# 2012: End of the World or Consciousness Revolution?

By Stanislave Grof

With few exceptions, the Mayan prophecy about the end of the cosmic cycle has been misinterpreted as predicting the actual physical destruction of humanity and the material world.

This is similar to the misinterpretation of the term "apocalypse" by Christian fundamentalists, particularly the millions of American Christians who believe that at the time of this global destruction they will experience "rapture" and be united with Jesus.

The original and literal meaning of the term apocalypse, however, is not "destruction" but "lifting of the veil" or "revelation." It referred to the disclosure of secrets, hidden from the majority of humanity, to certain privileged persons.

Based on my research into non-ordinary states of consciousness, I believe in a radically different, more optimistic interpretation of the Mayan prophecy. Instead of predicting a physical destruction of the material world, the Mayan prophecy might imply the possibility of a mass inner transformation of humanity -- the end of a world dominated by unbridled violence and insatiable greed.

The Mayans were indeed accomplished astronomers. More than 2,000 years ago they noticed that the position of the winter solstice sun was slowly shifting toward an alignment with the galactic axis. This movement (precession) is caused by the wobble of the rotational axis of the earth. The Mayans concluded that major changes of cosmic proportions would occur at the time of this auspicious solar/galactic alignment that occurs only once every 25,800 years.

But in addition to making sophisticated astronomical observations, the ancient Mayans were also keen explorers of their inner worlds. We have ample pictorial evidence that they used various "technologies of the sacred" for this purpose, including the cactus Lophophora Williamsii (peyote), Psilocybe mushrooms, Salvia divinatorum (also known as diviner's sage), morning glory seeds, wild tobacco, balche (a fermented drink made from the tree Lonchocarpus longistylus and honey), and skin secretions of the toad Bufo marinus.

For the last 50 years, I have used "technologies of the sacred" in order to research the modern human psyche and its potential for healing. In my case, this was clinical research with psychedelics as well as numerous workshops and a training program using breathwork. In a supportive environment and under responsible guidance, individuals can use these techniques to experience states of consciousness that are both healing, informative, and transformational. I call these states "holotropic" -- meaning that they move us toward wholeness.

In holotropic states of consciousness, it is possible for individuals to obtain profound revelations about the universe -- far beyond the limits of their everyday imagination. And often, in such states, individuals can perceive a meaningful correlation between inner experiences and outer events.

Although the modern, post-industrial consciousness tends to dismiss this idea, the perception of the universe as an organic whole in which everything is meaningfully interconnected and the human psyche is a microcosm that reflects the macrocosm is a typical feature of profound inner experiences. In holotropic states the Mayans thus might have envisioned a meaningful connection between their inner experiences, terrestrial events, and the movements of celestial bodies.

Another key insight from my research is that individuals who enter holotropic states repeatedly will experience a profound transformation -- a process of psychospiritual "death" and rebirth. This process can be "apocalyptic" in the truest sense of the word, in that it lifts the veil on their previously unseen spiritual nature.

And yet, for individuals to experience that lifting of the veil, or revelation, they must let go of their previous identities. And this "death" can provoke tremendous fear of destruction, a protracted struggle with existential issues, and violent resistance. Given this evidence, it is hard not to conclude that the current behavior of our species is a kind of unconscious "acting out" of our inner fear of transformation.

To look around at current events, one might conclude that our world is indeed falling apart. And whether or not this was predicted by ancient Mayan seers, we are clearly involved in a dramatic race for time that has no precedent in the entire history of humanity. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of humanity and of life on this planet.

Many of the people with whom I have worked saw in their holotropic visions humanity at a critical crossroad -- facing either collective annihilation or an evolutionary jump in consciousness of unprecedented nature and dimension. The philosopher-poet Terence McKenna put it very succinctly: "The history of the silly monkey is over, one way or another." We either undergo a radical transformation of our species or we might not survive.

The final outcome of the crisis we are facing is ambiguous and uncertain; it lends itself to pessimistic or optimistic interpretation, and each of them can be supported by existing data. If we continue the old strategies, which in their consequences are clearly extremely destructive and self-destructive, it is unlikely that modern civilization will survive.

However, if a sufficient number of people undergo a process of deep inner transformation, we might reach a stage and level of consciousness at which we will deserve the proud name we have given to our species: homo sapiens sapiens (the wise people) -- and live in a new world that will have little resemblance to the old.