

A Brief Guide to Hurricanes

Ryan Call & Christy Call

HURRICANE AS ANCESTRAL WIND SYSTEM

The hurricane is an ancestral wind system that often originates over warm tropical waters, as these areas tend to provide more than enough potential energy to fuel the spinning wrath of previous generations. High walls of thick cloud, heavy-to-torrential precipitation, powerful winds, and internal tornadic whirls grow from the conversion of this energy and combine to disastrous effect. Perhaps most recognizable in the appearance of a hurricane, however, is its surprisingly calm central core, also known as 'the eye,' from which our deceased ancestors direct the force of the rotating storm against our unprotected shores. As the hurricane tracks over the shallow water off the coast, it drives before it an angry storm surge, which inundates beaches and low-lying shore areas, destroying structures and other installations of the living, and often drowning the stubborn, the unprepared, the children of the unprepared and their pets, the handicapped and infirm, the impoverished, the elderly, the rescue parties and aid teams and news crews, all as we watch from the safety of our inland dwellings.

HURRICANE, OR TROPICAL CYCLONE, AS EVER-CHANGING ENTITY

The hurricane, or tropical cyclone, is an ever-changing entity that undergoes periods of gestation, birth, adolescence, maturity, decline, and ultimately death and disappearance. We believe that hurricanes spawn from the troubled gatherings of our ancestors in the waters far offshore, though we have no way of verifying how long these gestation periods last before the violent birth of a hurricane. We can only hypothesize that such anger comes from our ancestors' disapproval of whatever feats we have failed to accomplish. There is an oddly swift and urgent sense to the anger behind a hurricane, as if our ancestors have realized that they only now have a certain amount of time during which they might attempt to convey their message of disapproval, their wrath, whatever punishment of violence and destruction they have in store for us, but they also know that they can only build their anger into an enormous, malevolent, and slow-moving force. We can see this near contradiction in the almost lazy way a hurricane meanders across the open oceanic waters, drawing the energy of the tropics up into its whirling belly, stacking it up into lengths of cloud-walls, practicing various sorts of lightning strikes, hail-delivery methods, the age-old whiplash of horrific winds. Such is a hurricane's adolescence: painful, a time of learning how best it might deliver its force, how best it might use such force to assert itself in a worldly way. Then we see its unnaturally quick fury, as if these old spirits knew that only quickness can accompany fury, can modify it, and the hurricane in their control gains the shallows, surges water up and over beaches and into mobile homes, solid homes, homes that depart from their foundations. The hurricane matures quickly, can be called an adult hurricane as it unleashes the full force of its violent streak upon the plentiful lives beneath it. And as slowly as it began, this fury draws to a close, declines: the hurricane's travels over land suck energy from it, and it ages, begins to die, swinging out rain

bands over larger swaths of territory in its final death throes, as if by doing such a thing, it might touch one final handful of people, maybe gather in a few more punishable lives, the more the better to make heard its message, its warning of the death and destruction to come. The hurricane dies, then disappears, and we again return to our news programs, which again return their attention to the warm coastal waters, in anticipation of another uprising.

HURRICANE AS A VEHICLE FOR THE DELIVERY

The hurricane as a vehicle for the delivery of our punishment is a terrifying spectacle to behold, whether we see it upon the electronic fuzz of a radar screen or through the gallery of windows in our bedrooms. What we have done to deserve such anger, such unfurling of suffering in our communities, we do not understand, but we imagine that we have displeased the ancestors in some way. Displeasure, especially as an emotion of those more powerful than our fathers or mothers, we have learned, often brings pain to our own existences. We learned that to be struck by a wooden spoon was in retribution for our having broken some vase in the dining room. We learned that to be struck by a yardstick was a consequence of our having physically and purposefully harmed our sibling. We learned that to be struck across the face was a result of our having voiced resistance to our parents. So to be struck by a hurricane, by the powerful anger of our ancestors, naturally means that we have somehow caused some even greater offense to their vision. What, though, we have done to cause this offense, we cannot understand, as our ancestors' messages, caught up as they are in the hurricane's labyrinthine cloud structures, are often too blurred with rage to allow our easily reading them.

HURRICANE AS GUILT WRIT LARGE

Hurricane as guilt writ large upon the surface of our landscape distributes into our midst a kind of familial readjustment; that is, a warning message that comes to us from the depths of our history: our ancestors, having driven themselves to the brink of anger, cannot help but cleanse their world of the remnant offenses that hang from the fractious curvature of their own tense family tree. The purpose, then, of a hurricane is to uproot said tree, to rip from its branches the greenery of future generations, to limb it with the axe and hewn handle of a long-ago hickory, to provide for the future generation a trembling sort of existence, one of desperate pain and violence, one that might create a system of retribution for the pained hearts of our elders, who, having gone deceased in the past decade, doom themselves to view our wicked lives from the warm, tropical waters of the Caribbean.

HURRICANE AS CHILDHOOD MAZE

Hurricane as childhood maze occurs during various celebrations, such as birthdays, summer holidays, other national days of observance, in order to allow us children a sort of play space in which to frolic, all while our parents sit close by and eat hamburgers from the charcoal grill. The maze hurricane creates a different kind of punishment, one that more often than not confuses children, loses them.

And so we are gone, dear parents. We are gone.

HURRICANE AS ORNITHOLOGICAL VORTEX

The hurricane as ornithological vortex strips from our skies air necessary for the winged purchase of birds: seagulls, kites, red-throated sparrows, ravens, Canadian geese, European starlings, albatrosses, hawks, brown pelicans, great horned owls, carrier pigeons, boat-tailed grackles, all of which created a feathered communications network by which we might speak with our great uncles on the leeward land of the Great Lakes, by

which we might send warning to our fathers and mothers, who having purchased for their travels an aluminum-skinned recreational vehicle, drive at this moment along the Louisiana coastline, against which bears down the dirty side of an intense, vituperative, and demanding hurricane, one comprised of our unhappy ancestry. They are unhappy with our sister's current dealings, we discover: she has taken to cohabitation without any intentions towards marriage-making, and this our deceased ancestors shall not abide!

HURRICANE AS PRIVATE LETTER TO SURVIVING SIBLING

Dear Sister, you must forgive the nature of this message, for I cannot but send to you by any other means: the ancestors demand it. How I miss you, our secluded meetings, the long and quiet intervals between my departure and my arrival. Be strong, my little Dove, beneath the winds of my message; they are not meant to be angry winds, but instead are winds jealous of your perhaps too intense communion with the living and breathing world of the free, for I am no longer free. The rain that pounds against your shelter is not a hard rain of anger, but a rain of mourning, of fear, and, well, maybe anger too, but I cannot have it any other way! We must not mourn the crazy life I have left behind. I must let you know that I have found new family: it is the new family of a terrorized shore population, such is my sadness at having lost touch. But no! Truly, this message is not a message of anger, but of love, the love I felt as I twirled around you in our old life. Please forgive the obscenity it brings upon your townspeople. I mean them no harm.

HURRICANE AS SURROGATE PARENT

In the event of a parent's absence and death, there sometimes arises a surrogate parent in the form of a loving and caring hurricane, one that charges the coastline in order to replace the parent and reassure us, the children, that we are truly loved. These hurricanes often seek out the

orphan child quickly and then hover over the land to protect the child, which often remains safely in the hurricane's watchful eye. Certain parents have been known to abuse the surrogate parent hurricane, often deploying them as they leave the country to tour ancient ruins of a far off land. Authorities do their best to punish such abuse.

HURRICANE AS BIRTH CONTROL

Hurricane as birth control is sent by the ancestors, according to their severe judgment, in order to disrupt certain procreational activities. The ancestors' judgment and reasons for doing so on certain occasions varies: the potential parents themselves are not ready for a child; the potential parents have not paid proper homage to their deceased ancestors; the potential parents lack the funds necessary for providing their child with a suitable education; the potential parents met each other two hours ago at a party and are extremely inebriated. Despite its nearly 100% prevention rate (one couple succeeded inland, our research shows), the hurricane is not capable of preventing sexually transmitted diseases and should not be considered a satisfactory safeguard against such diseases.

HURRICANE AS POWER WASHER, HEDGE PRUNER, MOWER, AND BROOM

In the likely event that the children did not do their outdoor chores, the ancestors send a hurricane to correct their behavior and to make the children into examples for the neighborhood kids. The hurricane drenches, digs, and dusts while the children hide under the basement chairs, sweating. The parents watch out the windows and clap their hands as the work is finally done, not seeing their son's tree house smashed against the drive, or their little girl's trampoline collapsed in the corner of the backyard. Instead, the parents see the cut grass and

clipped shrubs, the swept porch, and the clean white picket fence; they put their children's allowance in the mailbox, a small gesture of thanks.

The children?

We weep.

HURRICANE AS CATALYST AND FATES

The ancestors will also send hurricanes when a wife is forty weeks pregnant with swollen hands and feet, exhausted but still anticipating the delivery. Or when another wife is gray with paper skin and failing hips, falling down the stairs so often she moves her bedroom to the first floor. These hurricanes come to give life and to take life, as the Fates once did. To push the pregnancy, to pressure the hips. To cut the cord, perform the autopsy, to Baptize and to Bury. They are trained to write referrals for cloth diapers and grief management for the respective waiting room and funeral home families. They discuss breast-feeding and deliver a moving eulogy. They carry the newborn and the dead to the life of the world to come. Amen.

HURRICANE AS DRAMATIC MOVEMENT

Large hurricanes often develop from ancestral disturbances known as easterly waves that move dramatically off the West African coast and are carried westward across the Atlantic Ocean by the prevailing atmospheric flow. The developing storm, as it gathers together its angry courage, will usually travel along the southern edge of the Azores Bermuda High, a high-pressure zone in the mid-Atlantic about which we know little, though we suspect it to be an offshore ancestral gathering place. If this high is strong and full of indignation, the disturbance will continue westward through the West Indies and into the Caribbean Sea of the Gulf of Mexico. But if the ancestors desire, a trough of low pressure could extend southward from temperate latitudes to interrupt

the storm's progress. This blocking pressure area will weaken and permit the tropical storm or hurricane to find a steering current within the trough to the northwest or north, thus allowing the storm center to turn toward the American coast, the homeland of our family.

HURRICANE AS SEASONAL DISTURBANCE

Due to the mysterious workings of the atmosphere, the normal tropical storm season only lasts for six months, from the beginning of June to the end of November. We believe that because only half of the year is available for the creation of hurricanes and tropical storms, the ancestors take full advantage of these circumstances to release as many powerful storms as possible, using the off-season to rebuild their anger, to seek out further misdeeds and disappointments committed by their progeny. Given our knowledge of the hurricane as seasonal disturbance, one might expect that we too should better manage our resources and strategize ways of minimizing the potential for hurricane generation. We ought to prepare against hurricanes, lay aside supplies and materials for rebuilding our lives in their wake, perhaps make offerings to the ancestors in search of mercy. Instead, the off-season only frees us from responsibility. We go about our lives with our eyes turned inland, upon ourselves, upon our petty concerns. It is not until the first rumblings of discontent reach our ears that we turn ocean-ward, remember our duty to our heritage, to our ancestors. But the wall of clouds, the rising tides and white-capped waves, the striking rain, the violent wind all inform us that we are too late. We can only stand shamefully, fearfully, and wait for the descending blow.

HURRICANE AS FOREBODING STRUCTURE

Much of a hurricane's power comes from its appearance, its form as a foreboding structure cycloning slowly over the ocean. The vertical structure of a full hurricane reaches from the surface of the sea to nearly

50,000 feet above our frightened heads. We often, especially as children, cannot fathom such heights, and so the hurricane seems infinitely large, and thus we fear that a storm of its magnitude might never cease to terrorize our childhood. Within the storm, though we cannot see it, there exists an inward, self-perpetuating flow of low-level winds below approximately 10,000 feet that serves as the storm's foundation of propulsion. These winds blow hot and angrily, much like our grandfather when he speaks bitterly about his last few years of government work, and for that reason we fear his death and eventual landfall. In the middle section of the storm, around the central core, there is a predominantly cyclonic ancestral circulation, and above, about 25,000 to 30,000 feet, high-altitude winds flow in an outward direction, thus completing the cycle of retribution. This entire circulation pattern is the engine of the hurricane, the main force that drives the hurricane to deliver its righteous message to its overland destination. The sturdy walls of a hurricane may extend above 40,000 feet, spreading out to become an anvil-shaped cloud at the base of the stratosphere and extending downwind for many miles. Such a cloud wall serves many purposes as the hurricane slowly approaches shore. The clouds form a barrier to protect the deeply important purpose of the hurricane from those who might wish it to disperse. The clouds also create a maze within the hurricane to confuse anyone who might seek out its core. And finally, the clouds announce its inevitable arrival to those many miles away, for a hurricane's power of delivery comes not only from the intense turbine of its forces within the storm, but also from the promise of its violent arrival at the site of each particular family member in need of drastic correction. The whole structure, which may be up to 600 miles in diameter, is steered along, then, by the course of the winds aloft, which guide it to its inevitable end, pointing the way to your house, your home, to the roof over your head.

Christy Call is in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Ryan Call is the author of *The Weather Stations*. He lives in Houston, Texas.