

Prophecy and the Point of Inflection

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This is a first attempt at a narrative explicating the possible meaning of all the converging prophecies about our times, one which at once acknowledges prophetic material as primary source data, without falling into blind acceptance of any of the often messianic or dogmatic interpretations put forward by various specific traditions.

If one looks at the period of a decade or two following the new millennium, it becomes apparent that we are at a critical moment not just in human history, but as has been shown in The Shift Scenario, in the history of life on Earth. These converging indicators include:

Human Population – The critical point in the growth curve

Peak Oil – the top of the bell curve

Atmospheric CO₂ – the crisis point becoming apparent

Mass Extinction of Species – projections becoming irrecoverable soon

Biosphere Limits to Growth – demand exceeding the capacity of the planet

Global Economic and Social Unification – driving upheaval and crises

The convergence of these and other trends show that even from a purely scientific and materialistic point of view we are at, or very near, some sort of critical point of discontinuity in the human enterprise on this planet. As we have also already explored in detail in the Shift Scenario, it can be shown that all of these trends imply a point of inflection on an S-Curve, marking the point in time where, if we are going to make it, all of the long-term trends change. Seen from a purely scientific and material point of view, this represents a point of profound transformation, if not outright discontinuity, in the system. If we are to achieve a sustainable future, the curves describing the rate of change in the system switch from concave to convex, as the system goes from accelerating toward ever accelerating change to decelerating toward ever-greater material stability and sustainable longevity.

In addition to the material trends that we have previously explored, myriad social, cultural and perhaps spiritual indicators also point to a moment of super-critical discontinuity. Prophesies and prophetic myths from so many cultures, spiritual and religious systems seem to point to this time as the critical point in history. These include, but are not limited to: the Fundamentalist Christian fascination with the apocalypse, Armageddon and the rapture, various interpretations of the Mayan Calendar, the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius, the Kali Yuga, the Native American White Buffalo, various Hopi prophesies, and although not usually described in these terms, perhaps even Karl Marx (be specific here. And this is not quite spiritual/religious)). And yet, each of these prophetic descriptions may be so over-determined within its own historical context and cultural framework as to appear irreconcilable with the others. The one thing that virtually all of them do share in common is that each seems to describe either the end of the world, or the beginning of a new world, or both.

In that sense they bear a striking resemblance to another cross-cultural pattern, the ubiquity of the psycho-spiritual death and rebirth process for achieving individual spiritual transformation. In virtually all spiritual traditions throughout the world, for the individual to arrive at a higher state of spiritual realization or higher consciousness, the initiate must always undergo some sort of process of ego death, whereby some part of their individual identity must die before they can attain, or be reborn into, a higher more integrative state of realization of the divine. Just as with the prophecies, the details of these particular rituals and process in different cultures may appear to diverge, but when one steps back and surveys the entire field, the outlines of an overarching pattern becomes obvious.

Thus, it appears that we are faced with two remarkably similar cross-cultural patterns. Many cultures have observed that individuals must traverse a process of psycho-spiritual death and rebirth in order to attain to higher states of realization and integration. At the same time, prophesies from diverse cultures have foretold a time when the whole world would apparently undergo either the end of the world, the birth of a new world, or both. It would seem plausible then that whatever we are traversing at the global scale might be

expected to fulfill the same pattern for the collective as it has always represented for the individual. It would further seem plausible that just as the individual initiate must approach the experience with the full emotional fear that would accompany an encounter with individual physical death, so too with humanity. For the process to fulfill its promise, we would need to collectively face an experience that would threaten a real danger of our collective annihilation.

Indeed, if one hypothesizes that this collective experience is not just about a single unitive moment, but may also be spread out over a period of decades, then perhaps the fear of global nuclear annihilation experienced in the 1950's and again in the 1980's at the height of the cold war, the anxiety over Y2K, and now the growing fear of global warming, and subconsciously even the fear of mass extinction of other species, are all part of this gestalt being experienced in slow motion. It is also possible that at some point in the near future a single moment of discontinuity will occur, which will actually unify the entire population in a collective global near death experience.

Seeking such a near death experience may be the only plausible explanation for the current global situation wherein every time we come to a fork in the road between a path that appears to lead toward a smooth gradually adaptive path to a stable sustainable future, and one that leads toward an acute moment of crisis, we seem to determinedly take the path toward crisis. For instance it seems that vast numbers of fundamentalist Christians have adopted a stance whereby they welcome this crisis and insist upon the validity of their own particular interpretation of a potential event. It seems likely that whatever is ultimately going to happen will at once validate all of the prophesies in retrospect, and at the same time necessarily be different than the interpretation currently held by any one particular system of belief.

However it may actually unfold, the ultimate consequences of the event we are grappling with is so powerful that it apparently casts a shadow backward in time. Any prophetic glimpse of it was at once so profound, and yet so alien to the cultural context of the individuals who attempted to describe their vision, that all records of those experiences

have become distorted and colored by the various cultural traditions which received, retransmitted and ultimately codified their interpretation of the prophesy. Thus, in each cultural and religious system we would expect to see profoundly powerfully held beliefs, which may all contain a vision of truth at their core. It seems most likely that the events that actually transpire may turn out to confirm and validate all of the prophesies in retrospect, but in a manner that will turn out to be different from the rigid doctrinal interpretation of the meaning of those prophesies within any one tradition.

Indeed, the unfolding of the whole synchronistic reality may be a self-fulfilling prophesy in so far as it is exactly the tightly held cultural attachment to various confused, and often violent, interpretations of the prophesies which may insure that a crisis is played out in exactly the manner that will bring about a collective near death experience. The danger for the global situation is just as the great psychologist and progenitor of transpersonal psychology, Stan Grof, says of the individual death and rebirth experience, “The trick is not to act it out in matter.” There is no guarantee that we will not skate too close to the edge and inadvertently make what *could* be a collective spiritual near death experience into an actual collective planetary death experience.

Perhaps most frightening is the observation that what is at stake may not be the end of the world, but the quality of our experience in all of our future generations on this planet. To put this in radically eastern terms, the problem is not so much that we kill ourselves now, but that we will have to continue to keep reincarnating into a far more impoverished and unpleasant experiences of life on Earth as a result of the mess we make of the planet in this lifetime. Whether you see this as future generations, or our own reincarnations, the consequences of the outcome are the same. If we screw this up now, our generation will be responsible for the loss of the possibility of redemption for all future generations.

Teilhard de Chardin, a Catholic priest writing in the early mid 20th century, was the first person to predict the emergence of global consciousness, which he called the *Noosphere*. His vision represents a recent and particularly unique variation on the theme of prophecy. Here we have the genesis of perhaps the most radically unitive vision of the Earth as

essentially one being, one organism, being born, or coming to some new stage of self-reflective consciousness. Yet even adherents to this theory, such as to some degree myself, do not actually experience ourselves in this manner. It remains an abstract intellectual idea, a conjecture rather than a felt reality. What we actually experience, perhaps with the exception of rare momentary peak experiences, is ourselves as separate individual skin encapsulated egos. Even though when we look into this more deeply, we find that biologically this is questionable. After all, we are nothing but a bag of cells. Many of them share DNA, but, then again, many do not. In fact, by cell count, not by weight or mass, there are more cells in our body aren't us than are, i.e. our body is more like an ecosystem made up of a vast community of symbiotic cells with different DNA, than one structure made up of cells all sharing the same DNA. So how, and why, do we believe that we exist? Deep unanswerable existential questions aside, one answer is that we imprint the situation at the moment of birth when all of these cells literally have the experience of living or dying as one contiguous entity.

Extrapolating further, the only way that a truly viscerally self-aware Earth could be forged out of its human population would be for that entire population, through the mediation of their communications technology, to come face to face with a visceral experience of near death; a planetary birth forged in a moment of shared collective planetary near death. Such an event might be the only possibility that would fulfill all of the prophecies. However, this remains entirely a plausible conjecture.

When considering the possibility of a specific global crisis, one that would at once be sufficient to convey an experience of shared catastrophe, and yet one which would actually be potentially adaptive rather than irrecoverably destructive, the only plausible possibility would appear to be a global economic meltdown. There are plenty of other scenarios for global crises, but many, such as for example the widespread use of nuclear weapons, are far more likely to represent irrecoverable death experiences, than potentially uplifting and globally bonding spiritual death and rebirth experiences. Any scenario which leaves various populations blaming each other for their suffering rather

than feeling that they have collectively survived a shared encounter with a natural disaster is more likely to feed various existing divisions than transcend them.

In this regard a global epidemic might also be a potential candidate for a global near death experience, and indeed may prove to be part of an unimaginably challenging set of events that could include all of these factors and more. However, for the moment we will pursue the economic scenario, as it seems likely to be a key component of any effective and empowering transformation of the global situation. Indeed, as much as our culture is often criticized as being materialistic, one could make a good case that we are not actually materialistic, but instead to a large degree *symbolistic*, valuing the abstract symbolic system of money above all else.

One could make a good case that the same economic system that was adaptive and perhaps inevitably necessary to achieve the industrial revolution, and which, in turn, gave us the science to gain sufficient mastery of matter to achieve Meta-Nature, has already itself become the source of most of the dangerously destructive patterns of human behavior on Earth. If the economic system hits crisis sooner, we will have a better chance of making the necessary transformation, if it does not, and it is allowed to continue on its present trajectory for too much longer, such that we collapse the biosphere instead, the situation would be far more likely to be irrecoverable.