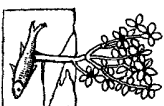



THE GENIUS MYTH



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CHAPTER 1

GENIUS TRANSFORMS THE WORLD

Adversity reveals genius, prosperity conceals it.

- Horace

We live in critical times, amidst a worldwide shaking up and breaking down, surrounded by radical changes that severely affect both nature and culture. The world is churning all around us, overheating with climate change and rising seas, but also awash with profound problems and intensifying conflicts. Given the size, scope, and complexity of the problems that currently threaten the world, there can be no single idea, specific political movement, or patented belief system that can save us. Rather, all kinds of ingenious solutions are needed; all types of inspiration, invention, and originality are now required. The idea of a genius self already present and trying to awaken within each of us may serve us better than more common notions of a heroic solution. Awakening genius is a necessary step on the way to becoming a genuine individual and an active agent in the reimagining of the world. Consciously seeking to awaken inner genius may provide a refuge from chaos and an antidote to the spread of nihilism and the increasing levels of despair that characterize a world gone wrong. Each person born, in some unique way, participates in the genius of life and the world at this time is in great need of an awakening of the genius qualities hidden in each of us.

Rather than a heroic journey undertaken by a select few, the genius myth imagines that everyone, by virtue of bearing some genius qualities,

is subject to a genuine calling in life. The question becomes not whether or not you are a genius, but in what way does genius appear in you and how might it contribute to both your own well-being and that of the world around you.

The future of this world is so much in question that each person needs to be considered a potential subject of a genuine "calling" to serve in some meaningful way. Not the sense that "many are called, but few are chosen." Rather, the sense that the genius nature in each person is subject to a calling and needed at this time. For, it is the genius within us that our calling is calling to. Everyone has some gift to give if they learn to give from their essential nature.

Genius is the source of purpose and the seed of destiny in each of us. Despite modern confusions about individual purpose and meaning in life, the genius has destinations and destinies in mind for us. A true calling is aimed at the genius qualities already set within each person. In this old way of seeing, each person has some form of genius, each also has a calling or vocation and a purpose in life. On the outside it is felt as a calling and on the inside it is felt as the awakening of one's own way of seeing and of truly being in the world.

AN ACCELERATION OF CALLING

In times of change, just as in periods of personal crisis, there can be intensification and an acceleration of calling. Whether it comes as a daunting challenge or a crushing blunder, a big dream or a cutting loss, each major life event has within it an opportunity to awaken to the call of the deeper self and the resident genius of the soul.

What calls us calls for the giving of the inherent gifts and natural talents we brought to life to begin with. What calls to us calls to the dream set within our soul before we were born. Because each soul is unique, calling comes differently to each person. There is no pattern into which we must fit, because it is the unique pattern at the core of each soul that is the aim of the calling. Because what calls to us is timeless, the calling can come

at any time. At each turn in the road our life's work awaits us; thus, our calling keeps calling no matter our age, position, or condition in life. In answering the call we must depart from the common maps and follow where spirit would have us go; for the aim of spirit in each life involves something uncommon and exceptional. Answering the call opens pathways of genius and imagination that can lead to finding one's "dharma" or natural way of being in life and serving in the world. We are each called to become more fully ourselves and our transformation liberates our spirit, but it also serves something beyond ourselves. In transforming each of us, genius also transforms the world.

The problem isn't a lack of calling, for each of us is called to bring something meaningful to life. Calling and vocation are part of the ancient sense of being born into an adventure of self-discovery aimed at awakening to greater consciousness and life purpose. The problem is that most people now fail to hear the call or else fail to answer to it, so that there can be little evidence of genuine calling to learn from or be encouraged by. The problem is hearing the call amidst increasing levels of distraction and confusion in modern life.

Genius points to something deeply ingrained, markedly original, and ultimately transcendent in human nature. Although widely accepted in traditional cultures, the idea that genius is an original spirit residing in each soul causes problems in modern societies based upon objectivity, rationality, and scientific methods. Modern people tend to talk about things that are useful to them without realizing that the most useful thing in the world is to know who you are at the core of your life and what you are intended to serve in this world. The call to awakening that has been the inherited opportunity of each soul born becomes harder and harder to hear because of all the distractions and misinformation and blatant superficiality of life.

During the statistical era and the age of information, genius becomes reduced to something quantifiable that can be proven, measured, and even developed by will power and hard work. In some cases, genius does appear as high intellect or reason, yet in others it might appear as surpassing imagination, inspired innovation, or even deep compassion. The presence

of genius can be awe-inspiring; however, our understanding of genius now suffers from attempts to reduce it to something measurable and controllable.

Genius has its own logic and is a presence of a different order. Genius is a mythological presence that must be intuited in one's own soul. Although it cannot be factually proven to be present, the presence of genius is a fact of life and a defining issue of each person's true identity.

No one can simply prove that human genius exists; yet we know it when we see it and feel it when we hear it. We celebrate its presence in all the awards that must be given out each year as if we must continuously mark its presence, just as its presence continues to mark each person born as unique and worth celebrating in some way. Each time we celebrate the genius qualities or accomplishments of those who succeed, we are unwittingly blessing the genius that each carries within; for everyone has some genius.

As the source of uniqueness and spark of individual life, genius is an indelible, if often overlooked, element of the human soul. Whether it is called a guardian angel or an inner muse, a divine twin or the genius within us, this original resident spirit of the soul gives each person inner purpose and a unique way of perceiving life. The genius of a person refers to a distinct and distinguishing complex of inner gifts, innate talents and native potentials. It is also a unique style or way of being that characterizes each person from within. Genius is the inner spark and spirit that animates each soul, making each person born unique and never to be repeated again. Genius also makes us purposeful and meaningful from within.

When human efforts are reduced to blind production and consumption, life becomes reduced to consuming the world and being consumed with the obvious. People become increasingly available to distractions and obsessions, to trivia and nostalgia. Under the rule of literalism and the dominance of a statistical world view, the children of modern mass cultures can easily find themselves feeling devoid of all purpose and lacking in direction exactly at the time when you would expect them to awaken to a meaningful life. What seems troubling in a new way is that hordes of young people, both educated and less fortunate, enter independent life believing that they are empty inside and lacking any inherent purpose for being in this world.

The myth of the modern world is that this world has no meaning, that it has no center and that we, who find ourselves in the midst of a random universe, are simply accidental beings, both empty of a personal center and lacking in any essential purpose in life. The genius myth offers the sense that each soul enters this world gifted in certain ways and is distinctly shaped from within. In the same way that each infant arrives with a unique set of fingerprints as well as precise brain printing, each soul bears an inner imprint and unique psychic pattern. Human nature includes the hallmark of genius and a stamp of uniqueness provided by great nature. Nature produces life on a massive scale, yet each person born remains singular, never to be repeated. Just as there is no such thing as an average rainfall or an average tree, there is no such thing as an average person. We each stand on the common ground of life with our own way of being present and our own once in a lifetime chance at becoming the person we are intended to be.

Genius stamps each soul as rare and valuable in some way that can both satisfy the individual and serve the world. When seen as an archetypal presence in the soul, human genius marks each person—regardless of age, gender orientation, ethnicity, or social status—as being essentially unique and inherently valuable. More than raw talent or potential ability, genius gives a person their unique way of being in and contributing to the world.

In mythic terms, it is axiomatic that each soul enters the world accompanied by a divine twin, guardian angel, or inner guide of some sort. Traditional cultures around the world have imagined an inner pattern that shapes the soul and provides a guiding force from within. Until modern times, all cultures imagined that each soul arrives with something indelible within that makes each person born a valuable and potentially meaningful individual. Modern attention may focus upon the distinct fingerprints or palm print of each person in order to prove their outer identity. Ancient cultures focused more attention upon the innate qualities and longings that form the true identity of each soul. Amidst the threats and dangers of the modern world there will be ever more refined ways of checking the identity of each person; the question is whether there will be meaningful ways for people to become who and what they are intended to be.

We may have to invent ever more refined ways to prove who we are at the level of common life in order to gain entrance to public places, and to avoid identity theft. Yet a great thievery has already taken place wherein people no longer imagine that they are genius-born, spirit made and intended to contribute something meaningful to the world.

GENIUS AND DIVERSITY

Variation and diversity are part of the magic of creation as well as the wonder of nature. Diversity and uniqueness are also essential ingredients for the survival and meaning of the human species. Thus, no two humans share the same genetic makeup. None of the billions of humans on earth share the same exact configuration of the base pairs of DNA that are strung on the double helix of inherited genes. We are intended to be unique beings and rare souls even from a biological perspective, as there is no single way of being. Neither is there a general form of intelligence; more like billions of intelligent forms seeking more than simple preservation of the species. Just as surely as each of us bears a precise DNA pattern within our cells, we each arrive with a unique and valuable style intended to give more presence to life and greater beauty and imagination to this world.

The genius in us knows from the outset how we are shaped and styled within and how we are aimed at life. Yet, we may rarely feel or fully grasp our greatest natural inheritance: the sense of inner meaning and purpose seeded in our lives. The ancient reverence for the individual, at times so clear and important, becomes easily lost amidst the collectivism of mass culture. For, despite touting themes of individual freedom, modern cultures are permeated with an atmosphere of literalism, materialism, and collectivism. The growing despair under the shining surface of mass culture arises from the sense that collective life increasingly lacks meaning and individual life serves no real purpose.

Despite all the ways of being connected to the modern world, in the depths of ourselves we often feel more isolated and alone. In a world of mass marketing, mass communication, and often massive confusion, it

becomes increasingly important to have some idea of who we are at our core and what we each have to give to life.

Amidst the massing of mass cultures and the rise of collectivism, it has become more difficult to feel genuine longing and the natural belonging from which new forms of human community and healthy ways of reconnecting to nature can be imagined and conceived. The notion of each individual having their own resident genius becomes ever more important as the world spins faster and faster around us, for something older and wiser keeps trying to catch up to us. Whereas mass cultures favor duplications and replications, nature only produces originals. There may be no time more pertinent for the rebirth of genius than this age of mass culture and technological dissociation.

THE HALLMARK OF GENIUS

The common notion of genius refers to the exceptional person within the norms and expectations of society. However, the original sense of genius indicated that which is exceptional in each person born. Considering genius in this older, wiser sense shifts the question from whether a particular person might test out to be a genius to how each person might find their genius. Instead of simply elevating people with certain kinds of intelligence or talent, the issue becomes a consideration of how and in what way genius seeks to manifest in each person born. The sense that each of us, regardless of place of origin or social background, has inner gifts and something significant to contribute to the world has practical benefits at both the individual and cultural level.

While each society must define its norms and standards of behavior, genius works outside of norms and sets its own standards. As the exact inner shape and often exacting spirit that is native to each person, genius brings its own expectations for life. The inner genius bears its own exacting standards as well as an inner ethic that is present within us before any considerations of collective morality. Genius sets an inner gold standard, the higher standard that our soul would have us live up to.

Innovation, invention and creativity are trademarks of those who come to know and use their innate genius qualities. Resiliency amidst adversity is another hallmark of genius and an essential capacity to have and develop in a rapidly changing, often disorienting world. Originally, a hallmark was an official stamp that guaranteed purity in articles made of gold. In that sense, genius is the hallmark etched within each person, for each of us bears the official stamp of spirit. Each of us came to this world bearing within certain golden qualities that mark us at our core as the genuine article.

This older, wiser sense of a unique inner genius stands against the collective ideas and designs of modern mass cultures, which are based in mass production and often put us on the verge of mass destruction. Old apocalyptic visions may feature a wrathful god wiping clean the slate of creation, but current dangers increasingly place worldwide destruction in the hands of humankind. Whether it be mankind contributing blindly to global warming or man's continuing inhumanity to man exploding in nuclear disaster, humans seem to have a greater-than-usual hand in the troubles plaguing this world. In that sense, mankind acts like a force of nature and "apocalypse now" involves a sense of self-destruction as well as the potential to annihilate the entire world.

Instead of an angry god punishing his creatures for straying from the rules, something inside humanity becomes the agent of destruction and disaster as reckless technologies and extreme ideologies might conspire to blow everything to kingdom come. On one hand, this points to human grandiosity and a negative inflation as mankind assumes powers typically assigned to the gods. On the other hand, it points to the necessity of recognizing the crucial role of humanity in the delicate balance between nature, culture and the human spirit. Humans are clearly implicated in the disasters of the modern age, yet something hidden within the core of humanity may yet help redeem the precarious condition of the world. Not the simple notion of humans heroically "saving the world", but the idea of people discovering the redeeming nature and capacity for renewal that reside at the core of life itself.

In a rapidly changing world faced with seemingly impossible problems,

it becomes important to imagine that each person born might have something to contribute to the solutions. The deepest human resources tend to awaken amidst the greatest human disasters. If everyone has a genius nature, then each naturally has gifts to give and something of value to offer. Rather than being seen as an abstract consumer of goods in a mass culture, each person can be revalued as a unique gift-giver. Genius defines the inner nature of a person and a genuine destiny involves the expression of one's genius nature. By becoming outwardly what is naturally seeded within, the individual becomes an agent of creation and thereby able to add something to life that was not there before.

Accepting the notion that each person has some form of genius will not solve all the problems of life, but it can give more people the courage to develop a life of meaning and find ways to contribute to the world. Everyone already has some talent or vision; what is rare is to find the courage to follow one's vision all the way to the destination to which it aims. An old idea reminds us that we often lie to ourselves about who we truly are and what we can actually do; we hide our true nature from ourselves and obscure what we are meant to serve in this world. One of the few things that can stand against the onslaught of mass culture and the distortions and distractions of mass communication is the sense of an inner uniqueness that distinguishes each individual from all others. As the original agent and source of our talents and gifts, genius stands against blind materialism and the loss of meaning characteristic of mass cultures.

As resident spirit the genius is the keeper of the inner pattern and root of memory in the soul. Throughout life it remembers that which is most essential to us yet so often forgotten by us. At critical times, the genius in a person draws attention to itself as it seeks to become consciously known by its human host. When the world rattles and everything turns upside down, holding to the inner thread of genius may be the surest way to find a way in life. If we allow the inner thread to pull us, the unique ways in which we are woven and spun will help us find our own way to survive and contribute meaning and beauty to life.

The inner genius is our innate connection to the living, ever-renewing

soul of the world; if we allow it to awaken within us, we become both more vital and more purposeful. In allowing the inner genius to transform us, some transformation of the world also occurs. If we follow the genius in ourselves, we recover what we were intended to be from the start and become agents of creation ongoing.

NATURE AND GENIUS

In these times of alternating collapse and discovery, we need to awaken as many inner geniuses as possible in order to meet the multiple threats and complex challenges we face. Rather than the need to heroically save the whole world, the real work of humanity at this time may be to awaken the unique spark and inner resiliency of genius within each person.

Amidst melting ice caps, rising seas, and radical climate change, what remains of the natural world matters more to life than ever before. Yet, as the natural self within us becomes diminished by mass culture, so too does our connection to the great nature all around us. The loss of reverence for nature and the cavalier destruction of the environment reflect the loss of connection to the inner nature and unique core of the human soul. As the world becomes increasingly threatened by extremism, terrorism, and fanaticism, and as nature suffers the storms of climate change as well as the ravages of exploitation, there is a desperate need for the inventiveness, creativity, and resiliency that are the natural hallmarks of human genius. As Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, "When nature has work to be done, she creates a genius to do it."

Could nature, now overburdened and sorely mistreated, be calling on each of us to take up the thread of genius that is closest to our own nature and set to the work of helping to reimagine and reweave the whole divine thing? Not simply the sense of heroic efforts trying desperately to save the world, but rather the sense of a diversity of genius natures awakening to assist the world in renewing itself. As resident spirit of the soul, the genius in each of us is both our natural connection to nature and our secret connection to the divine. The sense of inner genius can offer a thread of

revelation that allows us to find what has been missing all along.

The re-imagination of genius may offer a deeper initiation of the creative self within each person. When everything outside tends to fall apart the hidden message inside life may be closer to the surface and calling for attention. In the midst of radical changes in nature and the rattling of culture, revelations of the genius self within may be closer than ever.

THE GREATER SELF WITHIN

Nature loves a mystery and each soul born is a mystery waiting to be revealed, a meaningful story waiting to unfold. No one can prove it, nor can it be simply disproven. But all the old stories depict it and our dreams hint at it and life at critical times requires that we act as if it were true. The awakened individual has always been an agent of change and an assistant to creation ongoing. Human beings are both a genius production of nature and the genius producers of culture. The awakening of our genius self allows us to deliver the gifts we have been given and contribute meaning as well as beauty to the world. An old idea found in many traditions holds that each person comes to this world of change at a time when they have something meaningful to offer. Meaningful solutions to the overwhelming problems of the world would be closer at hand if it was better understood that each person born bears within them a gift that the world might need.

Great crises and impossible tasks can uncover hidden resources and reveal veins of genius that can alter the course of history. The threat of collapse and utter loss can also serve to awaken genius qualities and radical solutions. Each soul desires to be part of something greater, something "larger than life," for we each harbor within ourselves a larger life and a greater self waiting to become known. Everyone intuits the possibility of a greater life; yet this greatness now tends to be imagined as something outside ourselves. Most campaigns that promise liberation—be they political or spiritual, base advertising, or high-energy motivational programs—direct us toward outer goals. Meanwhile, there is a greater self within that tries to surface at each critical turning point in our lives.

The genius of human nature involves innate capacities for creation and invention that are important in the life of each individual and essential to the balance of the world. The true individual, by virtue of being himself or herself, enters a state of partnership with the ongoing acts of creation and thereby adds something to life that was not there before. When the troubles are all around us, everyone can find some place where they are needed, where they can help heal all that is wounded and help protect all that is currently threatened by radical changes and global disturbances.

To borrow from the genius of Emerson again: "This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." Yet, knowing what to do with the conditions of the world may depend more than ever on knowing that the soul in each of us is naturally seeded with genius and secretly threaded to the Soul of the World.

CHAPTER 2

A MYTHOLOGICAL TRANSFUSION

The purpose of myth is to make the world meaningful.

Finding the purpose and meaning in life has always been a challenge; but to be modern means to doubt that human life has any meaning or purpose at all. To be modern means to be surrounded by devices intended to move all of life faster while increasingly doubting that there is anywhere meaningful to go. To be modern means to always be on the edge of the next technological revolution, but also to be on the verge of annihilation. To be modern can mean to be lost; to be post-modern can mean to feel forsaken.

As the modern genius Albert Einstein expressed it: "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity." In the upward, onward, and forward at all costs rush of the modern world, the soul of humanity can become lost. Yet, the intensification of cultural and environmental issues can serve as a reminder that something meaningful has gone missing and must be sought for again. It is only when the whole thing seems to be falling apart that people begin to remember that there was something left behind in the great rush to the future.

The human soul is an ancient and knowing thing that cares little for the latest technological devices. It longs to give birth to the innate values, essential ideas, and core images that brought each of us to life to begin with. We are each involved in a unique experiment in life, the clues for which are hidden where most people prefer not to look: inside ourselves,