

Transition to Source

Kate Isaacs: Happy Mother's Day to all of us who are mothers, who are daughters, who are grandmothers, who are aunts and sisters, and to all of the dads and grandfathers and uncles and brothers and sons who are connected with us.

It is a time of pressure and transition in the world, on this Mother's Day, which has thrown me personally into a period of blankness and newness. I find that I don't have much to say in the old ways on many things about which I used to have a lot to say. It is an uncomfortable feeling, and one that is not unfamiliar, having been through a number of transitions in my life. I want to say a few words today about transition, from a personal place, and since it is Mother's Day, about what my children have taught me about transition. They are great teachers. And they are unrelenting teachers. They keep teaching you the lesson until you get it.

I'm questioning a lot of things right now and asking myself questions in a new way, in midlife and mid-career. Who am I as a mother, a wife, a professional? I have done work in the professional world of business for 20 years. And all of a sudden, I find myself not able to do the things that I thought I should be doing. I try one project and run into a brick wall. I try something else and run into another brick wall. Okay, I guess that's not it. But what *is* it I'm meant to be doing? The answers aren't forthcoming quite yet. But I am continuing to question what my contribution should be right now in this moment. What is my higher purpose? How should I be serving now, in *this* moment?

I want to tell a couple of stories about what my kids have taught me about transition. One is about what it means to stay present. It's a story about the birth of my second son, Eli.

I was trained in a technique called hypnobirthing, which is about staying in touch with your body during the birthing process. It's a very different model than the medicalized "purple pushing" approach to birth. During labor, there is a time of transition when your body goes from the early stages of opening, to being fully open and ready to have your baby. Very often, though not always, that time of transition is accompanied by exhaustion and despair, and thoughts of "I can't do this anymore," or "This is too hard. I need that epidural now." This transition is when you are actually almost through to the last phase of labor, but it is often the moment of greatest emotional difficulty.

My labor with Eli was very painful and more difficult than the birth of my first son. I didn't expect it to be that way, and I was caught off guard. I didn't think it would be that hard, but it was. Labor had been going for a long while, and it was tough. The nurse came in and checked me and she said, "Well, you are about halfway there." I was shocked. Given all the difficulty and pain, I had figured I was just about ready to finish the whole thing and have it over and done with. Well, that wasn't the case. I thought, "I just can't do this for another 10 hours or 12 hours or whatever it's going to be." I sank down into a deep dark place for a few minutes. But labor keeps going whether you like it or not. I realized that while I might not be able to take the thought of 10 or 12 more hours of this agony, I could do at least one more contraction—surge, as it's called in hypnobirthing. And with Bill by my side, and my birth team, I felt supported. Sure enough, I got through that next surge. And then there was a rest. And there was another surge. And, I thought, "Ok I can get through this. I can get through it one surge at a time."

In that context of being forced to be present—because there was really no other alternative—this image came to me of this angel of light that was inside me, and all around me. I suddenly connected the surges and the pain that I was feeling with the angel that was about to be born. That totally shifted everything. It gave new meaning and purpose to the process that I was in. When the next surge came, I focused on the angel that was going to be born really soon. The purpose of the surges, and their pain and intensity, was so that this beautiful being, whom I so wanted to meet, could come into the world.

I found then that my body didn't resist the process and I no longer had thoughts of "Oh my god, I can't do this." I just was there, there was a reason this was happening, and it was a really good reason. I can't say that it became any less painful. But it became bearable. Eli was born very soon after that, and the end of the birth was incredibly beautiful and not painful at all. So, Eli, before he was even born, taught me how to stay present so I could discover the bigger purpose and meaning of what I was going through. I ask: if we are present and not resisting, what we might discover about the purpose of *this* moment that we are all experiencing right now in the world?

I have one more story to tell. This one is about right timing. Before Covid-19 when we still had school every morning, I would make the kids breakfast, get our older son David into the car, and drive off to school. This was a particularly beautiful morning in early winter. The sun was shining, and I felt very inspired. Usually on the way to school, David liked to listen to audio stories. That's our ritual. Well, this particular morning I was so inspired that I felt like listening to

Yo-Yo Ma, one of my favorite musicians. I had started learning to play the cello when I was pregnant with David, and I felt a connection to Yo-Yo Ma's beautiful version of Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G Major. It's only about 3 minutes long and I thought David might enjoy it too. I put it on and was about to float away...

You can probably guess what happened next. "Hey! That's not the story I wanted to listen to. That's boring music. Where's my story!? Mommmmmaaaa!!!" And on and on. So what was I going to do? I didn't want to give into the whining. I said, "Let's finish the song and try to listen to it." I invited David to pay attention to the beautiful, transcendent music. Well, that didn't work. He insisted it was boring and couldn't wait for it to be over. He yelled and grumped. There was no floating away with Yo-Yo Ma this time. Finally it was over, and we got to the story he wanted and then we got to school. And I was sweating.

Those of you who are mothers know there is not a lot of time to relax and put your feet up. I was thinking this was one of those moments where I might have a little window of ahhhh on the way to school and bring David into that feeling too. I realized, after I dropped him off—why didn't I just do his story on the way to school and listen to my music on the way back? Everyone would have been happy.

I find that, time and time again with my kids, there is this lesson about right timing. There is a right time for everything. Of course, I know this intellectually. And I hope that I am open and responsive to Life and to the Life current. But my children are teaching me this in a deeper way again and again and again. When I listen to the right time to do things, my kids are happy and so am I.

The lesson that I am learning again, right now, in this moment of transition is there is an even greater need to listen to the right timing for everything. Right timing is part of the intelligence of spirit moving through me. As I stop doing all the usual things that I was doing before this crisis, I am being forced, and we are all being forced, to listen in a new way. We all have the opportunity to come to a deeper knowing of when to act, and how to act, so that we touch all of the beings in our world in creative and generative ways.

I want to close with a couple of stanzas from a poem that I am sure many of you have also been aware of in this moment, "Keeping Quiet" by Pablo Neruda, who was not only a brilliant poet but also a Chilean diplomat who was very active on the world scene. I will read just a couple of stanzas here:

Now we will count to twelve
 and we will all keep still
 for once on the face of the earth,
 let's not speak in any language;
 let's stop for a second,
 and not move our arms so much.

It would be an exotic moment
 without rush, without engines;
 we would all be together
 in a sudden strangeness.

It is a strange time, and beautiful...

If we were not so single-minded
 about keeping our lives moving,
 and for once could do nothing,
 perhaps a huge silence
 might interrupt this sadness
 of never understanding ourselves
 and of threatening ourselves with death.
 Perhaps the earth can teach us
 as when everything seems dead
 and later proves to be alive.

Now I'll count up to twelve
 and you keep quiet and I will go.

Bill Isaacs: Keeping quiet. Let all the earth keep silent. In this way we honor the Great Mother and the Great Father. We are in a state of metamorphosis, of transition, as a human race. This has been the case for a long time but is becoming more evident to people than it has ever been. We are in an enforced moment of realization.

I have been thinking over the past few days about my own initial experiences of realization. What came to mind was an experience I had almost forty years ago. I was in England attending a conference. It was there that I met Conrad O'Brien-French. Conrad was one of the inspirations for the author Ian Fleming's James Bond stories. He was a quite unusual, debonair character who carried himself with a certain knowing eye, very much in the manner of an alumnus of MI6. He was by this time over 90 years old. He was tall, and suave, and very present. He got on the stage in front of an amphitheater with 200 people spreading out before him, surveyed the scene for a moment and then said something I did not expect: "Behold, the Tree of Life." His words went right through me.

What is being born? Human beings are in a gigantic inquiry, in this pandemic and anxiety-filled moment, about what might or might not happen. Beneath the disturbance is an opportunity to step back. As we do so, we find there is something to discover. Stepping back can lead one to see unhelpful personal habits previously hidden from view. But more than this is possible. We are in a moment of liminal space, meaning a threshold, between what we have known and are yet to know. This is an experience where up seems to be down and down seems to be up. We can appreciate the value and potential of these times, recognizing that they are in fact quite necessary, because they allow a movement out of the known and into the unknown. Of course, this is not a state that is particularly sought after. People avoid it. Today they tend to sit at home waiting for the crisis to end so that they can go back to what they knew. But at least for some people it is occurring that this strange moment presents an opportunity to move into a new awareness and understanding.

While what we may see starts close in, with one's own personal habits, vision can quickly extend to reveal the fragility of many of the systems that have held human institutions together. We see, for instance, not only the competence of some leaders but also the incompetence of others—the ability of some to hold things together and the stunning inability of others to do so. It comes very clear in such times who can hold steady and act with confidence, and who is making it up as they go along. We could of course each review the quality of our own personal resilience and steadiness.

But we can step back even further. There are features of what is happening today that have echoes to patterns that arose in the 1930's—the economic fragility of those times, the depression, the rise of authoritarianism and fascism, the threat and eventuality of global conflict. That moment was moving to a precipice, a turning point; the same seems to be true now. At the same time we can see the recycling of human history: repressive regimes produce an era of turmoil, eventually being overturned, which leads to more progressive patterns. There are many people today hoping that the same thing might occur, that the difficulties of this moment could give rise to a fundamental change, the birth of a new era. But these two patterns are really two ends of the same stick—repressive social regimes, which are "bad," and progressive governments which are "good."

What is being offered to human beings through the ingenious creativity of life, is something different. It is a chance to see beyond these polarized patterns, to recognize that there is a something beyond all of this, an experience that Life is offering that transcends human systems.

To know this requires active participation in the initiatory process we are now in, something that has a very definite structure and rhythm. It begins with separation, severance, from familiar ways of functioning. What follows is trial, challenges of various kinds, and then ultimately a return, but with a different state of awareness and understanding (People are of course hoping to return sooner than later—but may in so doing be avoiding what there is to discover). This sequence of separation, initiation, and return is the “hero's journey” written about by Joseph Campbell in his book *Hero with A Thousand Faces*. It outlines a pathway by which human beings can gain access to new levels of understanding and self-awareness. Campbell pointed out that the heroic myths on every continent, from Maori stories to the Mahabharata in India to African proverbs to Polynesian and Native American stories all have the same structure: separation, initiation, and return.

As Kate pointed out, in the transitional state, the metamorphosis pattern, the pressure builds. It's just at about this time that some people begin to hope that maybe it is all just about over. They look for an exit. But as Kate indicated, the real need is to move through all the way. I have been thinking of what is happening today as a remarkable collective learning opportunity, preparation for engagement in a much larger cycle that is underway. As difficult as the current crisis may seem, I suspect it is nothing compared to what may emerge. You can't for instance self-isolate from the rising waters that results from a melting ice cap. If the Greenland ice shelf has in fact already passed the tipping point, as some scientists suggest, we are in for a dramatic sea level rise, perhaps as much as 20 meters. That would bring about changes that make the current disruptions look rather mild.

There are many outer factors that can cause disturbance, but there is one safe place to be. The “trial,” the initiation that is being offered to human beings, can result in the discovery of this safe place. Central to this is the realization that what is needed is not another humanly generated social system but an experience that transcends the entire situation.

How could this come about? By accepting identity in the stable place of Undimensional Being, and by allowing the creative process that would bring this about in oneself to actually work. From here, one is present to the lessons that emerge and in position to give voice to the reality of oneSelf. We see that there is a continuous movement in each moment from the known to the unknown, from empty to full, from separation from what one has known, through a transition and release into something new. This is the creative process of life, operating at every level, everywhere. Developing real fluidity of movement in oneself with these cycles takes some

work in consciousness. All of us have been conditioned to put on the brakes when faced with this process, but now things are intensifying. The global lockdown is a vivid symbol of the fact that there is much less choice, which is wonderful.

What emerges as one surrenders into this flow is profound gratitude for what is present here and now. The song we heard at the outset of this time, called “May I Suggest” by Susan Werner, points to this. It has some beautiful words:

*May I suggest
 May I suggest to you
 May I suggest this is the best part of your life
 May I suggest
 This time is blessed for you
 This time is blessed and shining almost blinding bright
 Just turn your head
 And you'll begin to see
 The thousand reasons that were just beyond your sight*

This is the open-hearted door through which to move, an opportunity to return to source and experience the simplicity and power of being.

As we do so, we are in position to meet the patterns of difficulty and traumatic factors that emerge, individually and collectively. The authoritarian patterns that arose in the 1930's for instance did not come out of nothing; they were present in the human subconscious and arose to be addressed. How did we do then? How well will we do now? These patterns need to be transformed. This is only possible as one returns to source, to the place of being that is easily larger than any disturbance.

The earth is breathing a sigh of relief with the reduction of human activity. You can hear the birds in Wuhan again. The canals of Venice are clear. In northern India people can see the Himalayas for the first time in over 30 years. These facts have been pointed out by the luminous leader of New Zealand, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. She recently quoted a poem, called “Metamorphosis,” written by Nadine Ann Hura that speaks to this:

*Rest now, e Papatūānuku – (Mother Earth in Maori)
 Breathe easy and settle
 Right here where you are
 We'll not move upon you
 For awhile
 We'll stop, we'll cease
 We'll slow down and stay home*

Draw each other close and be kind
 Kinder than we've ever been.
 I wish we could say we were doing it for you
 as much as ourselves
 But hei aha

We're doing it anyway

The Prime Minister of New Zealand has light in her eyes and there is some coherence in the way her country is managing the effects of Covid-19 because of it.

Beneath the disturbance, in the quiet, it becomes evident that there is in fact something coordinating these cycles of transformation. What can emerge from the trial of initiation is the return to source, and ultimately to the sacred animating energy flowing through the whole. This is captured beautifully by these words from Revelation:

“He shewed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of god, and of the Lamb.

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22-1-2).

We are leaves of the tree of life. That reality can be known now, through each one of us, as we embrace this transition and listen for what is present now and seeking to emerge.

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Kate Isaacs: kisaacs@mit.edu

Bill Isaacs: bill.isaacs@dialogos.com

Pre-Service Music

May I Suggest

Composed by Susan Werner and performed by Red Molly