

FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE SOUL

Pluto in Sagittarius

When I was young I felt sorry for my friends who weren't Catholic, because they were going to hell. Later, as I shed my childish beliefs, early questions about the meaning of life persisted, and I tried out various answers.

After many, many years a different kind of recognition seeped into my bones — that what fuels my spiritual life is not any belief or set of beliefs, but rather an indwelling sense of Mystery, as an all-pervasive, invisible, unfathomable Presence.

I sense that we have all been gifted with glimpses of a subtle Presence that elicits wonder and awe, and that from this exalted plane springs eternal questions that propel us in uncharted directions, and that no "final answers" can ever satisfy.

As I go about my errands at the grocery store or the post office, I tend to peer closely as others pass by, searching their eyes for light. I notice that most people's eyes seem veiled, opaque. Perhaps their daily burdens weigh them down so far that they no longer look up, take a deep breath, and marvel at the sky.

And yet, in mountain villages of Peru, or Greece, or Turkey, and even in old Istanbul I can walk down the street and encounter the soul of perhaps eight out of ten people. As we pass by, my eyes greet theirs and our momentary connection feels so strong and full that my heart leaps.

Since the 17th century and the advent of scientific modes of knowing, we have been trained to consider "real" only that which we can perceive and measure through our five outer senses — sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch. "Materialism" — the religion of science — both denies the reality of realms beyond and within the material world (the world of matter) and dismisses enduring questions about the meaning of life as "unscientific."

Our western minds have gradually crystallized, become hard-wired— through both formal schooling and the weight of tradition — so that the so-called "normal" person interacts with the world in strictly delimited ways.

I imagine that, in this country, many church groups and social networks long to rekindle the fading soul bonds among us. For myself, I enjoy the Sufi-inspired Dances of Universal Peace, where we gather to sing songs composed with lyrics from the mystical arms of the world's religions. Some of the dances involve two circles moving in opposite directions. We weave in and out, to greet the soul as it flashes through each unique, precious, luminous set of eyes.

Anyone who has experienced the depth of these dances can attest to our spiritual communion as we dip below personality to dwell within Oneness. In fact, when I first encountered the Dances I felt overwhelmed, and wept openly. Here, I thought, was my kind of religion. No dogmas, no beliefs, just singing and dancing in shared surrender to the divine.

And yet, despite this inner spiritual flame that ultimately illumines our way, a terrible foreboding sits on all our hearts. We try to pursue life as usual, but when we project these opening years of the 21st century into the future, we fear for our children and our children's children.

Our sense of foreboding on earth finds its mirror in the heavens.

Since 1995, Pluto (the planet of extreme, underground power) has been traveling through Sagittarius — the sign that refers to how we experience politics, philosophy and religion. Pluto's cycle through the 12 signs of the zodiac is long (248 years) and somewhat irregular. It takes about 15 years for Pluto to move through Sagittarius. Pluto's journey through a sign forces transformation; it harvests death and destruction and plants seeds of possible rebirth. Pluto leaves Sagittarius for Capricorn by the end of 2008.

So far, Pluto's journey through religious and philosophical Sagittarius has paralleled the mental crystallization that increasingly breeds fixation on "true beliefs," i.e., "fundamentalism," and its terrorist repercussions. Less than three years remain for us to surrender to the death and rebirth of deep-seated mental programming that divides us from each other. For once Pluto shifts into Capricorn we will be forced to refocus from

ideas and ideals to the structural limits of material reality. Pluto in Capricorn will initiate an inexorable 15-year upheaval that will deeply disturb and begin to reconfigure the institutions and hierarchies of the civilized world.

Pluto's Sagittarian reverberations shake up the way our minds comprehend what is real and of real value; and we cannot help but ponder the gravity of two profound and unprecedented crises.

- First, we bear anguished witness to the accelerating deterioration of Earth's biosphere, caused, at least in part, by human activity.

- Second, most of us cannot help but personally experience what seems an accelerating loss of authentic connection to both the natural world and to our fellow human beings.

Not so well known is the linkage between these twin crises; that they spring from the same root, from the way the human mind and imagination structure experience.

Our minds are the builders, first cause. Whatever we expect to see, we will get.

From a "scientific" standpoint, the ways we apprehend what we intuitively recognize as sacred and mysterious dimensions of our lives don't count, since none of them can be "proved."

Yet both our questions and our search for meaning persist. The imagination refuses to be reined in by "Science." And our answers, nourished by an endlessly astonishing human creativity, proliferate into myriads of competing sects and religions.

Unfortunately, as our sense of connection to nature, to human community, and even to our own bodies recedes, our psychological and spiritual unease increases. The stable ground for what makes us feel real and alive disintegrates; on a gut level we feel less secure. Naturally then, in an attempt to feel safe, we band together with those who agree with us.

Because we tend to identify with our answers rather than dwelling within the original, childlike awe that inspired our questions, those answers feel so important that they separate us entirely from those with whom we disagree. Indeed, our beliefs feel like a stockade that imprisons us and keeps "The Other" out. We may even judge "Them" as not just wrong, but bad or even "evil."

In the final years of the 20th century, we learned to call this fixation on a particular set of beliefs "fundamentalism" and smugly assumed that fundamentalism applied only to The Other's rigid

point of view. Yet many of us now begin to sense our own fundamentalist tendencies. This new current in the zeitgeist shows up in recent films. Spielberg's "Munich" portrays Israelis and Palestinians as equally inflexible. "Brokeback Mountain" shows the hidden, heartbreaking reality beneath stereotypes.

I ask myself, how many times have I pre-judged a stranger based on some little clue in manner, dress or behavior that, if I were mindful in that moment, would cue me in to my own unrecognized and unprocessed stuff? And how many times, on further reflection, have I had to admit that I was just plain wrong? When I do wake up to my harsh judgments, my arrogance astonishes me, as does the unconscious, prolific, projective power of the imagination.

Indeed, if we, as a species, do intend to continue to dwell upon this planet we each need to consciously release our identification with our own beliefs, no matter how "true" and "right" we think them! For both our stereotypes and judgments are based on belief. To extricate ourselves from stereotype and judgment will fundamentally restructure the ways our minds work.

Our "scientific" mental hard-wiring includes two methods of knowing, "inductive" and "deductive." Both have reached the limits of their usefulness, and their interaction has turned malefic.

- Inductive (or, how we absorb information piece by piece a posteriori from the outside world): 20th century communication and transportation technologies, including the Internet, both link us together and vastly amplify the already overwhelming cacophony of information, pseudo information, propaganda, nonsense and just plain noise in which we have been continuously immersed since the dawn of radio.

- Deductive (or, the way we create theories to link, describe and explain information a priori from imagination): the current worldwide resurgence of religious and political fundamentalism tends to polarize us into opposing camps of rigid beliefs and sparks fear, separation, judgment and hatred that, when stirred into frenzy, provokes violence and war.

Inductive and deductive reasoning supposedly complement each other. We draw in bits and pieces of information (inductive) and weave them to create theories that make sense of the whole (deductive). This "scientific" understanding of the way the mind can work is classic western epistemology and quite naïve.

For the more I pay attention to how my own mind works, the more I realize that I tend to make my mind up first — based on whatever: mostly unconscious prejudices and attitudes and values and stories of all

kinds, not to mention my ego's need to win — and then I check for "facts" and "arguments" that support my conclusions.

In the past decade or two, this more realistic understanding of how the mind works has taken a hugely cynical turn, with, for example, leaders, pundits and press secretaries deliberately weaving "credibility" in place of truth.

The limits of inductive and deductive methods interlock in the pernicious world of spin, where political and religious dogmas select and skew ("cherry-pick") bits and pieces from the endless heaving sea of so-called information to buttress their chosen beliefs; they then repeat their mantra endlessly to brainwash the susceptible. And who is not susceptible? It takes a very strong inner focus to maintain equilibrium and inner knowing in the face of constant entertainment and other distractions, not to mention unceasing streams of religious, political, business, and governmental propaganda.

Of course, we do need some kind of filter or framework to organize and simplify the vast sea of information rolling in, but how do we know when we're hoodwinked? Does a so-called "impartial, detached" point of view exist not based on someone's self-interest? The line between fact and fiction blurs, dissolves; we feel confused, as if we are drowning. Instinctively, we grab the nearest possibly viable "explanation" — no matter how wild and unsupported, how fatuous and self-serving — that might offer relief.

More and more, on a subliminal level, we feel afraid. How to discriminate true from false, authenticity from hype, deliberate lies from mistakes? How to make sense of it all?

Even so-called incontrovertible "truth" is always relative to context; the very next "fact" could expand context and destroy interpretation. So then, what context is appropriate? As the philosopher Wittgenstein once said, "It's hard to go back to the beginning, and not go further back." Indeed, we could go back forever. For no matter how large or small, how defined or exacting a "controlled experiment" in science, it does not and cannot mimic the infinite complexities of nature.

Overwhelmed by "information overload," we want to just clench and curl up, revert to survival mode; we wish we could just stop the world and get off.

In America, we try to "cocoon" ourselves, and blot out the larger, suffering world. Meanwhile, we indulge in sweets, fast food, alcohol, sex, cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, electronics and other drugs, feverishly work to "get ahead" or "stay in the game,"

apply and endure beauty and anti-aging treatments, indulge and feel victimized by power-tripping dramas, shop until we drop, and other mind-numbing addictions — all themselves elements that reflect and exacerbate the overwhelm.

Even I, who takes pride in remaining aloof from all (well, most!) superficial distractions, must admit my chronic desire to latch onto a set of simplistic rigid beliefs as a life raft, a black/white screen that filters and funnels information overload into what I can understand and control.

How many times, for example, have I wanted to just blame George W. Bush, the Republican party, and religious evangelists for the complex and deeply rooted, hyperactive and competitive cultural field that holds us in its thrall?

Extreme information overload goes hand in hand with fundamentalist extremes. These two link as poles of a single duality, endpoints of a single line. Yet they also travel on a collision course to form a circle, a noose. Our rigid beliefs and the resulting "spin" ratchet tighter and tighter, become more and more jingoistic in order to continue to blot out more and more information. This accelerating implosion of information and fixed beliefs generates a collective nervous breakdown.

In crisis we may uncover opportunity. Breakdown can signal breakthrough. We need to transform both inductive and deductive modes of thinking and learning.

- Inductive: in order to thread our way through the daily inundation we must develop new ways to discern genuinely relevant information from spin, spam, urban legends, inaccuracies, and downright lies. To do this we must let our minds go, drop into our hearts — and open wide. "The heart has its reasons that the mind will never know."

- Deductive: in order to let go of fundamentalism we need to learn to trust and even revel in uncertainty, not knowing. We must allow and encourage new visions that provoke, stretch, and even conflict with our old beliefs. As Einstein once said, the only real question is, "Is the universe friendly?" By opening to new visions, we allow in new perceptions and commit to the endless, jaw-dropping grace and mystery of the present moment.

In my own life, I utilize astrological symbolism to both describe and understand our dilemma, as well as to suggest a way through.

In the language of astrology, the polarity between facts and theories refers to the "opposition" (a relationship in the zodiac of 180 degrees apart

and directly across from each other) between two signs; in this case, Gemini (our capacity to perceive, name and communicate the constant flow of phenomena) and Sagittarius (our capacity to comprehend larger, overall philosophical and religious ideas and ideals). Astrological opposites function as complements. Each "sign" — each way we can experience life — embraces its opposite Other in order to fully develop and balance its capacity.

Thus, we see (Gemini) what we expect to see (Sagittarius). It's as if each of us looks at the world (Gemini) through a set of glasses with a certain prescription (Sagittarius). Change the prescription, and we encounter a different world.

Moreover, the continual interplay between Gemini and Sagittarius has ethical implications; for how you and I act in the world depends on our "vision" of it. Thus, in order to transform our nightmare vision of increasing chaos and disintegration, we all need to transform our limited, fundamentalist ways of thinking so that we may learn to act in new ways that encourage harmony.

And the time is ripe. The time is now. Indeed, the time is nearly over for us to begin to enact this philosophical transformation.

Whether rebirth surges from the Plutonian implosion of our old epistemology depends in part upon how deeply we acknowledge and work to dismantle our own fundamentalist tendencies. How wide and open can we stretch our minds? Our hearts? Our smiles? — real smiles, smiles of delight and joy that spread warmth and love from the inside out. The synchronicity between our current challenge and the current planetary transit — Pluto moving through Sagittarius — both describes the challenge and gives us tools to work with it.

We have now endured this Plutonian fundamentalist/information overload blitzkrieg for eleven years. I repeat, not quite three years remain for us to begin to recognize that our perceptions of the world are both selected and given meaning by our beliefs. Change our beliefs and what we see changes too. Conversely, when we allow in more of what's actually "out there," our beliefs cannot help but transform.

In order to change our beliefs, we must know them — a daunting proposition. For the beliefs that hold us in thrall, the deepest ones, lie hidden within our subconscious minds and constitute the conceptual bedrock upon which we stand.

So, on the one hand, deep beliefs, attitudes and values run on beneath all our conscious thoughts and feelings, and channel ideas and emotions in only certain directions; on the other hand, to question them feels, well, terrifying, like an earthquake. Who wants that?

And yet, unless we do resolutely investigate what keeps us in a certain stance, or trance, smugly ensconced into an old and severely constrained way of understanding and perceiving the world, we will continue to feel separated and even alienated from those who do not think as we do and thus continuously re-energize the root cause of tension, conflict, and war.

Thus I, for one, from this day forward commit myself to sense, acknowledge, and honor other human beings at a level of the heart, below the small, myopic certainty of my "true beliefs."

My beliefs, like clouds, form and dissolve as they pass through an open, infinite sky. As I let go of belief, I surrender to the empty sky — and allow what my soul has yearned for all along — a joyous, never-ending search for meaning and significance.

Ultimately, as we surrender belief, we once again remember our origins and glimpse the Oneness of which mystics speak — the living cosmos as a single organism embracing each of us as a unique and irreplaceable cell that dissolves, with the pulse of each breath, into a compassionate, ever-expanding awareness.

Nothing is foreign to us who sense this communion.

© Copyright Ann Kreilkamp 2006

*Ann Kreilkamp holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, has been a student of astrology over 30 years, and lives in Bloomington, Indiana. She founded and published the magazine, *Crone Chronicles: A Journal of Conscious Aging* from 1989 through 2001, and her book, *This Vast Being: Reverberations upon the Death of My Husband*, will be published in 2006. Most of her writings are archived on www.celestialnavigations.net.*

This CN Bulletin is a small part of an
extensive interactive web site
www.celestialnavigations.net

134 N Overhill Dr, Bloomington, IN 47408