

Rendezvous With Destiny

Bill Isaacs: Human beings live in the world of time and space. Being on the planet, we can't avoid it. But if we reflect on this, we can also come to see that we don't only live in that range, but have access to something more, to a level of experience that transcends the demands and immediacy of the world. We may, if we choose, come into the presence of the eternal flow of life here and now. This is a puzzle, a paradox, because somehow both are true at once. Part of what it means to live in the world of time and space is to pay attention to the cycles that operate within the range of our immediate responsibilities. There are of course many ongoing cycles at many levels, impacting our immediate lives, our society, the physical planet, the solar system, and beyond. There are also cycles operating at more subtle, invisible levels: pulsations and tides of memory, for instance, that flow through individual and shared awareness.

In recent weeks, there has been some saber rattling from Russia that is triggering a memory of the perilous events of 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Many analysts have said that not since that time have we been at risk of some kind of nuclear exchange. Whether that is true or not, it points to the recognition that human history recycles, that patterns in the subconscious of mankind tend to reemerge from time to time. These patterns are quite detectable and observable and more, turn out to have a predictable structure. They operate within the collective subconscious of human beings. Let's consider the possibility that they do not need to continue to repeat themselves in the same way.

At the Democratic Convention in July of 1936 in Philadelphia, Franklin Roosevelt, when he accepted the renomination for the presidency, said this: "There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations, much is given. Of other generations, much is expected. This generation has a rendezvous with destiny." Little did he know that a few years later the world would be ensnared in the Second World War. Leaders with greatness sense and anticipate the larger unfolding cycles and provide the leadership needed for the events to come. There's a sense in people today that we're on the brink of something similar, a challenging moment. This seems correct. I would suggest Roosevelt's words apply now to each of us, not just because there are factors emerging in an outer sense that are likely to

bring great intensity, but because there are factors emerging from an invisible level too, enabling us to meet that intensity with healing and transformative energy. For the first time, perhaps in a very long time, these two rhythms are meeting.

It's easy to sense that a change of season is upon us. Much that used to make sense, particularly in social and political realms, not only in the United States, but also in much of the rest of the world, no longer holds. Accepted norms are being jettisoned. There is a naked battle for power between polarized groups in many countries. People are working around the world in subtle and not so subtle ways to erode taken-for-granted democratic norms and, in place, establish authoritarian control. These efforts are often framed in Orwellian terms as efforts to save their country and preserve democracy when just the opposite threatens to be the case. And sometimes, like Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there is a much more blatant grab for power and control.

The cycles unfolding in our own lives are starting points for understanding and influencing all of this. For example, each age and stage has its seasons, its right rhythms, its appropriate moves. We may sense certain things to begin to do and other things to let go of, depending on the season we are in. If we're wise, we move with these compulsions. There is seasonality in the unfolding of our own lives, and there is also seasonality in the way factors arise for clarification in our own subconscious. Reaction patterns in us tend to repeat themselves. If we do not deal with them effectively when they arise, they will return. It is, however, possible to transform factors that have been stuck, to heal and let go of ways we have been living in the past. We can build strong momentum if we do this consistently.

To get a sense of the cyclicity of one's own life, here's an interesting exercise you can try: Think for a minute of what's current and really significant to you, what matters most to you, today. Try doing that for a second. Now divide your current age in two, and ask the same question: "What was really significant to me at that time? What was going on then? Now think of the first memory you ever had. See if you can recall your very first recollection. Then take a minute to see if you can see a pattern connecting these three moments. Sometimes it's more evident than not, but this exercise can reveal the way things cycle in our lives. In my experience, it's remarkably clear. I feel myself now at a particular initiation point, and was having a very similar experience at half my age. I also am aware of

a very early moment in my life that is also correlated to this. I was about two; I recall the light coming into our apartment from a wall of windows overlooking Washington Square Park in Manhattan. I think I must have been on the floor looking up. But I remember seeing the beams of light and feeling the aesthetic and the magic of that, the wholeness of it, and with it a sense of beginnings. This made a big impression.

The cycles and seasons of our lives have very exact creative requirements and present to us clear compulsions. These things are gentle but not particularly subtle if you are listening and paying attention. But it takes discipline to let go of the old, as well as awareness to move accurately with what is newly emerging now. It also takes courage and honesty to clarify rising factors in ourselves which may be distorting perception or experience, but to which we are attached.

The same is also true at larger levels. There are ways to perceive the structure and patterns of history. The book *The Fourth Turning*, by William Strauss and Neil Howe, captures this idea well. The authors show that over successive generations, social roles, social bonds and trust in institutions change in predictable and cyclical ways. They argue that larger cycles shift about every 80 years. They illustrate this by enumerating four stages of change that they call “turnings:”

The First Turning is a High, an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism, when a new civic order implants and the old values regime decays.

The Second Turning is an Awakening, a passionate era of spiritual upheaval, when the civic order comes under attack from a new values regime.

The Third Turning is an Unraveling, a downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening institutions, when the old civic order decays and the new values regime implants.

The Fourth Turning is a Crisis, a decisive era of secular upheaval, when the values regime propels the replacement of the old civic order with a new one. Each turning comes with its own identifiable mood. Always, these mood shifts catch people by surprise (*The Fourth Turning: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny* by William Strauss, Neil Howe).

Written in 1997, the authors predicted that around 2005 there would be a sudden spark that would catalyze a crisis. Remnants, as they say,

"of the social order will disintegrate political and economic trust will implode. Real hardship will beset the land with severe distress that could involve questions of class, race, nation and empire. Yet this time of trouble will bring seeds of social rebirth. Americans will share a regret about recent mistakes and a resolute consensus about what to do. The very survival of the nation will feel at stake and there is as they put at a great gate of history."

When was the last fourth turning? The 1930's heading into World War II. The time before that? The 1850's and 1860's leading to the Civil War. And there were times before that and before that and before that. Strauss and Howe go on to predict the events they saw likely in some form to arise in the period between 2005 and 2026. Reading their prophecy is to hear a breathtaking foretelling of coming events. They named the possibility of terrorists blowing up an airplane, a severe financial crises and collapse, an out-of-control virus leading to a pandemic, a breakdown of accepted norms in the social order, and Russian military action on its neighbors. Most of what they anticipated has occurred. This is less to admire their thinking than to point to the fact that human history cycles in predictable ways. Fourth Turning crises are foreseeable and volatile. Each successive one has deployed ever increasing sophisticated technology and unleashed ever more violent conflict. It's unlikely this one will be any less intense.

Cyclicity in human history carries with it a recycling of the same factors. Perhaps because of this, despite the illusion of progress, and sense of relief as a new cycle begins, people develop dissatisfaction with the current order; it gradually unravels, leading to a new crisis. But the truth is that the incoming order doesn't really change much. It's more of a flat circle than an upward spiral.

As we become aware of these patterns, we may ask the question, "What will it take to allow something different to happen?" We may become aware of the fact that the whole has been introducing new factors all along. This includes a rising wave of Self-awareness and awakening in many people and places around the world. Our own sense of awakened Self-awareness is evidence of this larger movement. This is not something we can take credit for. It just unfolded, to whatever extent, if we allowed it to. There is a larger invisible pattern at work, operating in and through these cycles. And now for the first time in a long while, there may be some level of critical mass where a measure of encompassment of these factors becomes possible. In this current Fourth Turning, for instance, this may make

possible not only a clearing away of an old order but space for something fundamentally different and previously unimaginable to emerge. Human beings' highest vision has typically been a better version of the same social reality. But something beyond this is possible.

How does this collective shift happen? It's not just a matter of being detached and emotionally putting one's arms around what we imagine is unfolding. That is imagination in action and carries little impact. Our contact points into this cycle of history are immediate, direct and personal, arising within us. Table stakes for this level of leadership are a deep sense of true Being, an experience of ease and awareness that everything's going to work out. However, that is only the starting point. We don't need to reiterate it. The more pressing question is, "What do I sense arising in me now? What do I know I need to heal in my immediate experience and field of awareness? What is my reaction to the factors of difficulty that I experience around me? What do I do (not what to tell myself or others) with regard to these things?"

We have an impact as we operate both with a mature grasp of the world of time and space, and at the same time, a precise introduction of the right qualities of energy in the right ways directly through our experience into the world. That is what counts as true leadership: the ability to embrace both.

Wider social factors are coming to a crisis point that may well become even more difficult than they are now. If this turns out to be the case, it will no doubt catalyze for many people fear and a sense of impending doom. Apparently, this is already the case with a whole generation of young people coming of age; the suicide rate for adolescents around the world has skyrocketed. Someone needs to introduce the understanding that it is possible to let things work out, that somehow Life in a wider sense has got even this, as we learn to cooperate with it.

Along with this emerging Fourth Turning pattern, is also a rising pattern of collective awakening. Seeds of light planted over the millennia are to some extent coming to the surface. Whatever people may hope, the world that is emerging need not merely be a better version of what once was. What it might be is quite unimaginable. And there certainly is no guarantee of real change, because while the turning of the cycle from above and from below is inexorable, what actually happens in human experience is not. Human beings have

choice, and an ability to interrupt and abort creative processes. I am sure we can all relate to that. At the same time, there is an opportunity to surf the wave of creative change now flowing and let something fundamentally different emerge.

Roosevelt's observation of a "rendezvous with destiny" is indeed true today. A new community is forming— in the Ukraine, in Russia, in Africa, in the US, even across polarized patterns that are getting more calcified by the day. Who can hold the space to allow these intense factors to heal? The capacity for this comes not through thinking about it, but by addressing polarized patterns in oneself. Sometimes this means shaking up one's own status quo. There is saying that you should be careful—your groove could turn out to be a rut. There might be ways in which we think we're floating in some kind of effective pattern of function and service when it could well be the case that what's needed is another level of amplified function altogether. Something different is needed if there are going to be people in position to hold and help shift the rising intensity that is emerging.

Put differently, the role of leadership in this era is very different from previous times. Our notions of leadership have tended to be rooted in physical patterns. Leaders guide people in some kind of new direction, perhaps to "take the next hill." But leadership is really not like that now. Instead, it involves allowing creative change to occur in complex circumstances that don't look like they could ever change. It involves overcoming rigidities of thought and attitude in oneself. It involves embodying the underlying invisible impulse of Life, moment by moment. And ultimately it involves coming to know oneSelf as one is.

Many people will move with new energy if it's actually provided. If things are falling apart that is because there is no one around who can allow anything different to happen. Being part of an operationally functional pattern of leadership that isn't subject to the cycles of history but operates in a way that allows these same patterns to shift takes both backbone and humility. None of us know how it is all supposed to work out. It is remarkable to begin to sense the stature and power behind the changes that are coming and to recognize the very personal and direct responsibility we have.

We each have our sense of the compulsions and requirements present for us, the work we have to do. We either act on these sensings or we don't. The interesting thing about

leadership now is that no one can make anyone do anything, and no one can get anyone to do the work they need to do except the person themselves. There's no other way.

There is an old saying from the 1960's that if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. I don't think that's quite right. I think you can only be part of the solution if you recognize that you are part of the problem. We can know that we are part of the pattern that's entering a crisis cycle and we can also allow something transformational to occur within ourselves.

Offering confidence in others' awakening authority is something I find myself focused on. It is imperative that people find their own voice of authority relative to what appears to be the unchangeable cycles of history, both personally and in a larger sense. There are patterns of history repeating themselves. The good news about this is that it is also eminently shiftable. We are not stuck with anything, at any age or stage. As we operate within the cycles of history, we may now also operate with awareness of larger cosmic cycles and the possibility of transformation from above as we embody these energies. These things are meeting in me, in each of us, making this a remarkably exciting moment.

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Pre-Service Music:

Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 85: No. 4, Andante sostenuto

Composed by Felix Mendelssohn and performed by Andreas Ottensamer & Yuja Wang

Concluding Music:

Ave Maria

Composed by Franz Biebl and performed by Voces8