



Civilisational Collapse — or a Threshold Moment?

Meaning and where to find it.

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We are not suffering from a lack of information, attention, or intelligence.

We are suffering from a failure of **shared meaning** — not as belief, but as infrastructure.

Meaning is not something we add to reality through stories, values, or explanations. It is the compression that allows reality to be inhabitable together. When it works, it largely disappears from awareness. Life feels oriented. Situations make sense without constant interpretation. We know where we are, and we have a workable sense of where others are too.

When that compression fails, reality arrives unfiltered: too much, too fast, too thin. Individuals are left carrying complexity that used to be held collectively — by culture, institutions, traditions, and shared forms of life. What is often experienced as personal overwhelm is better understood as an ecological failure of meaning.

For most of human history, this work of compression was not carried primarily by individuals. It was distributed across shared structures — religion, education, law, medicine, governance, culture — which did more than organise behaviour. They stabilised reality itself. However flawed or exclusionary, they slowed life down enough for human nervous systems to live inside it. Meaning was ambient. We were born into worlds that already made sense.

These structures did not simply tell people what to believe. They filtered information, paced change, and provided shared reference points that allowed experience to settle before action was required. Reality arrived already shaped.

This is not nostalgia. These systems also constrained, excluded, and enforced conformity. They often mistook stability for truth and continuity for moral authority. But even where they failed ethically, they succeeded structurally: they held meaning in place long enough for lives to be lived without chronic disorientation.

What has changed is not simply that these institutions are being questioned. They are losing their capacity to compress reality at the speed and scale contemporary life now demands. They continue to perform authority, often using familiar language and symbolic forms, but they no longer metabolise the volume, simultaneity, and abstraction of what we are being asked to live inside.

As these collective containers weaken, the responsibility for meaning does not disappear. It migrates. Individuals, families, and small groups are left to assemble coherence for themselves — each in their own way, with very different consequences.



When shared compression fails, people do not stop making sense of reality. They do it alone. Each develops strategies that help restore orientation: identity, ideology, narrative, affiliation. These are not errors. They are adaptive responses to overload. But without shared scaffolding, they harden. Over time, they form silos — not just of opinion, but of perception.

The fracture we are living with is not merely ideological. It is experiential. We are not simply disagreeing about the world; we are inhabiting different versions of it.

Acceleration intensifies this condition. Digital systems collapse distance, remove buffers, and reward immediacy. Meaning, however, requires time to settle. It depends on rhythm, repetition, and the body's capacity to digest experience before responding. When inputs arrive faster than they can be metabolised, coherence gives way to reactivity.

Algorithmic amplification worsens this by feeding each mode of sense-making more of what already fits, while reducing exposure to other forms of perception. Rather than supporting shared digestion, these systems intensify narrowing. Culture begins operating permanently at the edge of its nervous system — brittle, polarised, unable to pause.

From the inside, this condition is often misread. Difficulty settling, reluctance to commit fully to fixed narratives, or resistance to simplified accounts of reality are treated as personal failures. But seen through the lens of meaning compression, these responses may reflect something else: a nervous system attempting to remain responsive in conditions where inherited coherence no longer holds.

And yet meaning has not disappeared.

Where meaning still flourishes

Alongside fragmentation, another pattern has been appearing.

Not everywhere. Not reliably. And not in ways that can be planned or scaled. But often enough to be recognised by those paying attention.

In certain situations, meaning still lands — and in fact amplifies.

These moments do not arise through belief, agreement, or shared ideology. They are not produced by alignment, belonging, or consensus. They tend to occur in small, live settings — conversations, working groups, collaborative encounters — where the pressure to perform certainty is temporarily suspended.

What changes first is orientation, not content. Speech becomes less declarative. People speak from partial knowing rather than finished positions. Listening shifts from preparing a response to staying with what is actually being said. There is less urgency to conclude, persuade, or stabilise.

Participants often recognise a distinct experiential shift. Reality feels inhabitable again — not simplified, not resolved, but held. Something is present and being attended to, even though it cannot yet be named or claimed.

These situations are unstable. They break down quickly when identity hardens, authority reasserts itself, or outcomes are demanded prematurely. But when they occur, they leave a clear trace: a recognition that meaning is still possible — just not under the conditions we previously relied on.

At this point, the question changes.

It is no longer *What do we believe?*
or *Which framework is correct?*

It becomes: **under what conditions can meaning stabilise and flourish at all now?**

The necessity of relationship

When inherited structures can no longer compress reality, and individual strategies fragment under the load, meaning has only one remaining place to stabilise: **in live relational contact.**

Not because relationship is morally superior, but because it redistributes complexity in real time.

Institutions once held meaning by slowing reality down.

Digital systems accelerate it.

Individuals cannot carry it alone.

Relationship is not a preference here — it is a structural necessity.

When meaning can no longer be stabilised by inherited forms, and cannot be carried privately without fracture, it must redistribute. Not upward into authority, and not inward into identity, but across — into a shared relational field where experience can be metabolised together.

This is not intimacy as comfort, nor community as belonging. It is relationship as **load-bearing architecture.**

Not relationality as usual

This form is easily misread, because it shares surface features with things we already know: conversation, listening, mutual presence. But it is not an improvement of existing relational modes. It is a different structure, operating by different rules.

Most relationships — including reflective, therapeutic, or collaborative ones — remain organised around individuals and their positions. Identities meet identities. Perspectives negotiate perspectives. Meaning is privately held, then exchanged. Relationship is the medium, not the generator.

Here, that order reverses.

Meaning does not originate in individuals and then move between them. It arises between them — prior to ownership, interpretation, or alignment. Participants are not expressing what they already know so much as staying present to what is attempting to take shape through the relational field itself.

This requires the suspension of familiar reflexes: the impulse to clarify, defend, persuade, or stabilise. Speech becomes exploratory rather than declarative. Listening is oriented toward staying with what is unfolding, including uncertainty, contradiction, and moments where no clear meaning is yet available.

This is not achieved through technique, agreement, or shared ideology. It depends on a collective willingness to relinquish the role of meaning-holder. No one arrives as authority. No one is asked to defer. Identity is present, but it is no longer the organising principle. Perspective is offered, but not defended. The usual scaffolding that holds social interaction together is deliberately loosened.

Under these conditions, the relational field itself becomes the compression mechanism.

When relationship itself becomes the compression mechanism, the terms of participation change. Meaning can no longer be outsourced to authority, secured through identity, or stabilised by explanation alone. It must be **recognised** between us — already present, already alive — or it does not hold. This places new demands on how we meet one another: greater tolerance for uncertainty, less reliance on position, and a sustained sensitivity to what is arising between us. What is ending is not meaning, but the assumption that it can be delivered without cost.

What arises is not just connection — it's generativity.

Something third comes into being.

Something alive and *meaningful* that did not exist before.

This is why these encounters are experienced as creative, intimate, stabilising, and often deeply affecting at the same time. Not because people agree, or bond, or align — but because meaning is no longer being exchanged. It is being **experienced**. Insight appears that no one arrived with. Language sharpens. Authenticity becomes both a prerequisite and a consequence of participation. Love may be present here — not as sentiment or attachment, but as the felt coherence of being immersed together in something real.

What is at stake in this threshold moment is not better conversation or improved relating. It is access to a generative dimension of human life that only becomes available when meaning is allowed to arise between us — or not at all.