



CROSSING THE BRIDGE TO OUR FUTURE

Craig F. Schindler

Dr. Craig Schindler's life has been devoted to one big, overarching question: What will it really take to bring about a shift in consciousness and action that's needed for us to overcome the global threats to our future and move us forward as a species to our next level of conscious evolution? On that quest, he got his law degree at Stanford University and a Ph.D. in psychology and ethics from UC Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union. He has taught at Stanford, Harvard, Trinity College and UC Santa Cruz. He is the president of Project Victory that has facilitated national dialogues, pioneered methods of conflict resolution and trained 30,000 in compassionate leadership. He has developed and taught The Wisdom Leadership Intensive: On Mindfulness and Compassion.

Whether at the university, leading transformational leadership trainings or coaching directly with individuals and groups, Craig has been working to affect the tipping point for what he calls The Great Turning. It is a place where mindfulness practice and a commitment to inclusive love and compassion combine to build loving communities, nations and a healthier planet. His forthcoming book, CHOOSE HOPE, YOU MATTER: Eight Wisdom Keys For Our Transformation, is a guide to live your higher purpose for a more compassionate self and world.

It is a call to awaken from the trance of self-destruction and rise up for a love-based, worldwide rising to restore Earth and create peace.

When my first child, a boy, was born on August 6, the anniversary of Hiroshima, it was a powerful, life-changing experience. It was the mid-1980's Cold War, and I was a professor of environmental ethics at the University of California at Santa Cruz. There was something about holding a newborn in your arms and seeing the preciousness of life that we all have — and juxtaposing it with the reality of weapons of mass destruction and the increasing destruction of the environment. It moved me to make a commitment to do my part to help turn things around. At that point, I co-founded Project Victory with Dr. Gary Lapid and Theo Brown, a non-profit organization to help advance what we call *"The Great Turning"* -- the leap in consciousness and action needed for humanity to survive and thrive in increasingly challenging times. Our book of the same title offered the vision of *"a new era of human dignity, environmental restoration and lasting peace"* and spread the Gandhian insight that to achieve this goal: *"We must be the change we want for the world."* We organized and facilitated national dialogues with leaders of diverse views on peace and security, the environment, interfaith and multiracial issues. We trained 30,000 people (to date) in compassionate leadership and conflict resolution.

Where are we now in 2018? I believe we are living in the most pivotal time in history. Humanity is hovering on the cusp between accelerating in our trance toward our own extinction on the one hand, and awakening to embody a new era of transformative change on par or equal to the Enlightenment or the Renaissance. In past eras, people have faced critical choices that would shape the future, but not until recently have we faced choices that could determine whether there is to be a future at all. While we acknowledge the remote risk of an asteroid devastating our planet, we are often not awake to the increasing momentum that climate change and human-caused actions are driving numerous species and humankind toward extinction. Yet the enemy that threatens humanity with extinction is within us.

Albert Einstein said: *"The problems we have created cannot be solved at the same level. We need a new way of thinking."* For 30 years I have sought to address both the inner and outer change needed for this new way of thinking. In addition to my Project Victory work with dialogue and compassionate action, I have maintained my coaching and counseling practice in transformational psychology, working with hundreds of individuals and organizations. I have come to realize that each of us is not just the external or small self, the ego; each of us is also the observing Self, the witness or big Self, that can transform our destructive patterns, cultivate mindfulness and happiness and help to advance the betterment of all life. This is what Abraham Lincoln meant when he called us to *"the better angels of our nature."*

We are facing a chasm between our wisdom and our technology. When I was trying to find a metaphor to describe humanity's world crisis, I thought of my first trek in the Himalayas and coming to a rope bridge that stretched across a 1000-foot river canyon. To understand what the Great Turning is and where we are right now at this time as a human species, think of this rope bridge stretching across this chasm between our wisdom and our technology. E.O. Wilson, the Harvard biologist, describes this chasm: *"The real problem of humanity is the following: we have Paleolithic emotions; medieval institutions; and god-like technology. And it is terrifically dangerous, and it is now approaching a point of crisis overall."*

Crossing the rope bridge requires us to be awake and mindful. There are gaps between the wooden planks and two ropes to hold onto. At the end of the bridge across the chasm is the lush landscape of the flowering of our humanity and our consciousness, what the great souls have seen as the next stage of our evolution. If we should fall off on one side while crossing the bridge, we risk griming the planet and the future for our children and children's children. The perils below

are the increasing devastation of climate change and the threat of annihilation via weapons of mass destruction through increasing conflicts, racism and hatred. Should we fall on the other side, we risk losing our freedom to the rise of authoritarianism, or to becoming cyborgs, slaves of artificial intelligence where we lose the evolution of the human soul and become more and more machine like. Crossing safely to the end of the bridge means we are living with mindfulness and compassion and we are ready to graduate from our long, war-weary adolescence. We are actualizing the ethic of respect and stewardship from our wisdom traditions and restoring the Earth. We can move forward to explore the Universe not as pillagers but as pilgrims of the light.

My forthcoming book is *Choose Hope, You Matter*. Hope is more than a feeling; hope is a choice. Millions of us would agree that we are in a dark time, yet as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. often said: *"The darkest hour of the night is the hour before the dawn."* Often we live in denial about the state of the world. We are afraid that if we come out of denial and face the situation, we will fall into despair. Certainly it is daunting to face the human-caused threats to our future. We bounce back and forth between denial (nothing is wrong) and despair (there is nothing we can do). It takes courage to confront the darkness. Yet there is a third way besides denial and despair and that is making a commitment – to choose hope. By committing ourselves to be mindful and help create a more just, and sustainable world, we rise above our denial and despair. As we choose to live the conscious change needed for our world, we make our affirmation of hope real by our actions. The mind wants to be right, but being right about things being hopeless is the booby prize. If you and I let ourselves fall into hopelessness, then we become part of the problem. Choosing hope is essential to creating a more mindful, compassionate, just and sustainable world.

How can we *"Be the Change"* that we want for our world? As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it: *"Our goal is to build the Beloved Community and this will require us to increase the quality of our soul as well as the quantity of our compassionate action."* This is what we call The Soul-Action Practice. The Soul-Action Practice combines inner development through practicing mindfulness and inner peace, and outer development through practicing compassion, justice and stewardship in action. This is the shift from small self (ego) to big Self (soul). Similarly, wise teachers like Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Dr. Jane Goodall affirm that we are here to learn *"compassion for all life."* Our world, they say, is a kind of spiritual democracy, meaning it reflects the accumulated sum of all our thoughts and actions. Thus as we elevate our thoughts and actions,

our ripple effect will change the world. In this way each of us can vote with our lives for more love and compassion, justice and dignity, wisdom and stewardship. The most effective method we have is the power of love/truth/soul – the Soul Action Practice.

Regarding the Inner change: Neuroscientists are now confirming that we can change our brains through mindfulness – that what we think and do with regularity changes our brains. Anyone who has worked to create a breakthrough in their physical fitness knows how powerfully the body responds to regular workouts. The same is true of the brain. Mindfulness is the practice of undivided attention and heart/mind awareness. Every great wisdom tradition teaches some form of mindfulness, such as centering prayer and meditation. Neuroscientists using CT scans have shown that regular meditation for two months can shift the set point of the brain from the right pre-frontal cortex linked to stress and anxiety to the left pre-frontal cortex linked to happiness and wellbeing. Practicing mindfulness, exercise and healthy diet increases happiness. Thus neuroscience and the wisdom traditions say that through our practice of mindfulness and altruistic action we can change our brain, elevate the quality of our life and help our world.

Regarding the outer change: To advance the Great Turning and increase our compassionate action as Dr. King recommended, engaging in real dialogue is crucial. But some people may be skeptical how dialogue can really accomplish anything in such polarizing times as these. They argue that people have become so absolutist and adamant in their mindsets, leaving seemingly little space for openness to other points of view. Part of what's going on in America right now is that we're not seeing each other as decent, good, caring people across these divisions. There's a demonization effect. Over the years, we in Project Victory have organized numerous dialogues to help bridge the divides on peace, environmental issues, climate change, race relations and religion. When you think about the broad constituency of folks of good will across many points of view and traditions, what works to foster dialogue is to create an atmosphere of kindness and safety where your point of view is going to be heard. Once that happens, you are going to be much more receptive to listening to the other point of view—and even considering there are some things you don't know. It all comes down to forging an experience of mutual respect and dignity.

The Tipping Point: Scientists have established that when a population adopts a new idea or innovation it grows slowly until it reaches the tipping point of ten percent and then it spreads exponentially like a flame. Thus when ten percent of us are living the change we want for the world with mindfulness

and compassion, we will rapidly accelerate the Great Turning. As we heal and transform our own lives, we will transform our culture, and thus we can cross the rope bridge and together create a new Renaissance of the human spirit.

At Project Victory we are working to spread the call to live the Great Turning and to help link the Great Turning Network of millions of individuals and groups committed to the inner and outer change toward love and compassion, inner peace and wellbeing, human dignity, justice and equal rights, and the healing of the Earth. As Dr. Martin Luther King says: ***"When I speak of love, am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life."*** As ten percent of us awaken from the trance of small self (ego) and live from big Self (soul) with love, we will ignite together the love-based worldwide rising.

When my son was born, I dedicated myself to this vision: ***"Two hundred years from now – if we choose – historians of the 23rd century will look back at our era and call it the Great Turning. They will say that a worldwide movement, in which tens of millions of people lived with mindfulness and compassion for each other and all life, was able in the 21st Century to restore the Earth and create the conditions for peace"***

For more on Craig Schindler, please view www.projectvictory.net

