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OUR DATE WITH THE WINDOW OF EMERGENCE

GREGG BRADEN

As they hear 2012 predictions, many wonder if there is any scientific evidence. Gregg Braden explores the possibility that 2012 will bring a reversal of the Earth's magnetic poles and what such a reversal may mean for the largest population the world has ever seen. In the following essay, using the Maya's incredible accomplishments and predictions as a starting point, he probes what we know today, looking for scientific evidence that the planet's magnetism will reverse and that sunspots or sun storms signify a coming change. Braden draws from physical evidence, quantum theory, and historic trends to gauge the likelihood of massive destruction or the emergence of an empowering new reality in 2012. After weighing the evidence, the choice, he says, is ours.

Does the ancient Mayan calendar hold the secret to an epic event that will occur within our lifetimes? If so, does that event hold the key to our future, and perhaps even our very survival? A growing body of evidence suggests that the answer to these questions is, Yes. Now we must ask ourselves, Why?

Why did an advanced civilization suddenly appear more than 1,500 years ago with the most sophisticated galactic clock known until modern times, build a massive civilization focused on expansive

galactic cycles, and then disappear? Why does their calendar, which coincides with the 5,000 years of recorded human history, end on such a precise date—a date within our own lifetime? What is the significance of the winter solstice on December 21, 2012?

To answer these questions, we must cross the traditional boundaries that have separated science, religion, spirituality, and history and marry these many sources of knowledge into a single new wisdom. When we do, something remarkable begins to happen.

THE MAYAN MYSTERY

The Mayan civilization is an anomaly in the traditional view of history and culture. Archaeological records show that the first Maya "suddenly" appeared over a millennium and a half ago, in the remote areas of what is today Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, Guatemala, and parts of Honduras and Belize. What sets the Mayan civilization apart from other cultures during the same period is that the Maya appear to have arrived with an advanced technology already in place, rather than evolving their technology over a long period of time, as we would expect. Although there are many theories, no one has solved definitively what is called the "Mayan riddle."

In his exploration of this ancient mystery, author Charles Gallenkamp summarizes the irony of the Mayan presence: "No one has satisfactorily explained where or when Mayan civilization originated or how it evolved in an environment so hostile to human habitation." He elaborates on how little we actually know about our ancient ancestors, observing that whatever it was that led to "the sudden abandonment of their greatest cities during the ninth century A.D.—one of the most baffling archaeological mysteries ever uncovered—is still deeply shrouded in conjecture."[1]

While experts may not agree on precisely *why* such a powerful civilization seems to have disappeared, they can't argue over the marvel of what it left behind. And any discussion of Mayan accomplishments must acknowledge what is arguably the single most sophisticated artifact of all: their unsurpassed calculation of cosmic cycles and time. Before the twentieth century, the Mayan calendar appears to have been the most sophisticated method of tracking galactic time. Even today, modern Maya keep track of galactic time, as well as local time, using the system that experts such as Michael D. Coe tell us has "not slipped one day in over 25 centuries."[2] In addition to tracking familiar solar and lunar cycles, the 5,000-year-old Mayan calendar appears to track something even more surprising: the rare celestial alignment of our solar system, our sun, and our planet with the center of our galaxy—an event that will not happen again for another 26,000 years.

The key to the Maya's "galactic timer" was a 260-day count called the *tzolkin,* or "Sacred Calendar," which was intermeshed with another 365-day calendar called the "Vague Year." The Maya viewed these two cycles of time progressing like the cogs of two wheels, turning until the rare moment when one day on the Sacred Calendar matched the same day on the Vague Year. That rare and powerful day marked the end of a 52-year cycle and was part of an even greater expanse of time called the "Great Cycle." According to this explanation and the tradition of the Mayan priests themselves, records indicate that the last Great Cycle began in August of 3114 B.C.E.—the approximate time of the first Egyptian hieroglyphics—and ends in the near future, in the year 2012 C.E. Specifically, the cycle ends on December 21, 2012, when our sun will move into direct alignment with the equator of the Milky Way galaxy.

Scientists acknowledge that this galactic alignment will occur and that the Mayan calendar marks the event. The question most often asked is simply, What does it mean? There are those who discount the phenomenon as little more than an interesting oddity that we will be lucky to see during our lifetime. Others suggest that the close of the Great Cycle marks the convergence of rare cosmic processes, with implications that range from joyous to frightening.

Dr. José Argüelles, an expert in Mayan cosmology, suggests that the first years of the new millennium are part of a subcycle that began in 1992, marking the emergence of what he calls "nonmaterialistic, ecologically harmonic technologies . . . to compliment the new decentralized mediarchy information society."[3]

Using the same information, others warn that the end of the Mayan calendar coincides with celestial events that may hold profound, and even dangerous, consequences for life on Earth as we know it. An electronic magazine based in India, for example, carried an article in the March 1, 2005, edition, describing the results of the Hyderabad Computer Model for a polar shift to coincide with the calendar's end-date. The frightening headlines stated, "Computer models predict magnetic pole reversal in Earth and sun can bring end to human civilization in 2012." The article also described a worse-case scenario of what a world without a magnetic field could mean.[4]

While there are many ideas of what we may expect as the end-date of the Mayan calendar draws near, most people feel that *something* is going to happen—the question is, What? What were the Mayan timekeepers trying to tell us about a date that none of them would even live to see? Because 2012 is only a few short years away, and happens to coincide with unprecedented changes happening in our solar system, a growing number of scientists suggest that it is in our best interest to

understand what the Mayan timekeepers were trying to tell us. Perhaps the best way to discover what we *don't* know is to take a look at what we *do* know.

EARTH'S MAGNETISM: A SURE THING?

When we think of things that are certain in life, we tend to count the magnetic fields of our planet among those certainties. For as long as anyone living today can remember, every time we have looked at the needle of a compass, the tip of the needle has pointed in the same direction—"up there," toward the magnetic north pole of the Earth. And while we tend to think of Earth's north and south poles as a sure thing, the reality is that our planet's magnetism is anything but certain.

We know, for example, that every once in a while something truly mind-boggling, almost unthinkable, happens. For reasons that are still not fully understood, our familiar north and south poles trade places—the magnetic field of the Earth does a complete flip-flop. Although polar reversals are rare in the history of civilizations, the geologic record shows that they happen routinely in terms of Earth's history. Magnetic reversals have already happened 171 times in the last 76 million years, with at least 14 of those reversals occurring in the last 4.5 million years alone.[5]

And while they are definitely cyclic, the reversals appear to vary in time, making the time of the next one an uncertainty. There are symptoms, however, that precede the flip-flops, such as abrupt changes in weather patterns and a rapid weakening of the planet's magnetic field—both of which are happening right now. It is the appearance of these symptoms today, and the fact that we are "overdue" for a polar shift, that has led a growing number of mainstream scientists to suggest that we are in the early stages of just such a reversal.

In July 2004, the *New York Times* took the possibility of Earth's magnetic reversal seriously enough to dedicate an entire portion of its Science section to describing just what a magnetic reversal is and the possible implications of one taking place. The article stated, "The collapse of the Earth's magnetic field, which both guards the planet and guides many of its creatures, appears to have started in earnest about 150 years ago."[6] There is little doubt, at least in the minds of some scientists, that the reversal has already begun.

Geologic measurements do, in fact, show that Earth is declining from a peak of magnetic intensity 2,000 years ago and that the values have steadily dropped to a point 38 percent lower now than then. Measurements taken since the mid-1800s further support the fact of the magnetic decline, showing that planetary magnetism has lost 7 percent of its strength in the last 100 years alone.[7] Even though the symptoms of a polar reversal are present, they may not be easily recognized for a number of reasons, including the assumption that the reversal of Earth's magnetic fields happens as a long, slow process occurring at a constant rate.

New interpretations of the evidence present a strong case that something else may be happening. It may be that the more the field weakens, the faster it weakens. And if this is the case, past reversals may have occurred much faster than we currently believe. In the remote northern latitudes of Siberia, for example, wooly mammoths, believed to have been caught in a polar reversal during the last ice age, have been found frozen in midstride, with their last meal still in their mouths—proof that the abrupt climate change accompanying such a shift can happen really fast!

In 1993, *Science News* published a study describing how "the task of finding an accurate reversal record seems to be all the

more difficult because the magnetic field weakens considerably when it switches direction," just as we are witnessing today.[8] The question remains: Just how weak does the field become before a reversal? While the answer to this question is not certain, what we do know is that such monumental events don't just happen by themselves on Earth. They appear to be linked to events happening to our celestial neighbors, and possibly even the entire galaxy.

OUR SUN: THE QUIET BEFORE THE GREAT STORM

Since Galileo's first telescopes allowed astronomers to observe the heavens, European astronomers have known that our sun experiences regular cycles of intense magnetic storms—sunspots—followed by predictable periods of quiet. These cycles have been observed on a regular basis since 1610. Since the measurements began, 23 cycles of sunspots, averaging 11 years each, have occurred, with the last beginning in May of 1996. Precisely when the most recent cycle would end was a mystery—that is, until the spring of 2006, when NASA reported the event that astronomers had been waiting for. On March 10 of that year, the sunspots and solar flares suddenly stopped, and the sun became "quiet," signaling the end of the current sunspot cycle. The quiet, however, is misleading.

The end of one cycle is the indication that a new cycle—and new storms—is beginning. What makes the coming cycle so different is that the strength of the sunspots observed from 1986 to 1996 suggests that the next cycle will be one of the most intense ever recorded. "The next sunspot cycle will be 30–50 percent stronger than the previous one," says Mausumi Dikpati of the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder, Colorado.

David Hathaway, of the National Space Science and Technology Center, agrees and suggests that the sunspots created in the previous cycle are expected to amplify themselves and "reappear as big sunspots" in the new cycle. If so, the solar magnetic storms will be second in intensity only to those of 1958, when the aurora borealis illuminated the night sky as far south as Mexico. At that time, however, we didn't have our current communications technology, such as satellites, that can be disrupted by such storms. While the predicted intensity of the new solar cycle would normally be of concern, it becomes even more significant when we consider the projected date for the most intense portion of the storm—the solar maximum. Based on the 1986–1996 cycle, NCAR's Dikpati places the projected date for the solar maximum at 2012, coinciding with the Mayan calculations of our sun's galactic alignment. Because this phenomenon has never happened with the population and technology that we have today, no one knows for certain what effects these solar storms may have on our future.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

We know that the sun is going through a magnetic shift, and the Earth appears to be in the early stages of a polar reversal as well. What do these celestial events have to do with the Mayan calendar? What does it all mean? These are very good questions, and they are important because the one thing we know for certain is that all life is strongly influenced by magnetic changes. There are countless studies in scientific literature that describe how many species of animals, from whales and dolphins to hummingbirds and wildebeests, rely on Earth's magnetic "superhighways" to navigate their way to feeding and mating grounds. While we may not use these "superhighways" quite the same way, it appears that humans are no exception.

In 1993, an international team studying *magnetoreception*, the ability of our brains to detect magnetic changes in the Earth, announced a discovery that makes 2012, the Mayan cycles, and Earth's magnetic fields even more significant than previously thought. The team published the remarkable findings that the human brain contains "millions of tiny magnetic particles."[9] These particles connect us, just as they do other animals, to Earth's magnetic field in a powerful, direct, and intimate way. And this connection carries powerful implications. If Earth's magnetic fields are changing in the 2012 time frame, then we too are affected.

We know, for example, that magnetic fields have a profound influence on our nervous systems, our immune systems, and our perceptions of space, time, dreams, and even reality itself. And while the strength of our planet's magnetic field may be measured as a general reading, it varies locally from place to place. Early in the twentieth century, magnetic, ribbonlike patterns were charted and published by scientists as a contour map of the world.[10] The map displays the strength of the magnetic lines overlaying the continents and shows the places on Earth where the people of the world experience the strongest—and the weakest—effects of the planet's magnetic fields. To understand why this is important for the 2012 cycle, we need look no further than consciousness itself.

While there is a lot that we don't know about consciousness, there is one thing that we are certain of: the stuff that consciousness is made of is energy, and that energy includes electricity and magnetism. While the electromagnetic nature of consciousness is still being explored, it does appear that Earth's magnetics play a key role in how we accept new ideas and change in our lives. If we think of magnetic fields as a form of energetic "glue," we can use this metaphor as a possible

explanation for why some parts of the world, and our own country, are slower to accept change, while other places seem to jump at the opportunity to try something new.

Our "magnetic glue" model suggests that places with stronger magnetic fields (more glue) are more deeply entrenched in tradition, beliefs, and existing ideas. In places where the fields are weaker, just the opposite is true. In these places, people seem compelled to create change. Although areas of low magnetic intensity may be ripe for something new, how that change is expressed is up to those living there. With this in mind, a look at our global magnetic map may help us make sense of places that seem continuously locked in conflict, as well as understand why innovation and change seem to spark in one area before spreading to others. Immediately, one link is so clear that it almost jumps off of the page.

The places in our world with the lowest magnetic intensity, such as the zero contour line (zero magnetic gauss), which runs directly beneath the Suez Canal and into Israel, are precisely the places where we see the greatest opportunities for change. Sometimes the change comes as a smooth transition from one idea to the next. Sometimes it comes as a struggle. In our Middle East example, we see the struggle that can result from the attempt to preserve ancient tradition in a place that compels change. The low magnetic field does not mean that the change must be expressed as conflict; it simply provides the conditions for new ways of looking at things. Once again, it is up to those living in these zones of opportunity how they express the change that the low fields invite.

A similar zero magnetic contour line exists parallel to America's West Coast. Not surprisingly, this is a part of the world that is also known as a hotbed for change, although it is expressed in a different way than in the Middle East. Stretching