundly, so finally, and with so little mercy.

Pluto’s passage through Scorpio specifically targets the Pluto in Leo generation. Scorpio “squares” (is 90° away from) Leo, causing a stressful situation which activates the original Pluto in Leo energy and forces it to work within a seemingly antagonistic Scorpio context. During the years 1984 through 1995 those born between 1938 and 1958 — the entire Pluto in Leo generation — will be activated at an unconscious level. Those born between 1938 and the early ‘40s are the first to be activated. They have Pluto in the first ten degrees of Leo and are activated between 1984 and 1989; those born in the second ten degrees are activated slightly later, and so on.

Between the years 1984 and 1995 this generation will gradually either transform its life, or die — or both. In dying from AIDS, some will wake up to eternal life, and empower themselves, radiating love to all those within their glowing aura. In contemplating their fear of AIDS, others will recognize how they are using it, and the mass hysteria which surrounds it, to assume the worst, and disempower themselves.

Fear of AIDS

AIDS is a disease which, by and large, strikes adults in their prime, approximately 29 to 49 years old — precisely those who have Pluto in Leo. Exactly as AIDS became a social disease, so did Pluto begin to journey through Scorpio, squaring that original Pluto in Leo signature. Sexually promiscuous in the past, we wonder now, about our own history, who our partners were.

It is not surprising to learn that Pluto in Scorpio points its long skeletal finger at us. We were the ones who brazenly advocated free love, while ignoring the ancient karma which follows, as night does the day, the selfish and manipulative use of our deep sacred creative power: sexuality. We are the ones who thought we could “do our thing” and get away with it — forever. Spinning off from traditional community as found in our small home towns, we rushed to the cities, where we spun out from even our own centers, into the madding crowd. Refusing to be held accountable for our actions, we moved from one group to another, from city to city, aimless, drifting, anonymous, always one step ahead of a karma which, even so, ever threatened to swallow us. Atoms in the void of our own creation, the more lonely we felt, the more we craved physical contact — as substitute for the love, appreciation, and recognition we felt we never got enough of as children. Sexual encounters were notches in our belts. Nameless, faceless sex. Sex as panacea, sex as paradise lost.

All that is over now. AIDS is everywhere. Invisible, menacing, it transforms all possibility for real intimacy into distrust, paranoia, terror. As a child, when abused, confuses fear with love, so have we been forced to fuse these two antagonistic and fundamental states. And there is nothing we can do about it. Nowhere to go, no place to run — especially not in cities.

AIDS functions as a sort of meta-disease; by destroying our immune systems it leaves us defenseless, open to a host of other diseases. Mention “AIDS” by name in a crowded room and we slink away, sink down inside ourselves, feeling defenseless, powerless, unable to function as autonomous, creative centers, in command of our own

destinies. Our attitude and behavior, when confronted with this disease, mirror what it, in fact, does to our physical bodies. Our feeling of defenselessness parallels the fear that our biological defense systems have or will shut down.

This is no accident. This illustrates a metaphysical principle. **Disease, in the physical dimension, is an outpicturing of a lack of ease in the spiritual dimension. Symptoms are symbols. We become that which we fear the most.**

To the extent that we fear AIDS, we are projecting our Pluto in Leo energy out, into the world, and locating it in a tiny, microscopic virus so powerful, so virulent that it threatens to make the plague of the Middle Ages look like a tea party.

To the extent that AIDS is here among us — and proliferating geometrically — is the exact extent to which our creative power could be expressing among us — and magnifying daily, hourly, minute by minute — were we to take back our fears, withdraw our projections, and acknowledge the creative force inside.

Yet the contrast between who we are potentially and what we are currently expressing could not be greater. In San Francisco, for example, the daily press puts an AIDS story on every front page. And the news is always grim. The press and the medical establishment both assume AIDS is uniformly fatal, final, terminal, no hope.

Visiting the Castro District in San Francisco this spring, I was amazed to learn that there are a number of people who were diagnosed with AIDS quite a few years ago — and are now very much alive. Each of them took charge of his own health — and his life. There was no one way, no panacea, no cure-all drug. Instead, each of them subjected his entire being — body, mind and spirit — to scrutiny, to change, in both attitude and behavior. Experimenting with what worked for them, they each had a singular approach, a fully expressive and creative way of viewing and experiencing their own process. In “getting” AIDS, they activated their Pluto energies in keeping with the characteristics of autonomous Leo functioning, and took command of their destinies.

Yet their stories go untold by the media. **An unconscious cultural death wish prevails, blinding the press to anything but the medical establishment view**

of AIDS. Mass psychic contagion races on. AIDS continues to invade the hearts and souls of those who live in San Francisco's Castro district, stealing their lives. Ridding society of a group of people who never did fit in. Nor do Haitians. Or black Africans. Or intravenous drug users.

In stealing their lives, AIDS, paradoxically, sometimes gives life back, real life. The capacity to feel. The ability to serve, to suffer. Compassion. Caring. **As Ram Dass is reported to have responded, when asked how AIDS is affecting his sex life: "It means I have to be willing to die to go to bed with someone."** By contemplating AIDS, paradoxically, we return our sexuality to its original sacred function.

AIDS and Empowerment

Pluto rules the sign of Scorpio. The sub-ruler of Scorpio is Mars, one of the keywords for which is "vitality" or "vital energy." Some think of Mars as the "lower octave" of Pluto, and the medical astrologer Davidson speaks of the effects of Pluto, in the case of fevers, as a "triple Mars." Triple the intensity of Mars. Triple the vitality. Pluto symbolizes the life force itself, that which runs throughout nature, bursting seeds into roots, pushing buds into flower. It sparks the attractive force between male and female in every species, conceiving and birthing those mutations which lead to adaptation and calling for the death of everything in time. Pluto governs the day/night cycle, the cycle of the seasons; it is the deep running movement within everything that exists and is alive.

In a new book published this year, *The Creative Imperative*, author Charles Johnson, M.D. argues that "wellness" should be defined in terms of "capacity," as "the amount of aliveness a system can tolerate." Johnson recognizes that wellness, in these Plutonian times, needs to be understood as much more than the mere absence of disease — just as peace needs to be understood as much more than the mere absence of war. (Witness the current alternative, as David Byrne points out in his wonderfully ironic Talking Heads song: "Heaven . . . is where nothing ever happens.")

We discover the truth through contrast. It is through experiencing the opposite of what we want that we finally get the nerve to demand our heart's desire. AIDS is that opposite. Both the manner in which it functions and the terror it inspires gives us the perspective we need to recognize what we really need. As AIDS is a meta-disease, so too the aliveness we are seeking must be of a different order than before.

Our life is to become a mighty river flowing through us, its current so forceful that deadly toxins are yanked from their places and eliminated. A swelling, surging river, vivifying each and every cell, quickening us into heroic overflowing generosity of spirit. In this environment, there is, simply, no room for weakness, for negativity. The light shines through the darkness and lightens our burden, enlightens our souls.

The Esoteric Meaning of AIDS

Ultimately, in one of those excruciating ironies we are learning how to recognize now that we are old enough to see the patterns that do connect, we are beginning to acknowledge AIDS as a real aid. **As both the ancient Greek Socrates and the contemporary shaman Don Juan remind us, a philosopher, a warrior, is one for whom death walks by his side.** We are becoming philosophers, warriors, by being forced to prematurely and dramatically confront our own deaths. Stripping off the layers of social and genetic conditioning, we reveal that deep inner core of ourselves, a life force that does run through us and that, ultimately, will rise up to ensure our survival.

Pluto was discovered in 1930 — the very year we started messing around with the atom. Long associated with nuclear power, with an extraordinary creative force that lies at the heart of matter, our principal iconic image for Pluto is the brilliant blast of the mushroom cloud.

They say that one pound of *plutonium*, used to make the triggers for nuclear bombs, if evenly distributed to the lungs of everyone on earth, would be enough to kill us all. AIDS is a microorganism; would it take more or less to do the same damage? Strange: as Pluto is a tiny planet, so are we all Goliath against each tiny David of our Plutonian fears. Strange, too, how the object of our collective fears keeps mutating. Only a few

years ago nuclear war was our most dreaded demise; now it's AIDS. Notice how this change parallels the change in our own thinking from the '60s to the '70s. Again, working from the outside in, we identify nuclear war as out-there, AIDS as in-here. One more step in this process and we will again recognize, with Seth, that we create our own realities.

The master gland for the immune system is the thymus gland. The word "thymos" from the Greek, means "life energy." Located in the chest, this gland is associated with the heart chakra. The sign of Leo rules the heart. The French word for heart is "coeur," and means "courage." It is time we Pluto in Leo people recover our courage. **The cure for AIDS is not medical but spiritual. We must open our hearts, and love one another.**

Not with the wimpy kind of love that Bly so acutely and accurately diagnosed, but with our hearts exposed, our arms wide, open and willing to accept all of God's creatures, even those most likely disenfranchised by the human community — including gays, Haitians, black Africans, and intravenous drug users. (For an extraordinary channeling on healing, and especially the view of AIDS as striking the disenfranchised, see Kevin Ryerson in *Psychoimmunity and the Healing Process*, Jason Serinus, ed.)

May that brilliant blast occur inside each of us: enlightenment. May we truly empower ourselves, by diving deep inside and uncovering those inner riches which have been our original promise all along. And this means confronting and engaging with and overcoming our fears — including our fear of AIDS.

We reach down into the core of our beings, and recover our original natures, our natural selves, so long frozen into immobility by thick layers of genetic and cultural conditioning. We make that leap from small self to larger Self or Soul. Each of us the center of the universe. Each of us a holograph, mere drop in the ocean reflecting the entire universe. We are all part of Nature, we are all One. To express ourselves fully is to put ourselves in service to the divine, as vessels through which energy can pour, and heal, and vivify, make fully alive, both ourselves and our planetary home.

