

# The Coming Storm: Prophetic Dreams and the Climate Crisis

by  
Paco Mitchell

*“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind . . . ”*  
—Hosea 8:7 (KJV)

*“Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet, was beforetime called a Seer.”*  
—I Samuel, 9:9 (KJV)

Like so many biblical verses, Hosea’s utterance about sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind is a beautiful piece of prophetic poetry. And as with any good poem, it reverberates with timeless metaphorical ambiguity, provoking us to ask: How can one sow the wind? Is it even possible to reap a whirlwind? What kind of harvest would that be? How can something so seemingly insubstantial, at the outset, result in something so devastatingly consequential, at the end?

In this essay, I explore the planetary environmental crisis from an unusual angle, on the assumption that insights derived from depth psychology might enable us to see our way into a healthier future, no matter how it ends. In particular, I take up the question of those dreams traditionally known as “prophetic,” and how they might help us to re-imagine our collective situation—the better to prepare ourselves.

A prophetic dream is not necessarily predictive. Nor is it limited to biblical topics or doctrines, or to any specific historical period—biblical or otherwise. In my view, to qualify as “prophetic” a dream simply must draw its images from deeper psychic levels than the “personal unconscious,” casting its net of associated contents well beyond the individual dreamer’s personal situation and concerns. It must present us, in other words, with images of *discernible, collective import*—manifestations of what Jung called “the objective psyche” or “the collective unconscious.”

All dreams are laden with anticipatory clues about emerging trends, usually personal. But a prophetic dream gazes, as it were, past the individual dreamer, to focus upon emergent motifs that confront the entire culture, society or even civilization. This collective, anticipatory potency imparts to prophetic dreams much of their enhanced value—that, plus the enlivening archetypal energies of their images and dramatics. A prophetic dream

enables us to see not just further ahead, in a horizontal, secular sense, but also deeper and higher—into the emergent psycho-spiritual motifs that confront us all. Such dreams offer us a better way to form our attitudes toward the future than just relying on ego-habits alone. In creating the future, the transpersonal agencies within—or behind—dreams can help us break up our old assumptions and melt them down to be re-cast in new forms.

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Every day it seems more apparent that we are living in an age of crisis, as the pace of disturbing change accelerates and the ground trembles beneath our feet—both metaphorically and literally.[1] More and more, we begin to discern the magnitude of a terrible truth and the shape of its outlines: We are getting what we wished for. In other words, what we have sown—*our highest values and most cherished way of life*—is producing a “harvest” that may just eclipse Hosea’s whirlwind in terms of destructive intensity and, we might even say, poetic justice. Thus, old Hosea’s ancient poetry still rings with archetypal truth: the inevitable shock and bitterness of unintended, unanticipated consequences.

“All we did was sow the wind,” we innocently complain. “Why has this violent whirlwind befallen us?”

Of course, it does absolutely no good for us to play innocent, as if we were really unaware, or were really unable to fathom just why the weather has gotten so strange, or why abstractions like “loss of biodiversity” or “species extinction” should be anyone’s concern. Relentlessly, the evidence piles up by the day. It is laid before us with care, as if by kindly elementary-school teachers attending to “slow” pupils. We may stubbornly close our eyes against teacher’s simple charts; we may perpetuate our own confusion with harmless-sounding euphemisms like “climate change” or “global warming”; or we may pride ourselves on our can-do optimism and look to geo-engineering for “solutions.” But such measures only delay the reckoning, the shock of awakening to the tornado in our backyard.

So now we pay the cost—Hosea’s prophetic price—for having sown the wind, that insubstantial seed of hubris, on the breezy assumption that we could do whatever we pleased to the natural world, do it indefinitely, and get away with it forever, unscathed. In

the process we have radically altered the conditions of life on the planet, to an extent far beyond our ability to control.

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Humans will probably argue over this global situation until they run out of breath, oxygen or time, whichever comes first. But in my view we're better off letting go of the arguments and turning our attention to this question: *What attitudes do we need to develop in order to meet whatever it is that is coming our way?*

For my part, I have no doubt that a storm is coming, both metaphorical and literal. It will manifest itself in countless ways, and its scope will be global. There will be no place to hide. Actually, the storm is already happening, globally, but we haven't seen the full force of it yet.

Apart from the sheer madness of denial, the trouble with most of our problem-solving efforts to date—as we struggle to come to terms with the climate dilemma—is that it is nearly impossible to think about things in a way that doesn't simply *perpetuate the same kind of thinking that led to the problem in the first place*. As computer programmers often say, “Garbage in, garbage out.” So we find ourselves caught in a crazy-making kind of feedback loop or vicious circle, known as a double bind. *We're damned if we do, damned if we don't*. Practically everything we do, say or think, in our attempts to foment change to meet the challenge, has the ironic effect of perpetuating the status quo.

This is why I am so interested in the possible value of dreams, especially prophetic dreams, or dreams from the objective psyche, as a radical way of breaking through the vicious circle. Over the decades, I have found that dreams, as spontaneous productions of the psyche and possessed of a “super-intelligence” exceeding that of the conscious personality, may just be the source of our deepest creativity. Periodically they reveal an encompassing wisdom, and the active intelligence with which they are imbued can actually be seen interacting with the physical world in mysterious, synchronistic ways that we have scarcely begun to appreciate—an interplay of psyche and matter.

If we can open to these dreams, responding with our substance to their messages, our very own dreams may supply the wherewithal to inform and transform both ourselves

and one another, in deep ways. By such a devotion to dreams, we might better prepare ourselves for what I am calling “the coming storm.”

Of course, I don’t expect throngs of people to start forming queues in order to follow this advice. For all I know, my words may only resonate with a handful of readers. But we need to start thinking and imagining in radically different terms from what has become the accepted norm. The prophetic task has probably always fallen to relatively few—those prophetically-minded individuals endowed with sufficient imagination and courage to buck the tide, in what amounts to a considerable sacrifice. But we should not underestimate the potential value that could flow from those few who are willing to open themselves to their dreams, and their dreams to the rest of us.

This is important work that goes unrecognized by society, by and large, a sad fact that has been true for a long time. Even in antiquity, when such things were better understood, the role of prophet was not always easy. It has even been rumored that, in Old Testament times, people would stand on the city walls and throw stones when they saw the irate old prophet hobbling toward them. I don’t know if that’s true, but it certainly has a ring of truth to it. Perhaps we should think of this as our own “scriptural moment” of modern history, a period in which those of us who are willing to do so, will take up the potentials of the collective unconscious in dreams and visions, wield our scrolls, brandish our staffs and call our tribes to account—dodging the stones, if we must.

Naturally, the “sharing” of prophetic dreams can take any number of forms: confide the dream to your partner, colleague, therapist or friend; disrupt a dinner party with your account; stop a stranger on the street; publish articles, blogs and books; render the dream in poems or paintings; write dream memoirs for your children and grandchildren; compose poems, fictional dramas, love sonnets to the soul—make up your own method. Better yet, follow the lead of the dreams. They will tell you what to do.

I hope it’s obvious that the point of taking on the prophetic role is never to aggrandize oneself—Look at me! I’m a prophet!—but rather, in a spirit of humble sacrifice, to make a contribution toward returning a sense of sacredness to our much-profane and endangered world. This requires giving up something of personal value, in favor of a greater good—assuming we can discern what that good is, in itself a difficult enough task.

I have no idea whether the new vision that could grow from such efforts has any chance of taking shape, let alone prevailing. Quite possibly not. But I see no viable alternative to trying our best to bring it into consciousness, give it form and invest it with the substance of our lives.[2]

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Among the many dreams I have recorded, only a dozen or so qualify as prophetic, in my opinion. Here is one I am currently viewing through the “prophetic” lens, though I did not see it that way when I first dreamed it thirty-some years ago. But recently it has come back to mind with such force, with so many new associations and synchronistic implications, that I have had to change my view of it. I present this now as a prophetic, collective, cultural dream, placing it within the specific context of the climate crisis and the “coming storm”:

*I am in a house with a few other people, waiting for a tornado to arrive. The storm is on its way, and there is no escaping it. The feeling of inevitability is reinforced by the fact that a square opening has been built into the ceiling of the house. The purpose of the opening—trim-finished, complete with molding—is to permit the occupants to be sucked up into the tornado. In preparation for the tornado’s arrival, we are practicing the kinds of maneuvers skydivers might perform, as when they join hands to form a circle in order to stay connected while in free-fall. The other necessary preparation is to swallow a handful of diamonds.*

*Once the tornado arrives, the pressure drops and we are all sucked up through the opening in the ceiling. As we whirl around inside the great funnel, amidst the debris, we struggle to join hands and stay connected, as we have practiced. It is very difficult. As I tumble about, however, I am surprisingly calm. I know that, because I have swallowed the diamonds, wherever I land—assuming, of course, that I survive—I will be carrying irreducible, “diamantine” values with me, on which I may be able to build a new life. [End of dream.]*

Dreams are kaleidoscopic: You hold one against the light, look into it, turn it in your hand, and you see ever-shifting aspects and configurations. The elements remain the same, yet it permits endless associations. When I set aside the personal meaning this dream had for me at the time, I find several aspects of collective relevance today.

First, the opening scene shows a homely interior, an image of personal life. But it is not “my house” so much as it is simply “a house,” one in which a small group of several individuals, myself included, are involved in something like a preparatory ritual. The house suggests that the ritual must be imagined as taking place at the personal level of daily life, not as a mass undertaking or political movement.

Second, I refer to the preparations as “rituals” because the coming tornado implies a dramatic shift in magnitude—the simply-personal is about to be engulfed by a numinous

and transpersonal cosmic force. Throughout history, any accommodation between the human and the divine, between the sacred and the profane, could only be approached after ritual preparations—ablutions, sacrifices, abstinences, purifications, etc.—various ways in which the mundane habits and attitudes of consciousness were modified or set aside in anticipation of an encounter with the numinous powers of “the unconscious.” Without ritual, such an approach would have been considered dangerous—a sacrilege, a profanity, an abomination, a punishable hubris.

The way we disregard the attitudes appropriate to ritual and sacrifice today, constitutes, in fact, our hubristic modern approach to the sacred precincts. For the most part, we have no sacred precincts any more. No grove of trees on earth, no matter how revered, is safe from the bulldozer, the chain saw or the bottom line. No wild animal is safe from being mistreated or hounded to death. We read or hear of chortling jokes about the starvation and drowning of the great polar bears. We see photos of dead spotted owls nailed to signs forbidding the killing of spotted owls. It is difficult to imagine the horror that indigenous tribes must have felt when they saw the sacrilegious depredations of Europeans, hacking and blasting their way into the “virgin” tribal preserves. The violence, far from ending at the close of the colonial period, continues unabated today. Some years ago I read [3] that some of the remaining “pre-contact” Amazonian tribes are now being flushed out by illegal mahogany loggers supplying wood for patio furniture.

From the outset, my dream suggests a revision of this modern profane attitude, along with the recovery of an earlier religious sense of ritual reverence.

Third, the nature of the ritual is twofold, involving maneuvers and diamonds. The maneuvers suggest a *social aspect* to the otherwise personal crisis implicit in the advent of the tornado. Notice that the dream presents an image of “keeping in touch” that is neither hierarchical nor narcissistic—two major symptoms of our present cultural wounding. The very absence of these symptoms from the dream is significant in itself.

As an alternative to power-motives and narcissistic display, the dream presents a form of “contact” that is directed toward a commonly recognized, sacrificial and ritualistic, symbolic goal—that of forming a circle. But it adds an unexpected twist: the circle is to be formed while in *free-fall*. I must say that, despite the horrors implicit in the tornado, this is a beautiful image. Even in our present conditions, these circles are not easy to form; but under the disrupting pressures of the tornado, it requires a supreme effort.

The circle is probably the oldest social configuration in human history, after the single-file line of hunters, perhaps. The circle is inherently non-hierarchical and reverential. Each person has a voice, even if there is a chief. Today’s social and economic

phenomenon of wealth disparity—the 1% versus the 99%—does not figure into the dream’s lesson. In fact, great disparities in wealth and social status run contrary to the spirit of this dream. Nor are we talking about a communistic worker’s paradise here, but rather an image of what people value most deeply, and how they apply those values in cooperation with others. The formation of the circle during free-fall, the chaotic spinning, suggests that personal values in the midst of chaos are given greater meaning when joined with the shared values of others. Forming the circle, in other words, is a meaningful symbol of a primordial way to confer order in the midst of chaos. And the dream “says”—start practicing now, while you can.

Fourth, I use the term “free-fall” more than “spinning” because, when I look around that’s what I see—a society in free-fall, where stable values and structures dissolve in a disorienting rapidity of change, and where virtually everyone is being affected on every level, whether they know it or not. On the whole, our responses to these conditions are just as confused as the situations to which we are responding. Yeat’s prophetic poem, “The Second Coming,”[4] still resounds today like a great tolling bell: “. . . things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world . . .”

Like Yeats’ poem, the image of “free-fall” also catches the spirit of the time, of what is happening now. Perhaps the “spinning-phase” is yet to come, but it will happen soon enough.

Fortunately, there are increasing numbers of articles and books, workshops and conferences, touching on the same general question the dream addresses: *What do we have to do to prepare ourselves to meet the coming turbulence?* This is a question we would all do well to consider.

Fifth, this brings us to a major image—the square opening in the ceiling. It has several aspects: it is square; it is structural, built-in, inherent; it is “above our heads”; and it permits communication between earth and heaven (“ceiling” is related to the Latin *caelum*, “the heavens”).

Jung’s researches on the phenomenology and symbolism of the Self amply demonstrate the importance of both circle [5] and square [6], among other shapes and objects, in the archetypal manifestations pertaining to the Self as central archetype of order and wholeness.

I confess that I have always been wary of this formulation—the “central archetype of order and wholeness”—when compared with an actual encounter with the Self. Not because I doubt it, but rather because reading a book about the Self and having a living

experience of it, are not the same thing at all. Due to its nature as a conjunction of opposites, as Jung has written, when we depict an engagement with the Self as a wrenching conflict of opposites we come closer to the bitter truth than the wonderful-sounding phrase “archetype of order and wholeness.” First the storm, then the peace.

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In *The Archetype of the Apocalypse*, [7] Edward Edinger emphasizes the “coming of the Self” as a general problem that humans will have to face, presently and in the future. He follows Jung’s idea that the more people there are who are able to confront the opposites consciously, within and around themselves, the better it will go for us. In contrast, the more people there are who remain unconscious of their whole personalities, deny their shadow side and project their conflicts outward into the world, the more violent will be the results.

The implications of the square, the four-sided *quaternio* shape, are vast: The integration of personality into a whole, integration of the shadow with consciousness, integration of the four functions of consciousness, integration of the unredeemed aspects of the God-image, etc.—all of these tumultuous processes are related, and all are implicit in the opening in the ceiling.

The square opening, then, gives us a hint as to how we can face the coming storm—to be consciously complete individuals, as much as possible, familiar with the moral burden of our dark sides, acquainted with the autonomous figures who approach us from the unconscious, unwilling to deceive ourselves, able to face and deal with the gamut of our emotions, fantasies and desires, willing to subject them all to the grinding, pulverizing ball-mill of ethical considerations and moral consequences.

In the context of the dream, the square opening is as much a part of the ritual preparations for the coming storm as the maneuvers and the diamonds. Opening to such a powerful cosmic dynamism as a “tornado” is dangerous indeed, not for the faint of heart, and it therefore requires a thorough, “four-square” preparation; but, as the dream emphasizes, there is no escaping the task, and the time to begin is now.

Sixth, swallowing the diamonds is an eloquent image of assimilating value, however value is conceived. What we “swallow” we incorporate, assimilate, embody. The “diamond” is the hardest natural substance—formed under immense pressure and heat, out of pure carbon, the essence of life and congealed sunlight. The diamond corresponds to the lapis of the alchemists, a symbol of the integration of matter and spirit, conscious and unconscious. The “diamond body” occurs in different forms in many esoteric

traditions—Taoist, Tibetan Buddhist, Hermetic, etc.—the general idea being an incorruptible essence, a symbol of the Self, for which Jung found parallels throughout history and culture.

For simplicity's sake, I take the diamond as a shorthand symbol for "irreducible values," which the participants in the dream must "ingest," assuming they have acquired them in the first place. Needless to say, dreaming of a diamond is one thing, whereas actually *realizing it through embodiment*, is quite another.

Seventh, as a phenomenon, the tornado is unsurpassed for its intensity and whimsical destructive potential, a superb expression of "divine" energy. It is easy to see why, in ancient times, meteorological phenomena like wind, storms, thunder, etc., were associated with deities. Today we have instruments that measure pressure fluctuations, wind speeds and such, but even so, there is no getting around the feeling that we are bounded, at all times, by powers we do not control. As a dream symbol, I take the tornado as a synchronistic image uniting inner and outer worlds, psyche and matter, in one great confluence. That is what the climate crisis of global warming amounts to—a synchronistic relationship between humans and their psychology, on one side, and the systemic cosmic dynamisms of which the earth is a local expression, on the other. The tornado-image gives a fine point to the entire global climate crisis. And just as the dream emphasizes that there is no escape, so, too, no corner of the planet is immune to the disturbances of our imbalanced climate.

Eighth, the *dénouement*. The dream does not merely imply that a tornado will come—the tornado *does* come, as if to demonstrate the dream's bona fides. Eerily, the atmospheric pressure drops, and we all are sucked up through the opening and into the funnel. As I indicated above, it is very difficult to stay in touch, much less to form a circle, under the pressure of the powerful whirlwind and its clattering debris. But everything in the dream seems necessary—the storm, the maneuvers, the circle, the square opening, the diamonds, the calmness in the midst of turbulence—even the possibility that the end-result may well be death.

I have had my share of turbulent personal experiences, including brushes with death, and I expect to undergo more as the global situation worsens. The philosophical necessity of preparing for one's own demise—a requirement of life—seems all the more imperative today.

This dream is one of several I have had that give me a perspective on what is happening both in myself and in the world. I believe that many individuals are having similarly prophetic dreams, and that those dreams have valuable perceptions to offer us, if we can

only register them in consciousness and make them available to one another—as implied by the image of “forming a circle.” Everyone, potentially, has access to the primordial diamond values, along with the wherewithal to withstand the coming storms.

I know that many people might find it difficult to connect the dream images I am discussing here, with the actual consequences of climate disturbance on an “outward” physical level. But I must emphasize once again the synchronistic connection between world and psyche, something we have barely begun to appreciate in the wider culture. This is a failure of society that must be made good by individuals. If it is true that “everything is connected,” and that under particular circumstances “matter and psyche are one,” then we humans bear a heavy responsibility that we must not shirk.

The need of the time is great. Whoever can plumb the depths of their own dreams probably should do so, if they can summon the will. And whosoever lays hold of the prophetic wisdom that dreams occasionally bring, must find ways to body forth that wisdom and make it available to others.

We need this now, as never before.

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## END NOTES

<sup>[1]</sup>The increase in “fracking” practices throughout the country has been associated with increased numbers of localized earthquakes. As marginal natural gas and oil deposits are extracted by means of controversial new technologies that “fracture” the gas-bearing layers of shale rock with high-pressure injections of water, sand and chemicals, it appears that, in the process, rock strata are being de-stabilized. For a description of fracking, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydraulic\\_fracturing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydraulic_fracturing) For a description of a sample study linking fracking with earthquakes, see: <http://www.msnbc.com/the-last-word/oklahoma-earthquakes-linked-fracking-study>

<sup>[2]</sup> See [Meredith Sabini, “Dreaming for Our Survival,” \*Depth Insights\*, Spring 2012](#)

<sup>[3]</sup> <http://www.businessinsider.com/video-shows-isolated-amazonian-tribes-first-contact-with-outside-world-2014-7>

<sup>[4]</sup> Yeats, William Butler, “The Second Coming.” See, for example: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172062>

<sup>[5]</sup> See, for example, Jung, C. G., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 240.

^[6] See also, Jung, C. G., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 21, p. 249.

^[7] Edinger, Edward, *The Archetype of the Apocalypse: Divine Vengeance, Terrorism, and the End of the World*. Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing, 2002.

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