

The Future's Uncertain and the End is Always Near

By Armand Diaz

Years ago, when people started asking if the world was going to end in 2012, I developed a stock answer: "I'm saying no. If I'm right, then I will be the calm, rational voice among the Chicken Littles. If I'm wrong, who's going to be around to call me out on it?"

That answer was very satisfying to my smart-ass Scorpio ascendant, and it also reflected my astrological thinking on the matter. If we survived the Uranus-Pluto conjunction of the 1960s, I didn't figure that the opening square of the cycle would be lights out for us. Life-changing, but not world-ending.

Yet as the build-up to 2012 grew, I began to pay more attention. The focus on 2012 as the end of the Mayan calendar (or a cycle of it) eventually made me think: *What does it mean when a living civilization begins to set its clock by a dead one?*

I grew up when the world was about to end. Born during the height of the Cold War, I can remember freezing with terror one day in kindergarten when the air raid siren went off – it took some time for Miss Mally to convince me it was the noon whistle rather than nuclear apocalypse. As time went on, fear of The Bomb faded. The end of life on Earth became a sophomoric "what's the point?" argument against doing homework. Still, I've often thought of how the Cold War framed my generation's worldview, and I've wondered where all the apocalyptic energy went.

It turns out that it may have gone into creating the apocalypse. End-of-the-world scenarios are by no means limited to New Agers, and almost everyone seems to be packing their bags, whether it is the end of the Mayan calendar, global warming, economic crisis, terrorism, the second coming of Jesus, the first arrival of the Messiah, or the crash of a comet that is the focus of attention. Clearly, we're all feeling edgy, wherever we are on the materialist-spiritual spectrum.

One thing about Doomsday is that it simplifies things. In an increasingly complex world where the pace of change is accelerating at an unbelievable rate, it's worth noting that for most of human history and all of prehistory, change happened at a glacial pace. The world people came into and the world they left were substantially the same. The changes that did occur – a war, an ascension to the throne, a plague – were easy to recognize against a background of apparent stability. The dates we know from our history classes were significant because they stood out as periods of transition amidst long periods of the status quo. That has reversed itself, so that change has now become the constant, the background against which we search for islands of stability.

That stability is very hard to find when even our environment is changing noticeably. Extremes in weather, stock market volatility, and even sports statistics, are becoming more frequent. Consider, for example, that nine of the ten warmest years on record occurred in the past decade. Perhaps most significantly, our ability to communicate and travel has truly made the world a global village. We now know instantly what is happening anywhere on the planet. My mother-in-law lives in a rural Portuguese town so remote that if she wants to buy meat, she needs to wait for the meat truck to come on Tuesday mornings. But if something happens in the NYC subway system, she will call us within an hour to ask if we are okay.

Although what we can know has increased exponentially, the abundance of information has made it very hard to attach *meaning* to events, and when we do find something that

we recognize as meaningful, it is often lost in the noise of incessant data. News stories that capture our attention for a few days seem to fade away rather than being resolved, leaving us to wonder, months later, “whatever happened to...” Our sense of personal responsibility is multiplied as the problems of the entire world are brought to us on a daily basis. What will you work to save? The rainforests? Tigers? Elephants? Whales? For what will you fight? Universal health care? Quality public education? Economic equality? Immigration reform? To end hunger?

We are not simply dealing with more information, however. Communication has made the world a smaller place, but population growth has made it crowded. The world’s population reached one billion in 1800, then doubled to two billion in 1930. By 1960, there were more than three billion people on the planet, and this past Halloween, the United Nations estimates that the population passed seven billion. The implications of driving a car, drinking bottled water, or eating a hamburger take on new proportions when seen in the light of exponential population growth.

Given the short amount of time we have been living at this pace, we have really adapted remarkably, yet we sense that we are reaching our limit. History is full of failed Omega points, but our current situation has an unprecedented level of physical danger to support our existential anxieties. Something’s got to give. Something has to occur on some level that will help us to make sense of who we are and where we are going. Maybe, we hope, 2012 will be the year?

The simpler the scenario for 2012, the more confused its proponents are. Jesus coming to whisk all the Christian souls up to heaven at the rapture (leaving behind their clothes and pacemakers), is a very simple image. It begs, or prays, for a simple answer to the complexities of life: as long as you’re a good Christian, the process is entirely passive. Nuclear annihilation is another simplistic scenario, although it originates from a very different crowd. Global warming is far more complex, not only because the threat plays out over time, but because we may still be able to avoid it.

Conspiracy theories aren’t necessarily part of the 2012 story, but they do fit in very well, and they have been multiplying in recent years. In general, they help to allay our fears that the ship is running full steam ahead with no one at the helm. The Illuminati (or whoever) may be malevolent, but if they truly did know how to run the world, that would be a kind of comfort in its own peculiar way.

Perhaps the most complex images of 2012 come from New Agers who feel that we are approaching a point of global shift. Although there are many versions in circulation, the basic idea is that we will reach a point of greater consciousness that will shift our values. Each of us has the potential for realization of our inherent connectedness to all other human beings, to the entire planet, to nature, to all beings everywhere, and even to the entire Cosmos. If those realizations were to happen on a large scale, it could result in a significant realignment of our values, away from the protective, contracted, safety-oriented mindset that has prevailed since our cave-dwelling days and towards an appreciation of being itself. Recognition of connection – or even identity – with a greater whole naturally reduces the feeling of *otherness*, as well as the need to compete for resources. In this way, an essentially spiritual awakening could have a profound impact on all levels of being, including the material level.

The obstacles are significant. Among other things, the worlds of industry, government, and academia are continuing to run on a business-as-usual basis, shuttling back and forth between seizing opportunity on a good day and crisis management on a bad one. The rest of us shouldn’t be too judgmental, as we are running our personal lives in

more or less the same way. A global awakening of spiritual consciousness, let alone within the next year, might seem like pie-in-the-sky.

Don't be too sure that it's impossible, however. For one thing, it's become apparent that not everyone needs to have such an awakening for a profound change of values to occur. A portion of the population, usually estimated to be around 10 percent, might be enough to do the trick. That has been the way that change has typically occurred: a powerful new mindset begins among a relatively small segment of the population, and new values spread outwards. Relatively few people actually participated in the radical changes that took place during the Renaissance or the Enlightenment, but because the time was right, the ideas and values of those times eventually became dominant influences on culture. More recently, the 1960s were a time of profound change in our values, and we can see how a few pioneers in diverse fields started a wave of change that had been unimaginable at the beginning of that decade.

We've lived with a number of value sets since over the millennia, but they have all been geared towards survival. In general, we've needed to increase or maintain our population. It's been a pretty smart bet to accumulate as much stuff as we could, and it has been a very good idea to defend against someone else coming and taking it away. Nearly all of our values have been based on survival, although some value sets favor survival of individuals while others favor group survival. The problem is that all of these value sets assumed a more or less stable environment and essentially unlimited resources, and neither of those assumptions continue to hold true.

Yet a new set of values is beginning to emerge. There is a growing recognition that we have extraordinary potential to create our reality, from the contours of the physical world to our access to the spiritual. It has never been easier to explore worlds new and old. There is unprecedented opportunity for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual freedom. We have the potential to move from survival-based values to being-values¹. Boundaries are breaking down, and vistas of possibility are opening up, if only we don't blow ourselves up or choke ourselves out before we can appreciate them.

We need to shift value sets radically, and we need to do so rapidly. That should make us queasy, because shifting value sets has never come very easily. The two World Wars in the 20th century are only the most obvious examples of the difficulties we had in moving away from the values of nationalism and colonialism. When we consider that much of the world has not even worked through *those* issues, the potential problems of a much deeper transformation can be truly frightening.

The cardinal T-square we'll be living through over the next few years is not a unique aspect in history, although it is the first time we will be *consciously* experiencing. As we'll be seeing it through the fish-eye lens of Neptune in Pisces, periods of exhilarating hope will probably be balanced by many times when we feel the world is ending. In a way it will be, because the move from one set of values, one worldview, to another is a kind of death, often accompanied by violent throes. And even as we steer around that Scylla of violent self-destruction, we will have to avoid sailing into the swirling Charybdis of environmental disaster. The future is indeed uncertain.

We have the potential to emerge on the other side of this time of change in brighter, more open, more peaceful world. We have the potential to liberate ourselves from many of the fears that have driven us since we last reached out to touch the Monolith. We also have the potential to create a new Dark Age, and even to extinguish the light altogether. Insofar as astrological aspects create conditions to which we are challenged to respond, our best hope and deepest dread both pivot around the same phrase: it's up to us.

¹ See Don Beck & Christopher Cowan, *Spiral Dynamics* (1996) for more on value sets.

Armand M. Diaz, *Ph.D.*, *NCGR-IV*, is an astrologer, writer, and teacher with a focus on integral theory and the development of consciousness. He has published in a number of magazines and journals, including **The Mountain Astrologer**, **Geocosmic Journal**, **the Journal of the Astrological Association of Great Britain**, and **ReVision**. www.IntegralAstrology.net.