

Listening to the Secret Chord

Bill Isaacs: We are in the closing days of one year and the opening of another. The light in the Northern Hemisphere is increasing again. This is a good symbol of what is occurring within everyone: the light is increasing. As the light shines it becomes possible to see, to relax and relinquish what does not belong, what was never true of you. One way the light gets in is through our increased vulnerability and humility. As the light intensifies it becomes increasingly evident that the control structures of human consciousness are dissolving. Like glacial ice floes, these can remain seemingly stable for centuries, and then can suddenly collapse, melting into the sea. The courses of collective thought go through various phase changes over time: ideological patterns shift, political systems transform, long held paradigms collapse, national boundaries are redrawn, dissolved, merge. What can look stable and unchanging from one perspective can suddenly transform entirely into something else.

We are evidently in such a significant shift now. It's interesting to be alive and aware of this fact while it is happening—at least we imagine we are! Most such changes don't amount to much. While the relinquishing of one paradigm for another may seem a dramatic rearrangement, we often merely move the furniture around within the same house of human self-centeredness.

While it's not always possible to put one's finger on it, something else also seems to be emerging even as things unravel. This transformation can be seen as the dissolution of the veil of conceptual control that governs experience. This control is held collectively, embodied in taken-for-granted systems of shared thought. These systems are simultaneously all-encompassing and invisible, hiding in plain sight. They define our worldview until suddenly they don't, leaving us without a way of making sense of what is happening. Disruptive or unexpected change can draw attention to this fact, personally or collectively. These internal changes mirror the physical transformations occurring on earth. Atmospheric warming is producing dramatic and even breathtaking modifications to the polar ice caps, as a new atmosphere rearranges physical forms. What once seemed permanent proves transient.

There are many such changes appearing in an external sense, some of which look terrible and disastrous and some of which don't, depending on your perspective. We must suspend our assumptions about these outcomes, about what should be considered good or

seen as bad and disastrous. It's easy to imagine that we don't have those assumptions, yet our perception that “something is being loosened up” reveals an underlying assessment, which shows that we have some idea of what should or should not be happening.

We are in a moment of increased vulnerability collectively, and that makes this a very delicate time. Now, human nature abhors a vacuum. When opportunities for control arise, forces inevitably emerge to attempt to do that. But these efforts are proving to be rather difficult to carry out. The rug keeps getting yanked out from under people. We are in a cycle marked by intensifying movement at subtle levels, making once accepted ways of working increasingly ineffective.

Navigating these tectonic changes requires intensified groundedness in personal experience. I must move from assumptions and knowledge that I believe I have about my experience to greater states of vulnerability, to a willingness to inquire into factors I thought I understood. In other words, I allow a different depth of the radiance of Being to move into the crevices of my experience. It's easy to delude ourselves into thinking that we more or less have things worked out. As mirrored in the very movement of the earth at this solstice time of year, the whole job is continuous movement toward the increase of light. Informing all of this is the magnificent underlying order of things.

Leonard Cohen beautifully captured this dynamic with the opening words of a song:

*Now I've heard there was a secret chord
That David played and it pleased the Lord
But you don't really care much for music, do you?*

In three lines, are everything: the hearing, the listening for being, and the doubt and rejection of it. In these words is the acknowledgement of the secret chord of Being, and the recognition of scorn for this sacred experience—a scorn not only in others, but in parts of ourselves. This is the state of human experience. The secret chord isn't really hidden from Being, but it is obscured from human experience. The human cry is, “Well, if, if there is a secret chord, how come I'm having such a miserable time?” Why is the experience of life not enough? There's a constant quest in every direction to fill this void and bring heaven on earth. This effort is bolstered by increasingly powerful tools. But the effort itself is futile because it is based on a false premise.

The challenge is to let oneself be vulnerable enough to see what is already present. As Cohen goes on to say:

*There's a blaze of light in every word
It doesn't matter which you heard
The holy or the broken, hallelujah*

The lifting up of all aspects of experience, every word, no matter what it looks like or how insignificant it appears is how the light gets in, as we develop the vulnerability and willingness to see.

Many people are quite fascinated nowadays by the quest for the secret chord—for new kinds of experiences, enhanced performance, new awareness, new capabilities. Some of this is being technologically assisted, but all of it is motivated ultimately by an internal void, from a lack of knowing what is fundamentally already present. “There's a blaze of light in every word.” Coming to know this takes some doing in oneself. There are plenty of parts of me that don't like music all the time, that have patterns of rejection of the very factors that we know are true.

To allow the radiance to emerge, we must become vulnerable to what needs dissolution within us, and not to carry on as if one has some superior understanding. And as this occurs, greater assurance, greater power, impact, and magnetism follow. More is drawn, more is lifted up. You could be saying to yourself, “Well, I know all this.” But the leadership needed now is to address the very parts of ourselves that think this way, and meet what's rising with authentic openness, not conceptual invulnerability. Then things light up.

What remains very unusual are people who can hold a balanced perspective, not getting too excited or too disturbed one way or the other about the changes that are unfolding. The habit of convincing oneself that one has it all figured out runs very deep. To let go of that opens the doors to magic, to reality. I'm finding with certain colleagues and friends, more substance is available to reflect on subtle levels of experience that have been harder to access. I sense there is enormous readiness and openness to move into these more refined ranges, all of which is predicated on the presence of increased vulnerability in me. Without this willingness, control remains coarse and balance elusive.

Much of what's passed for control in human experience has been a substitute for the control that would emanate from Being itself. These have been anchored in various systems of thought, ideologies, and political systems. One seems to be dominant for a while, and then suddenly a major upheaval disrupts everything and another pattern takes over. This polarized dynamic of control is very crude and entails lurching from one side of the boat to the other, with seasickness the result for many. But now there are cracks appearing in these

control patterns, opening people to new experience and ultimately new forms of control, that are potentially far more powerful.

For instance, today there is an enormous rise of interest in psychedelics. Michael Pollan, known for his books about food, recently wrote a book called, *How to Change Your Mind*, where he talks about advantages of psychedelics as a way of shifting consciousness. There is now a lively and growing body of research and experimentation on the efficacy of psychedelic experience as a healing and therapeutic modality. Some people are finding ways to make sudden shifts in experience that can last; in the right hands this does appear to work for them. Of course, none of this is exactly new. Human beings have looked for medicines that could alter consciousness for millennia. Often these things amount to a slight lifting up of awareness and then a rapid descent, because the personal substance needed to sustain the experience is not yet present. Yet I think there is a generally increasing readiness today to move into deeper experience and therefore the use of these tools has potentially a greater value now.

There are cracks in other fields as well. You may be surprised to discover that quantum physicists have discovered “magic.” This is quite a precise term within the quantum computing field used to describe states of matter that make quantum computing more likely to work. In a quantum world, many possibilities can exist or be “superimposed” at a time, at what physicist David Bohm called the *implicate level*. Some of these states hold great potential for containing large amounts of information, far more than so-called ordinary or classical computing can manage. There are some very serious academic papers on “[magic](#).” At one level, this is quite hilarious, but it is also very interesting because it is pointing to growing comfort with embracing fundamentally new ways of understanding reality. Quantum experimentation has now progressed further, into the domain of “quantum teleportation” where information is “entangled” such that if there is change in one state of a system there is instant change in another that is physically quite far afield.

The surge of interest in Generative AI marks another fissure in the dominant paradigm. Computers are already emerging that will be far more intelligent than current Chat GPT variations, which are changing almost continuously at this point. But scientists have long anticipated a “singularity,” a threshold where machine intelligence would surpass all human intelligence combined. As this possibility comes into view, it is proving to be of great concern, notably by the very inventors of these technologies. Human nature letting

loose superintelligent machines that learn faster and know more than all of humanity combined, what could possibly go wrong?

Yet these explorations reveal something deeper. They represent ways human consciousness is becoming aware of previously unseen dimensions of reality. All human technological inventions are projections from the subconscious mind into conscious form. However advanced these technologies are imagined to be, they nevertheless emerge from, and are already contained within, the far larger context of Being. Each new idea provides a hint of the direction that is lurking beyond the veil of conventional understanding, leading us closer to seeing it. For instance, the idea that there's superintelligence, capable of understanding everything, looks from a human standpoint to be quite fantastic. But this is how Being *already* works. The notion that there are subtle states of matter that hold vast potential waiting to come into form, as one has the equipment to let it happen, speaks to an existing capacity in human experience. The notion that there are states of consciousness beyond the ego, that can allow a level of energy, insight and freedom beyond the conventional experience of being human is the natural state of Self. Each of these ideas may have interim usefulness in the current human state, but of far more value is their presence as living symbols of what is needed and indeed expected from human beings. All of this could be seen as moving in service of the great project of the awakening of mankind. As the veil of substitute control dissolves, new possibilities can and are showing up to teach human consciousness how to function in a wider field of activity.

This is not an easy process, but it is an inexorable one. While there is growing anxiety and effort to try and figure out what to do about all the difficulties that are appearing, it is also the case that a little bit of relaxation and openness can allow creative and transformational outcomes to appear that could never have been imagined in advance. The need to move with what is new and relinquish pre-conceived notions is being brought to everyone's doorstep.

One of the larger collective cracks, and a moment of reset, occurred in the United States over the last few months through the recent election. The results validated some people's experience, surprised quite a lot of others, and left an entire pattern of past experience behind, leaving unwritten what comes next. We are indeed in a moment of opening, however it may now appear. All of this is part of the exquisitely precise healing that is needed, which is different for everyone, to allow a resetting of things. This could well

look like yet another lurch from one side of the boat to the other, but I think it is better seen as a crack in the whole edifice of human governance and control.

Taking advantage of the moment requires awareness and a healing of one's own understanding and the relinquishing of assumptions about what is happening. It requires humility. This doesn't mean being asleep or numb, or indulging in magical thinking. Indeed, the antidote to magical thinking is precisely the healing of the rigidities and reactions one has (unconsciously) harbored, now being brought into the light.

What does it take for human consciousness to move through these collective phases of change? Structured states of consciousness have been present for a very long time; they reach back centuries. These melting frozen ice floes could be referred to as “legacy burdens:” patterns that have been accepted over centuries or even longer, passed down through the generations and coming to focus in the present. As the light intensifies these become more apparent. We do not need to know every detail about them, just as we do not need to know personally every detail of our past personal experience for healing to occur and new awareness to emerge.

The pressure for change has been rising for a while. While it is apparent that great shifts are underway, some people may well hold on tighter to their views, bringing things to an even more intense point of crisis. Pressure does seem to be a great motivator, and this too may well be one way learning occurs. We can each personally, I'm sure, relate to that. The factors that have been stuck in the collective human subconscious need to be transformed one way or another. We act now by doing something about the factors that come into our range of awareness. We do not need to go looking for them; they will come find you. The healing process is very efficient. The subconscious network of factors will bring exactly what is needed to awareness. But there needs to be some people who are in position to do this work. Perhaps now there are, for the first time in a very long time.

Now I heard there was a secret chord.

We let that chord be heard and felt and its resonance experienced as a healing vibration throughout the whole as we remain vulnerable and open to it.

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Pre-Service Music*1. Winter Nights*

Alexis Ffrench

2. Planxty Kelly

Composed by Turlough O'Carolan and performed by the Danish String Quartet

3. Panis Angelicus, Panis Hominum

Karl Jenkins

Concluding Music*Hallelujah*

Composed by Leonard Cohen and performed by Chris Botti