

excerpts from:

## *Finding Our Center: Wisdom from the Stars and Planets in Times of Change*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the beginning of human consciousness, dating back at least 40,000 years, cultures have questioned the meaning of life and formed an understanding of our relationship with the Earth and with the Universe. The forms of these cosmologies have changed across time and across cultures. How are we to understand these ways of understanding life and the meaning of our existence? How do we become more consciously aware of the beliefs and values that shape our world in this time? In this time of intense global and environmental change, how do we find a deeper purpose and meaning that can guide us in how to live our lives?

We currently live in an intense time of transition and transformation. Many of us feel the increasing pace of time and the escalating tensions in our world. We have recently experienced a dramatic upheaval in our global economy. We are faced with ever-erupting global conflicts related to militant forces of nationalism and fundamentalism. We confront an increasing environmental crisis as we push our own and the Earth's survival to the brink of disaster. Hunger and famine are more widespread, and the gap between the world's wealthy and the poor is widening. Conflicts about nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and sexual orientation are rampant.

Individually, many of us feel that our lives need to change, yet we do not know how to do that or what that might mean. How do we make sense of this time of change and turmoil? How do we find our way in the increasing chaos and confusion of these times? Is there some larger meaning or purpose that lies beneath these crises? Where do we turn for answers?

In the midst of this cultural and personal turbulence, the religious institutions that have been a source of solace and of beliefs defining our sense of reality are showing signs of stress and fragmentation. The Catholic Church has been fraught with accusations of sexual abuse in the United States and Europe. The Episcopal Church is challenged by conflicting views about homosexuality and the confirmation of a gay bishop in the U.S., which has erupted into worldwide dissension in the Anglican community. In the Middle East, there is an increasing division between nonviolent Muslim leaders and the militant fundamentalist groups. These are just a few examples of what is happening around the globe. What does it mean that the religious institutions and beliefs of the last two thousand years are in crisis? Where do we turn to find solace and spiritual guidance? Why are we experiencing such turbulent times?

Perhaps, if we view our current experience in the larger context of human history, we can gain clues as to what we are experiencing and how to navigate these intense times. In ancient cultures, there was a deep understanding that our lives are guided and mirrored by the movements of the stars and planets as well as by changes here on Earth. Across human history,

the Great Year, the precessional cycle of 25,765 years in which the signs of the zodiac gradually shift in the sky at the time of the spring equinox due to the axial tilt of the Earth, has given us guidance as to the evolution and shifts in our consciousness. Since ancient times, spiritual leaders and teachers have known that times of transition from one astrological age to the next are times of turmoil. Part of the turbulence of our time relates to the shifts in consciousness that we are experiencing in this transition from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius. Our ways of knowing, thinking and formulating reality are being called into question.

Part of what is being challenged for us in this time is our view of the world in the context of polarization and duality. We tend to see life in dualities such as good/bad, light/dark, male/female and self/other. We also see this polarization in our conflicting desires for connection and separation, for communion and control, for meaning and for materialism.

In part, these dualities have resulted from an increasing split across the past few thousand years between our sense of self and other and our experience of spirit and body as well as the increasing split in our understanding of gender and in the relationships between men and women. This dualism has been fostered by the patriarchal consciousness of the past 5000 years and is exemplified in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and further refined by the work of Renee Descartes and the scientific revolution. Polarization has been codified in religious systems of thought that view the body as separate from spirit, and humans as set apart from nature. Nature becomes devalued and something to be controlled. Women, in their intrinsic connection with nature in their monthly cycles and child-bearing have also been increasingly devalued in patriarchal society. But as we will see, this split has not always been evident in human history.

The dialectic of separation and connection is also evident in the history of our understanding of the human mind and in the development of psychology across the past 100 years. Much of early psychological theory has been about the development of an individuated self (i.e., consider the theories of Freud and Jung as well as much of psychoanalytic theory). Psychological health was posited as the capacity to separate from merger (usually in relationship with the mother) and to develop an autonomous sense of self. To be a fully functioning person also meant the capacity to contain and control one's feelings and impulses, to separate the mind from the body and emotions. Discrimination, analytical thinking, productivity and many of the facets of left-brain functioning have been emphasized in modern western culture. Intuition, imagination, holistic thinking and empathic attunement (aspects of more right-brain functioning) have been less valued.

In recent years, in modern western culture, in developments in psychology and physics, we have begun to see a shift in this way of thinking. Recent psychological theories (such as the Stone Center Self-in-Relation work and developments in self-psychology and eco-psychology) have emphasized the importance of relationship in the formulation and maintenance of healthy human functioning. Dr. Allan Schore, who has written a seminal book, [Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self](#), links the effects of early emotional attunement and relationship to the neurobiology of early development and the subsequent development of the child's emotional and social functioning. Dan Pink, in his book, [A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age](#), states that effective functioning in our current time of change requires the skills, creativity and flexibility of right-brain thinking that incorporate a more holistic way of being and knowing.

Developments in quantum physics are asserting what mystics have always known that there is no clear demarcation between the observer and the observed, that there is no objective reality in the Universe but rather that everything is interconnected. This sense of unity is inherent in our increasing awareness that a butterfly's wings may trigger a hurricane on the other side of the globe. Or, as recently occurred in the largest power outage in U.S. history, a tree falling on a wire in Ohio triggered power failures across seven states and into Canada. All of life is interwoven. We can not separate ourselves from the larger whole whether we are speaking of the global community, the fabric of nature or of our galaxy.

Environmentalists are calling us back to that awareness and reminding us that if we do not begin to live in more dynamic, respectful relationship with the plants and animals and landscape around us, we will destroy ourselves as well as our planet. Thomas Berry among many others passionately speaks of this in his book, The Dream of Earth. He has spoken of our need to understand this current time as the dawn of an ecozoic age when all of our political and environmental policies need to reflect the awareness that we are only one species among many inhabiting this planet.

Our increasing geopolitical awareness of being part of a global community also brings this point home. We are profoundly affected by the events in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sudan or the melting of the ice cap in the Arctic. We may try to isolate ourselves with nationalistic boundaries or, more locally, in gated communities, but there is no real separation from the realities of the world that we live in. This is also becoming more and more apparent economically. We may strive to foster and secure our own wealth and material comfort, but we find that we reap the consequences when we deprive others to better ourselves—in the instability of world markets or in the rise in terrorism in response to global injustice. We are becoming increasingly aware through compassion or through the consequences of our actions that we are not alone in this world. We are part of the global human community and part of nature. Each of us is a part of a thread in the web of the Universe.

Our bodies and our psyches speak to us of this larger truth. Our bodies mirror our relationship to the natural world around us. As we overpopulate the globe, we find that cancer is on the rise. Cancer is the out of control multiplication of aberrant cells that spread through our bodies, bringing destruction to our organ systems. As we pollute our air and rivers, we find ourselves experiencing disorders of the immune system. Our cells turn against us as we have turned against the Earth. The more that we respond with increasing efforts to exert control (through warfare, consumerism, massive over-development, etc.), the more we find ourselves faced with disease and the destabilization of our internal and external environments.

Psychologically, we have to wonder what it means that depression and bipolar disorder (i.e., emotional instability) are so rampant in modern western cultures? Are these not in part a response to our increasing sense of disconnection from each other and from our natural environment and to the turbulence of these times? The prevalence of bipolar disorder may reflect the emotional and neurological stress of the profound changes in this time and the concomitant reorientation of our brain functioning (from left brain dominance to more balanced hemispheric functioning).

Perhaps the widespread depression in our western cultures is a manifestation of our growing sense of despair and disillusionment with our current ways of thinking and being.

Perhaps some spiritual or subconscious part of us remembers that this is not the way that life has always been. We hear the faint whispering of our ancestral lineage reminding us of what it means to live in communion and in wonder, to be part of the larger whole. We remember what it was like to be in tune with the cycles of the seasons and the phases of the Moon. We remember when the movement of the stars and planets had meaning. We remember when we were a part of the fabric of life and knew the creative and loving energy that moves throughout the Universe. We remember when all was One, and we were held in that knowing, in that fierce embrace.

How then do we find our way back into balance? Or is it even possible to go back? Perhaps, like the prodigal child, we need to return with the knowledge of what it means to experience ruptured relationship, the angst of separation and the despair of disconnection. Like the adolescent who defiantly asserts separation, we are needing to mature in the awareness that we are only truly unique and whole when we remember what it means to come back into right relationship—now with more respect and awareness of the profundity of our interconnectedness and the damaging results of defiance, illusory control and separation. Perhaps, analogous to our individual psychological development, we have needed to move through this phase in our collective cultural evolution. But, like the acting-out adolescent, if we remain locked in this developmental stage, we will become increasingly destructive to ourselves and to all of life around us. We are being asked to engage in a profound shift in consciousness. We are called to move into more conscious communion and co-creation with each other and with the natural world.

But how do we return? How do we make this shift? Ironically, in recent years, as we become more aware of our increasing fragile situation globally and environmentally, western cultures have attempted to manage the problems through escalating efforts at control. We go to war pre-emptively to fend off the violence of war. We increasingly use antibiotics (“anti-life” pills) and toxic chemicals (chemotherapy) to “fight” illness. While these approaches are vital to the health and survival of many who are ill, they also reflect our dominant mentality of separation, aggression and control. Perhaps there are more options to recover our health and well-being. Perhaps war and dominance are not the most effective paths to world peace and stability.

We need to look deeper. We need to learn to listen. The increasing illnesses are giving us a message about our imbalance with nature and disconnection from our own bodies. The spread of violence and despair are speaking to us of global injustice and inequity. The rising greenhouse gases in our atmosphere are showing us that we are violating the very air that we breathe. The answer is not to try harder to assert control and dominance but to pause and listen and remember what it means to be in right relationship. We need to return to attunement, to respect, to compassion, to an awareness of the inter-connectedness of all of life. What we do to the rivers, we do to our own blood streams. What we do to our sisters and brothers in other countries, we do to our own children. What we do to the trees of the rain forests, we do to our own lungs. There is no separation. We live in a sentient Universe, and we are a part of a unified cosmos.

In ancient times, our ancestors were more in tune with the meaning and wonder of the Universe. They had an intrinsic understanding of natural law, and they lived in intimate relationship with the plants that they ate and used for medicines and with the animals that they hunted for food. They knew that their survival was dependent on being in right relationship, on

interacting with other species with honor and gratitude. In native cultures, they understood that their actions in the present affected the seven generations to follow. For thousands of years, they knew how to listen to the pulse of the Earth and the songs of the stars. How then do we find our way back to that knowledge, not forgetting where we have been and who we have become, but coming back into relationship with the Earth, each other and all of life with more consciousness, wisdom and respect?

Throughout human history, our cultural development has been shaped by the world around us and our relationship to it. This is evident in archeology and in mythology across the ages. What we have forgotten is how much our ancestors understood themselves as part of a larger whole. They knew that the currents that shape the Universe also coursed through their veins and affected their lives. They looked to the patterns in nature and in the sky to guide them into more awareness of and attunement with the energy of the creative intelligence of the Universe. They glimpsed the signature of the Divine in the cycles of nature, in the color or shape of plants and in the movement of the stars.

Since the development of Newtonian physics and the industrial age, we have attempted to remove ourselves from that web of connection and have tried to analyze ourselves and nature as separate “objects” for study, dissection and mastery. We have learned a great deal of knowledge about the Universe in this manner, but we have lost touch with a deeper sense of meaning and wisdom in the process. Our challenge is to begin to reweave our scientific understanding back into a cosmology, a sense of the meaning of who we are in relation to the cosmos.

Perhaps, we can be guided by our ancestors in that effort. If we trace human history across the millenia, we will see that the patterns of culture and mythology were shaped by the movement of the stars in the sky -- “as above, so below” – not in a deterministic sense but in a relational context. This is the art and science of astrology, which has been in existence for thousands of years. In recent history, astrology has been devalued. We no longer seek meaning and wisdom from the sky but have focused on seeing the planets as bodies of matter to be explored and measured. It is time to reweave our collection of factual data with our ancestors’ attunement to patterns, cycles and a context of meaning. While we have blinded ourselves to the sky with our artificial light in our cities, the patterns of the stars and planets remain in the firmament above us. It is time to move beyond the analysis of our minds and to return to an opening of our hearts to the messages that the Universe is trying to convey to us. The communication is there if we are willing to listen.

# PART ONE – SETTING THE STAGE

## CHAPTER ONE - LIVING IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

We are currently in a transition time between ages. We are leaving the Age of Pisces and are on the cusp of a new age, the Age of Aquarius. Ancient myths and modern science teach us that such periods of transition are marked by global and social turmoil. These are times that are stressful for the planet from a geological standpoint and also from a cultural or sociological perspective and involve significant shifts in human consciousness.

The cycle of astrological ages is related to the precession of equinoxes. Our Earth revolves around the Sun and rotates on its axis. However, our view of the sky gradually shifts over time (1 degree every 72 years) due to the precessional cycle. The traditional understanding of this gradual movement of the Earth's axis in relation to the sky is that the Earth has a slow, wobbling movement due to the gravitational pull of the Sun and Moon, resulting in the shifting of the Earth's axis over time.

The visible manifestation of this is in the gradual changing of the celestial pole and the slow shifting of the constellations in the sky. For example, in 3000 B.C., the pole star was Alpha Draconis, but now our pole star is Polaris. (See Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.)

About two thousand years ago, the constellation Pisces began to rise on the horizon at the time of the spring equinox, but now, we are gradually moving towards the constellation Aquarius rising at that time of year. This shifting of the vernal rising of constellations is known as the precession of equinoxes. Each age lasts approximately 2160 years.

Of significance is a recent different scientific hypothesis for the precessional motion proposed by Walter Cruttenden of the Binary Research Institute in his 2005 book, Lost Star of Myth and Time. A similar view has also been suggested by Dr. Richard Muller of UC Berkeley and Dr. Daniel Whitmire of the University of Louisiana. These researchers speculate that our Sun is part of a binary star system. This means that our Sun is gravitationally bound with another star, not yet identified, with both orbiting around a common center. Astronomers have noted in the past several years that binary star systems are common in the Milky Way galaxy. If this is the case, then the precessional motion is not due to the wobbling of the Earth's axis but rather due to our Sun's movement which pulls our solar system in a gentle arc through space. The time that it takes for our Sun to complete one orbit would be the equivalent of the full precessional cycle (approximately 24-26,000 years). As Cruttendon explains:

Just as the spinning motion of the Earth causes the cycle of day and night, and just as the orbital motion of the Earth around the Sun causes the cycle of the seasons, so too does the binary motion cause a cycle of rising and falling ages over long periods of time, due to increasing and decreasing electromagnetic effects generated by our Sun and nearby stars.

(Binary Research Institute report)

If in fact we are part of a binary star system, think how this would affect our understanding of the universe and of ourselves. Our over-emphasis in modern western culture on separation and individuation would be called into question, and in a deep and profound way, we would need to understand ourselves, our solar system and our universe in a relational context.

Some of the researches advocating the binary star theory believe that the star that we are orbiting with is the brightest star in our sky, Sirius. It is noteworthy that this star has been sacred in many ancient cultures. The Dogon culture in Western Africa has honored Sirius for over 5,000 years. Interestingly, long before the modern scientific discovery that Sirius is a twin star with Sirius A orbited by its invisible twin, Sirius B, the Dogon tribe worshipped both and were able to describe Sirius B as an invisible, heavy but very powerful star. They believe that Sirius is the axis of the universe and the source of all life. In ancient Egypt, Sirius was worshipped for thousands of years (beginning about 3000 B.C.E.) as the primary Mother and Life-giving Goddess, Isis, who was seen as the source of life and as the one who helped souls to incarnate on this planet. Many other ancient cultures honored Sirius as a primary deity. Perhaps these ancient cultures had knowledge that was subsequently forgotten in more recent times.

Whatever the cause of the precessional motion, it is significant and has been studied by humans for millennia. Initially, it may have been charted through the movements of the stars, particularly heliacal rising stars (ie. those rising with the Sun) and the polar stars. Later, the constellations that follow the line of the Sun, Moon and planets in the sky, the path of the ecliptic (about 20 degrees wide), were viewed as important markers of the seasonal cycle of the year and the larger precessional cycle. Many ancients referred to the planets as the “wandering stars,” moving against the backdrop of the constellations. We know that the ancient Chinese and Babylonians originally developed a zodiac with six signs by the sixth century BCE. Later, about 630 to 450 BCE, ancient cultures created the zodiac with 12 signs, similar to the one that we use today (cf. Robert Hand, “History of Astrology”, p.2).

While Hipparchus, a Greek astronomer who lived around 147 BCE has been credited with the discovery of the precessional motion, many scholars believe that it was much more ancient in origin. Giorgio De Santillana and Hertha Von Dechend in their seminal book, Hamlet's Mill, describe how cultures around the globe and across human history have understood this slow, gradual process of the precession of equinoxes. These ancient cultures' astronomical knowledge of this phenomenon was embedded in their mythology, and these authors cite over 200 myths from 30 different cultures around the globe, some dating back to the Neolithic (early prehistoric) period that encoded numbers and references pertaining to the precessional cycle.

Many of these myths speak of this process as the “grinding of a mill” with the axis of the mill as the line reaching outward toward the pole star in the sky. These cultures often referred to the “four corners of the Earth,” which are the world “pillars” or equinox and solstice points marking the framework of their world in that time. With the precessional motion, the framework of the world (i.e. the solstice and equinox points and the pole star) gradually shifts. Many of the myths from around the globe tie this shifting of the equinoxes and the times of transitions between ages as fraught with pain and danger. These myths associate images of “floods”, “deluges” or cataclysmic disasters of some sort with these precessional changes.

In recent years, through scientific research, we have come to understand that the precession of equinoxes is also related to the patterns of glaciation and deglaciation. These

periods of transition between ages have been associated with natural disasters that the ancients were attempting to warn us about. Scientists now know that the onset and retreat of ice ages are related to three factors in the earth's orbital geometry: the obliquity of the ecliptic (which is the angle of the earth's axis of rotation as well as the angle between the celestial equator and the ecliptic), the eccentricity of the earth's orbit (i.e. the elongation of the earth's path around the Sun) and the axial precession (cf. Hancock, Underworld, pp. 271-271).

These factors affect the amount and intensity of sunlight and the patterns of global warming or cooling that lead to changes in the ice ages. What is important to note here is the level of sophisticated understanding on the part of ancient cultures about the gradual movements of the stars and how this had a profound effect on the world. Their myths were attuned to these patterns in the sky and their meaning for us on Earth in a way that we in modern times seem to have forgotten.

Not only does the precession of equinoxes cause changes in global climate patterns, it also relates to shifts in our social and political ways of being. Many ancient cultures viewed our development globally as cyclical rather than linear. These periods of advance and decline relate to the precessional cycle through the zodiac or the Great Year. If in fact our precessional cycle is related to our being a part of a binary star system, Cruttendon and others speculate that these cycles may relate to the electromagnetic fields that our Earth moves through in space as we complete this approximately 26,000 year orbit. Perhaps we advance in our consciousness and development as we move closer to the gravitational center of that orbit and decline as we move away.

Whatever the cause of the cycles, from a cultural perspective, these periods of shifting between ages are times of tumult as we let go of certain patterns of social, political and religious organization and move towards new ways of being. Such periods are often characterized by a significant degree of backlash, or reassertion of the old forms in a more rigid and exaggerated manner in reaction or resistance to the process of dissolution and change. The forms that the backlash takes are shaped by the themes of the age that is ending. In our current time, for example, we are seeing an increase in terrorism arising from fundamentalist religious groups. These terrorists are often sacrificing themselves in a form of martyrdom for their religious cause. These are exaggerated expressions of the archetypes of spirituality and sacrifice that are characteristic of the Piscean Age.

This understanding of the archetypal energies inherent in the patterns of the sky and reflected in events on Earth is very ancient. Yet, we are beginning to see this awareness resurface in our modern times. Richard Tarnas in Cosmos and Psyche traces the way in which this ancient attunement to archetypal patterns and to the sense of our living in a creative and intelligent cosmos was gradually lost following the Copernican revolution and the Enlightenment over 500 years ago. He describes the way in which we now live in a narrowly defined world of "science" and a "disenchanted" universe. With amazing hubris, we assume that our capacity for creativity, consciousness and symbolism are uniquely our own rather than being an extension and reflection of those qualities in the cosmos. He argues convincingly that we live in a sentient and meaningful Universe, and that it is to our own peril for us to continue to blind ourselves to that deeper reality.

I would posit that the conflict between these world views, the one of the Universe as a mechanistic “other” to be analyzed versus the Cosmos as a relational context of meaning, purpose and vast intelligence actually began as we moved into the patriarchal era (around 3000 B.C.E.). This loss of connection with the sentient nature of the Universe may also relate to the cycles of advance and decline related to the binary orbit of our Sun with its companion star.

According to the interpretation of the Hindu Yuga cycle (i.e. the Hindu epochs associated with the precessional cycle), we are emerging out of the Kali Yuga, the lowest phase of consciousness in which people live in a materialistic manner with a primary focus on physical reality. According to this system, much of the wisdom of the past and energetic and spiritual understanding of the earlier ages is lost during the Kali Yuga or Age of Ignorance. It is a time of wars and of vying for power with world leadership moving from being primarily in the hands of women to that of men.

According to the Indian yogi, Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri (guru of Paramahansa Yogananda), the zenith of this 1200 year Kali Yuga phase was during the Dark Ages or 500 A.D. Since 1700 A.D., we have been moving into a higher phase of consciousness, the Dvapara Yuga. This Yuga lasts 2400 years and is characterized by increasing scientific and spiritual understanding, awareness of subtle energies and an understanding of the unity of all of life as well as an increase in the prominence of the Sacred Feminine.

As Tarnas notes, this ancient wisdom and renewed spiritual awareness began to resurface in modern times through Jung’s depth psychology and his depiction of archetypes as principles embedded in our individual and collective unconscious. According to Jung:

... the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of archetypes. The concept of the archetype... indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere. Mythological research calls them “motifs.” ... This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents.

(Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, pp. 42-3)

This calls into question the Cartesian notion of “I think therefore I am” and of the postmodern notion that all of our theories and understandings of the universe are based on the projections of our own thoughts and beliefs or that we have the capacity as individuals to shape our own reality. While we have conscious choice in our lives, we are also part of larger cosmic currents of change. The Jungian archetypes harken back to ancient wisdom is that we are in fact formed and shaped by the currents of an archetypal field that is beyond our control and beyond our full conscious comprehension. In attuning to that field and aligning ourselves with those larger forces and patterns, we not only come back into balance and right relationship with the life around us but also step into a greater sense of our own wholeness. As we face this crisis of transition, it is more critical than ever before that we see the nature of the Universe and our own

lives in a more clear and holistic way rather than remaining blinded by our false presuppositions and by our disconnection from the world around us.