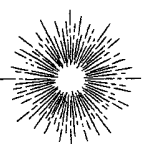
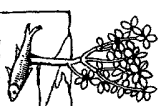
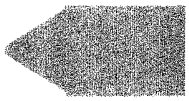

THE GENIUS MYTH



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CHAPTER 12

GENIUS IS THE STAR IN MAN

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting: the Soul that rises with us, our life's Star, hath had elsewhere its setting, and cometh from afar.

— *William Wordsworth*

People all over the earth suffer expanding exposure to threats of natural disasters and nightmares of man-made destruction. Increasingly, it seems that the whole thing might come to an end either from a mistake of culture or an accident of nature. Disaster comes to us from the stars, from the old Latin aster, which gives us astrology, astronomy, and asteroid, meaning “star-like,” as well. Astrologists throughout the ages have predicted a disastrous end to the world, just as some astronomers now calculate the likelihood of a large asteroid destroying life on earth. Major religions, which often disagree on core issues of life, seem to agree that the end may be close at hand. To be alive at this time is to face the threat of disaster from many directions.

Yet, the more common and seemingly more preventable disaster involves the sense that most people fail to learn what their life might be for and that many die without having truly lived. For, to live truly means to become one's genuine self and that requires an awakening to the uniqueness woven and set within one's soul. Disaster can mean “to follow the wrong star, to follow the wrong gods home,” meaning to follow a plan or a map made by others while all along there was an inner design waiting to be discovered. The instinctive sense of wonder proper to viewing the world comes from the uniqueness of the individual soul which has been increasingly replaced with blind literalism, dutiful creeds, and narrow ideologies. The greatest

disaster of all may be that most people never learn what their lives were secretly aimed at, as far too many fail to embrace the core pattern that was set within them all along.

Not long ago, an old burial mound was discovered in Italy. Within the mound there was a tomb, and set within the tomb the skeletal remains of an ancient man. Placed carefully near the head of the deceased, there rested a thin and folded sheet made of beaten gold. Clearly etched upon the golden sheet could be seen the following words: “I am a child of earth and starry heaven but my race is of heaven alone.” Scholars speculate that the golden sheet was a kind of passport for the dead used to gain reentry to the place of origins in the world beyond this world.

What happens after death has always been an intriguing mystery and most cultures imagine some form of afterlife. Yet, there is more here than the issue of whether the soul continues its journey after life or why ancient people would bury gold with the dead. The golden passport also says something about the living and where we stand in life. We are each a child of the fertile earth below our feet and also a descendent of the starry heavens above our heads. The issue is not just where we go after we die; but also how often we are asleep while seemingly awake; how often we forget the inner connections between our souls and the starry universe.

We live in two worlds and always have done so, yet half our being is often asleep. We belong to more than one dimension of life and our souls are secretly attuned to other levels of reality. One level is visible, palpable, and readily observable to the human eye; the other is mostly invisible, seemingly ephemeral, and more difficult to come to know. Yet, this second level is most essential to our well-being and critical to our understanding of both life and death. This inner and other realm of the Unseen that often goes unrecognized holds the missing elements we need to become truly self-aware and more fully realized.

The point is not to become inflated with an exaggerated sense of the overriding importance of humanity in the midst of the immensity of the universe. The point involves the interconnectedness that places us, like it or not, and stretches us, believe it or not, between the dark earth and the

heavens above. We are star born and at times star guided; yet our birth is also a sleep in which we continually forget our otherworldly origins and our subtle connections to the living cosmos and the starry heavens. The hidden light within our souls is the star-spark that connects each of us to the cosmic origins of life. The soul is the connective tissue of life and the star in mankind is the spark hidden in the soul of each person born to this earth that is itself a star rolling through the universe.

RESIDUE OF THE STARS

We live in a time of collapse and discovery, in an age of loss and remembrance. Ancient tablets that speak of stars are discovered in earthen mounds at the same time that cutting-edge scientists studying the starry skies rediscover evidence of our star-born inheritance. As life all around us seems to make less and less sense to us, we are rediscovering our cosmic origins and our mythological inheritance. For, even scientists now must agree that we are each star born and carry star matter in our very cells. We are children of the increasingly troubled earth and we are both literally and mythically made of star life and carry star energy in every cell of our being.

We may increasingly act as separate islands of life, only connected by technological devices, but our souls remain star born and our bodies are continually remade from the residue of stardust falling from ancient times, only now reaching the earth. Our consciousness includes an infinitesimal spark of cosmic light waiting to be revealed and become known to us, its often unconscious host and bearer.

The notion that we are threaded to the stars and drawn to destinies set within us may seem like lines from a poem of a long gone age when things were more fanciful and facts were less prevalent. Yet, at times fact and myth approach each other and the star in man, which once seemed an unearthly idea, becomes the conclusion of many modern scientists. Hard-nosed physicists find themselves waxing metaphysical as they encounter the mysteries of life at the extension of powerful telescopes and penetrating microscopes that reveal the pure and continuing wonder of the world.

Astrophysicists, some of whom are geniuses in their own right, now consider that a bit of the original star has to be in everyone. They reason that if it all began with the explosion of a star, in the surprise and brilliance of an original Big Bang, then anything that appears afterward must have some of that original star in it or else it could not be part of this existence. Consciously or not, they are following the old dictum from mythology, which states that "everything is at the beginning." If we are here now, we must have been there then in some shape or form when things first began. Thus, the shape that shapes us from within turns out to be both astronomical and mythological, a speck of cosmic star hailing from the very beginning of time, which can also be referred to as "once upon a time," since the time assigned to the beginning cannot be easily fixed or agreed upon.

We are made of the remnants of stars, our bodies still connected to and derived from massive explosions in distant galaxies, everything in us originating in cosmic combustions beginning billions of years ago. We live upon a star and everyone is a star by birthright, simply by being born into this cosmic dream and swirling galaxy of stars. Physically and metaphysically we are made of the stuff of dreams, the residue of dying stars, and the dust of the original star that exploded and became the big cosmic bang that kicked started the whole universe that continues to expand to this day.

The idea that we are made of the stuff of stars is both literally and figuratively true, as every few years the bulk of our bodies is created again, partially from the stardust that falls upon us even as we sleep. We carry the residue of stars within our earthly frame as each ingredient of the human body is formed from elements first forged in the inner furnaces of ancient stars. It is as if we rediscover our innate connections to the stars and to the cosmos from the literal residue of stars within us as the scientific approach reveals what the ancients knew when they prepared the dead to return to the place of cosmic origins.

In this age of statistics, everything must be counted and the latest estimates suggest that 40,000 tons or more of cosmic dust falls upon the earth each year. The stardust finds its way into roots and plants, and from there into the nutrients that we need to move, to think, and to grow. We

are stardust and like the universe, our bodies are in a constant state of decay and regeneration. Not just the building blocks of our food, but even the metallic bits that drive our electronic devices owe their existence to and derive energy from the birth and death of ancient stars.

Planet is the word now commonly used to refer to our earthly home and planet means "wandering star." It's as if we need to remind ourselves of our cosmic connections as many of our man-made institutions rattle and even nature undergoes radical changes. If there is to be a renaissance of some kind in the midst of all the worldwide disturbances and global troubles, we may have to find the sparks of inspiration and the glint of innovation in the speck of star we carry within ourselves.

Genius is the star in man, the irreducible spark of life hidden in the depths of each living soul, like a star waiting to be discovered in the dark expanse of the unconscious. In Italy during the time of the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino stated: "Whoever discovers his own genius will thus find his own natural work and at the same time find his own star and daemon." Ficino, in true Renaissance fashion was a priest and a doctor, an accomplished musician, but also a humanist philosopher and an avid astrologer. He found his own genius to be multi-faceted and felt it to be necessarily star formed and star born.

In the Renaissance they may have thought in terms of the star in "man" as in the male of the species. By now it should be clear that the star dust falls upon everyone alive, woman or man, girl or boy. The speck of star that makes each of us unique appears in each and every soul regardless of how a person might identify their gender. If there is to be a true renaissance of humanity it will have to include everyone and value each as having something to contribute that might be needed at this dramatic time of both collapse and discovery.

Genius appears as an original inner constellation that holds the key to understanding the meaning and purpose inherent in each life. Whoever finds that spark and speck of star within finds their natural way of being and their best way of contributing to the world. When we feel most alive, we are closer to that inner star and can thank our lucky stars to be in an

altered state that connects us all the way back to the origins of the universe. Whatever within us might be deemed original and unique is a manifestation of our secret connection to the original star of creation.

In these dark and uncertain times, there can be great value in imagining a bit of star in each human soul. Not just that it gives some hope for humanity at a time when man's inhumanity to man seems ever on the increase; but also because it points to an inner brightness that can light the way in dark times. The disasters of modern life include both the loss of imagination about the mystery and wonder of this world and the lack of understanding of our essential place within it. At critical moments, a person must follow the light of the inner constellation or they will miss their star and "follow the wrong gods home."

STAR QUALITIES

The speck of stardust implanted in each of our souls is another and perhaps deeper way to consider the old statement of "dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return." We may feel small and insignificant in terms of the cosmic expanse and the growing uncertainties of life on earth, yet we are directly connected to the stars and it is the very nature of the human soul to bring the stars down to earth.

We come from the stars and the diamond dust of ancient stars continues to float through us as we wander the earth in search of our true destiny in life. For, destiny is another star word, from *destinare*, meaning "of the stars." Destiny is the eternal irritant in us, the hidden speck and spark in the human psyche that makes us long to be part of something great and meaningful and even transcendent. Destiny can also mean "to stand out, to stand apart," especially to be seen standing in a visible relation to one's inner spark of genius. Our true destiny sets us apart from others because our genius self becomes visible and shines for others to see.

In this older, deeper sense, becoming famous meant something closer to being "known well," rather than simply becoming "well known." Thus, the true sense of fame relates more to the unique quality of one's life than to

the simple quantity of one's renown. The older sense of fame depends upon moments of revelation in which the inner genius becomes evident and can be celebrated. In mythic terms, the bit of star that links each person to the cosmos also connects each soul to the great Soul of the World, to the living, breathing Anima Mundi. This inner connection to the origins and creation of the world gives each person some cosmic essence that can in turn become the source of personal creativity and originality. We are truly original when we act from the inner spirit of our lives.

Genius names that inner spirit and spark of star that makes each person bright in their own way. Everyone has some genius in them and each can shine in some way when that genius spark is recognized and given a way to express its inner light and creative heart. For the genius spark within us carries the vitality of our lives as well as the brilliance. When the inner genius is not recognized or served, we still leave our mark upon the world; but only as the footprint of a consumer who lived on the residue of stars, but failed to give back to the cosmic exchange in the unique and life-enhancing ways that were possible.

The diamond in the rough that begins to shine like a star reminds everyone that the human soul is naturally gifted with talents and an inner light trying to incarnate and become known. Genius is born and not made as the inner spark or flame of genius names the "star quality" in each person that enables them to shine in some way and bring the lights of intelligence and beauty to this world. We can see it in those who effortlessly "light up a room" simply by entering. Some compelling inner quality shines from within them; it both sets them apart from others and attracts people to them.

The loss of the intuitive sense of a gifted self within each person causes many modern people to obsess over those who possess or seem to possess the brighter lights of genius. Of course, this psychological imbalance suffers a radical redress when those who were the greatest fans tear down their chosen idols for failing to meet the impossible star standards and expectations projected upon them.

When people fail to awaken to the spark in their own soul, they tend to project their innate star qualities on others in the form of adoration. The

older meaning of adore had to do with "beseeching or asking in prayer" for something needed or longed for. The sense of casting one's adoration upon distant rock stars, sports stars, or movie stars misses the point of becoming conscious of one's own inner spark and hidden genius qualities. The question lost in the collective adoration and fanaticism of modern 'fans' is what kind of star was born in me?

People would be less obsessed with the stars of film and stage and even business if they understood that projecting a sense of genius and talent onto others is an instinctive step towards discovering the hidden brilliance within oneself. Those deemed the latest "rising stars" and "rock stars" would have fewer demons and less dramatic breakdowns if they did not believe their own press and if they were less exposed to the mania produced by an excessive projection from their adoring fans.

Fan is shorthand for fanatic, which can mean a person acting out of "excessive enthusiasm and uncritical devotion." However, the Latin origin indicates something much more radical, as fanatics can mean "insanely but divinely inspired." The genius in humanity involves divine inspiration and enthusiasm. Enthusiasm has something divine and potentially zealous in it as "theos" means "god." The genius bears something divine trying to enter the world through each of us and it cannot simply be denied. If it cannot find individual acceptance and expression, it will take the form of excessive devotion and fanaticism for sports teams, for political movements or extremes of religious fervor.

The genius may be a defining part of us; yet it is foreign to us as well. It is the "inner other," the otherness within us that would lead us to become something other than most expect us to be. The genius within us has its own pattern and indelible design; it has designs on our lives and would direct us from within. Since the spark of genius has a divine source, it has little concern with the health of one's body or the quality of one's relationships. The genius has its own light that can light the way for us; but it also bears an inner heat that can burn us out.

Under the rule that there is always more than meets the eye, the modern notion of charisma falls short of seeing the meaning and the purpose of

individual charm and magnetism. Deeper than the fascination with attractive personalities and the appeal of popular figures, charisma originally pointed to the presence of grace and a touch of the divine. Charisma is the old Greek term for "a grace, a talent or divine gift," that glows and radiates light from within a person. This spark of genius cannot be said to be exactly human. We are descendants of the stars and bearers of gifts of the spirit that we cannot completely own and sometimes cannot govern.

When a person is able to live out some of their inner genius and inherent destiny, they become as a star; they shine before others and help to reveal a hint of the divine nature of this world. Yet, the brighter the lights of fame may shine on the outside, the darker the inside can become. Whatever shines the brightest and rises highest also casts a long shadow, and the modern fascination with wide fame and great fortune can just as readily endanger one's destiny as confirm it. The more that the inner genius becomes revealed, the more the individual must grow in character and in consciousness in order to carry their gifts and talents wisely. Thus, the problem shifts from not knowing the nature of one's inner star to having to learn how to live with it more consciously.

A TALENT IS A GIFT TO BE GIVEN

Most people think of a talent as an ability or capacity that a person has because they were born with it. Some wish they were more talented and many envy talents that others seem to take for granted and carry so effortlessly. Having a talent for something can make doing it look or seem so easy; yet the root meanings of talent include the verbs "to bear, to carry, to weigh." The weighty side of talent comes from the Greek *talanton*, meaning "a balance, a set of scales," hence "a weight or anything weighed." In ancient times a talent referred to a counterbalance, a weight used to measure precious metals like gold or silver on a scale.

People have always tried to put a price on talents and skills, often to the detriment of those who carry them from birth. A talent can carry a person far in life; it can also carry them far astray; think of all the stars and starlets

who lose all sense of self when it seems that they have gained all they could ever want. A talent can become a heavy weight to bear. Most often people fall victim to a fate they cannot control, precisely because they don't know that they are controlled by it.

In ancient Athens a "talent of silver" was the amount paid for nine years of hard work by a skilled craftsman. Talents have always had a place in the marketplace; but by now, the marketplace has taken over everything and financial language is the currency of the land. Now, most people hope to "monetize" whatever gifts and abilities they might have in some industry. What were once fields of study or areas of discipline have simply become industries where it is easy to sell oneself short when it comes to the inner value of natural gifts and talents.

On the other side of the coin, the Latin *talenta* carries meanings of "inclination, leaning, desire." Natural talents can also be seen as indications of how our souls are inclined towards life. A god-given gift for doing something is proof of inner values we each bring to life. An innate talent reflects a golden aspect of one's deeper self and offers a vital ingredient of one's inborn genius for life. It may become an expertise that provides a way to make a living; but it is essentially a way to give forth and give back from what has been given to each of us.

A talent not used is not simply an opportunity wasted; rather it becomes a weight on one's soul. What could shine like gold can also become a dead weight, like lead. A talent is intended to be a channel through which our vitality and creativity can flow into life. Thus, a talent can enliven both the one using it and those receiving it. If it goes unused its host can remain inert where they could be enlivening. The root of a depression or stuckness in life can often be found in the growing weight of a talent not freely given.

Like an element in the periodic table, each talent has its weight and characteristic form. We are out of balance and in bad form if we fail to recognize the gifts we have been given and how they aim our lives, requiring us to give something to the world. On the other hand, if we simply trade our innate gifts for outer wealth or fame, we have given away our inner gold and can wind up feeling empty and worthless, regardless of the appearance

of having high status or enviable success.

The weight of a given talent needs to be balanced with the growth of one's character. The greater the god-given gift, the deeper must be the character shaped to carry it. Not the simple sense of moral character, more the complications of a great and memorable character. The place of our greatest gifts should become the ground of our growing generosity. Whereas a talent not given becomes a weight on the soul; strangely, when given freely it tends to grow and not be diminished by being given away. A person is always more than the sum of their talents and innate abilities; yet a person remains less than themselves until they learn how to give freely what was given to them. Doing easily what others find difficult is talent; doing what others cannot even imagine, that is living genius being revealed.

TO BECOME IRREPLACEABLE

Genius is a compelling and necessary source of inspiration; but it is also a mystery and a puzzle and a source of consternation as well. Being human we need to bring the stars down to earth and also ground the star qualities and god-given genius within us. The point is not simply to become famous or widely known; that may gratify the ego in a person, but it cannot satisfy the inner star or genius. Far better is the older idea that each person is on a divine errand and the more we can express and deliver the unique gifts we have been given, the better we leave the world when we must depart. This sense of an irreplaceable star quality hidden within each person can be found in many traditions.

The ancient Bushman of Africa were legendary hunters who knew at a cellular level that they were the children of the great mother earth. Yet, they were also bold visionaries who lived close to the heart of Africa and felt themselves to be tied to the stars by virtue of "feeling strings." They imagined the thread of each human life to be a string of feeling and imagination that reached to a star in the heavens above. They further imagined that as a person dies, a star begins falling somewhere in the cosmic sky.

For once the heart ceases to beat, the feeling strings that connect it to

its stellar origins become loosened, and the star begins to fall. At the same time, the wind which moves between all things and is connected to the breath of each person, feels that something has stopped and been lost from life. As the star falls silently from the sky and the person falls out of life, the wind begins to blow away the footprints of the fallen soul. After that the person who has fallen out of life continues to live in the stories told about them; how they brought a unique presence to life and even how the world feels less present without their living presence.

The Spanish philosopher and poet Miguel de Unamuno argued that "our greatest endeavor must be to make ourselves irreplaceable, so that no one else can fill the gap that will be left when we die." He went further than most in saying that each soul born is not only unique, but irreplaceable and "worth the whole universe...each one of us." Therefore, each person ought to give as much of themselves as possible, exceed the usual self and go beyond to make themselves irreplaceable. If a person comes to know and comes to give of the star qualities and unique genius nature they have been given, they will have shed some light in this world and they will have brought the stars down to earth. When they die, people will know that something is missing and cannot be replaced. For each one born is unique in some way and having lived and become who they were intended to be becomes irreplaceable and never to be repeated. As the Navaho saying reminds: "When you were born you cried and the world rejoiced; live your life so that when you die the world cries and you rejoice."

As the fabric of life loosens and the veil between this world and the otherworld becomes thinner and more permeable, we can begin again to align ourselves with the luminous ground of imagination, the inherited territory of the human heart and soul. Our minds can learn again to serve the deepest longing of our hearts and draw upon the wisdom hidden in our souls. Just as time seems to be running out on everyone, the eternal tries to slip back into human awareness. Things become both impossible and more possible at the same time. Amidst the theories about how it all might come to an end, the unseen thread of the eternal can be found again. For, we are all held by the threads of dreams and secretly tied to the cosmos. If we allow

it, we are pushed by the inspirations of genius and pulled on by the stars.

The answers to the overwhelming problems and daunting global issues we all face cannot simply come from the limited consciousness of abstract reasoning and scientific attitudes that currently dominate the world. The problems run deeper than the simple facts of the matter; the answers must be found in deeper places as well. There is an increasing need for psychic balance, for both deeper intelligence and greater imagination that might reveal more of the ways we are each woven to the earthly realm and connected at the same time to the stars. Both at the quantum level and the mythic levels of understanding, we all remain connected to the dream of the cosmos and the wonder of the world.

On one level we are each insignificant, merely a speck of life in the immense darkness of a seemingly random universe. On another level, each soul comes to life as a unique torchbearer, each one bearing the eternal flame of existence for an indeterminate length of time. For each carries in their own way an inner spark of imagination and the flame of conscious life. On one level we barely matter, on another level what matters most to us also matters to the world.

When the dark times come round and great changes are afoot, it becomes more important that awake people remain awake and that more individuals awaken to the nature of the spark of life they carry within. In the drama of life the human soul becomes the extra quantity and distinct living quality needed to tip the balance of the world towards ongoing creation.

The loss of a felt connection to the divine spark hidden within each person may be the greatest curse of modern mass societies. Yet, the human soul, undeterred by the passage of time, retains its indelible birthright and a capacity to awaken to it and recollect the inheritance that keeps being lost. The idea that each person bears, from the beginning and in their own way, the flame of existence and a spark of genius is an open secret that keeps being forgotten. Yet, as the problems of the world grow massive in size and loom large around us, there may be no better time to reimagine the nature and purpose of human genius as a spark of individual light able to shine in the darkness of an unreconciled world.

III

A TALE OF TWO VILLAGES

