

THE SURVIVAL IMPERATIVE

UPSHIFTING TO
CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION

A Guide to Returning Peace and Harmony to the Planet

ERVIN LASZLO

author of *Science and the Akashic Field*

*Humanity is at a crossroads. One road leads to extinction.
This book eloquently shows that our taking the other road will save us.*

— **Deepak Chopra, MD**

Also by

ERVIN LASZLO

Science and the Akashic Field (2006)

The Intelligence of the Cosmos (2017)

Reconnecting to the Source (2020)

The Immutable Laws of the Akashic Field (2021)

The Wisdom Principles (2021)

Dawn of an Era of Well-Being with Frederick Tsao (2021)

The Upshift Explorer with David Lorimer (2023, In Preparation)

Autobiography

My Journey (2021)

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Ervin Laszlo

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OUR COSMIC MISSION

We have reached a critical juncture in our evolution on the planet. Now we face a survival challenge: evolve or perish. If we are to set forth our tenure on Earth, we need to evolve the way we relate to each other and to the planet. This calls for a change in the way we act, which in turn calls for a change in the way we think. This is a crucial, and by no means simple task. How to cope with it is the subject of this book.

We need to wake up to the realization that the problems, the crises and the threats we experience are symptoms of the way we have been, and on the whole still are, thinking and acting. We live in an era of rapid change — an evolution of which the outcome is not yet decided. This is not a biological, but a social and cultural, a human *feeling and perception* evolution.

There is more to evolution than we have been told. The new sciences of life tell us that evolution is not limited to the genetic pool of living species. It is a fundamental process of change and development involving all facets of life on the planet — involving indeed the planet itself. It is not limited to the Earth. It is a universal progression from origins in the chaos of the Big Bang

to the order and coherence that now meets our eye — of which conscious human beings are among the most remarkable manifestations.

However, evolution is not a smooth and even process; it unfolds on this planet in a strongly nonlinear fashion. It is continuous, but it is interspersed with radical fluctuations, dramatic fallbacks and positive forward leaps. Its phases of downshift may be followed by a phase of upshift to higher forms and levels of order. We have just lived through a phase of traumatic downshift on the planet. If we are to attain to the phase of a positive upshift, we must survive the impact of the downshift and not fall victim to it.

We are at a tipping-point in our evolution, a watershed that leads either to the extinction of the human species, or to the birth of a planetary civilization where humans live in harmony with each other and with life on Earth.

For a member of a conscious species, purposively guiding its evolution to harmony with life on Earth should not prove to be a utopian venture. It is feasible in principle, and should be feasible in practice. Undertaking it is the human survival imperative. It does not call for manipulating the physical and biological conditions of human life, nor for altering the genetic constitution of the human and other species. It calls for a more evolved and enlightened consciousness, inspired by the evolutionary impetus of living in harmony with life and the universe.

Consciously guiding our evolution to harmony with the symphony of life is the necessary and urgent next step to ensure our tenure on the planet. This is a momentous step, a step of truly cosmic dimensions. Protecting the persistence of a conscious species in the universe is a cosmic mission. When we undertake it, we shall have reached a momentous milestone in our evolution. We can then celebrate the return of harmony and peace on the planet.

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PART ONE

PREPARING THE UPSHIFT TO CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION

UPSHIFT! THE WHY, THE WHERE TO, AND THE HOW

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CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY

Shifting up to a better world — or drifting down to crisis and chaos: this, as Hamlet would say, is the question. To pose this question as a real alternative in the world constitutes a nonrecurrent historic opportunity. It is the challenge of the tipping point at which we find ourselves.

The crises we have been experiencing are driving us to change. It is no longer a question of whether to change or not to change, the only question is *how* to change. The wrong way would have catastrophic consequences. We would encounter a series of deepening crises — the virus crisis and the climate crisis would be only forerunners. But the right way could open an era of better life for humanity on the planet. We can still choose the way we go. We can still take our evolution into our own hands.

The Old Testament told us, where there is no vision, the people perish (*Proverbs* 29:18). To live and live well, we need vision. This requirement is sadly lacking in the contemporary world. Helplessness, dejection, and disorientation abound. The vision most people have of the future is of crisis and breakdown. The clouds on the horizon obscure the sun that still shines

above in the sky. The sun does shine, but we have to perceive it to be guided by it. It is high time to take a cool look at the world we have created — and take account of what went wrong and consider what we can do to put it right.

Where We Are Today: The Downshift / Upshift Ledger

There are signs that there is a true and spreading awakening in many parts of the globe. Action is generally moving from the local and national to the international and global level. The conditions under which human life can flourish on the planet are becoming known. They are not only better known, but also are increasingly acted upon. The actions contemplated today may or may not be sufficient to shift humankind to a flourishing world — but there is a reasonable expectation that they are constructive, helpful in that regard.

There are persisting problems in our world, as well as positive developments. Let us create a ledger. On the positive side, we can enter that there are major, even global projects to ensure the conditions under which humanity can persist on Earth. The international community is waking up. An unprecedented set of remedial measures is being developed, and major pledges are made to meet the global crisis. Attention is focusing on the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, on the climate objectives brought forth by the international climate conferences including COP 26, and on the Resolutions of the G20, the club of industrialized nations. It is becoming clear that reaching these and related objectives is essential for ensuring the persistence of now nearly 8 billion humans on the planet. In less than a century since theologian Hans Küng proclaimed of the founding of the United Nations that there can be “No peace among the nations without peace among the religions,” a vibrant global interfaith movement is now in place, convened through innumerable organizations and resulting in influential books by global interfaith leaders including “The Nine Points of

Agreement Among the World’s Religions” in *The Common Heart* (2006) and “The Nine Elements of a Universal Spirituality” (2013). A recent international bestseller noting over 100,000 international organizations working for global transformative change is subtitled “How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming.”¹ This is a basically promising development, to be entered on the positive side of our ledger.

On the negative side, devastating conflicts among the world’s religious communities continue, as if to belie the seeming progress reported above. Even as we write, humanity is embroiled in over twenty different wars per Wikipedia’s “List of Ongoing World Conflicts.”

We must also not fail to note that the financial costs of achieving the goals and objectives proclaimed by well-meaning organizations have not been covered. So far, neither the international community nor the business community have provided or even effectively projected adequate financing. At the same time, the threats keep intensifying, and the costs of dealing with them keep rising.

The fact is that the current level of the pledges is inadequate to cope with the problems. Even if they were adequately financed, the goals to which they are dedicated would not overcome the threats. More is needed to prevent a catastrophic rise of the level of the world’s oceans and the aridity of vast tracts of the continents than creating carbon neutral economies by 2050, not to mention only by 2060, and thereby stop global warming at the 1.5 degree Celsius level. Achieving the current goal would not foreclose further negative forms of climate change — it would merely postpone their coming. We need to go beyond the currently targeted solutions and face the facts. We are on the brink of a global survival crisis. This crisis is clearly measurable in regard to the climate. The so-called “climate crisis” is not just a crisis of the climate — of the weather we are having. It is a crisis of our survival on the planet.

According to in-depth climate research by McKay and collaborators, the way our climate is now evolving takes us to the brink of disastrous tipping points. These points have been spelled out by Johan Rockström and his team in reference to the Planetary Boundaries (PB) framework. This framework identifies nine critical processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth System. They identified nine “Planetary Boundaries” within which humanity can continue to live and thrive for generations. A review of these boundaries in 2022 showed that five out of the nine boundaries already have been crossed. This poses an unprecedented threat. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) noted that we are reaching the outermost limits of climate-change adaptation by humanity and many other species and ecosystems.²

We are approaching survival-deciding tipping points. We need to shift the trajectory of our evolution from the present trajectory of downshift to a consciously pursued trajectory of upshift.

Where We Are Going

On the positive side of our ledger, we can enter that we now have agreement on a number of crucial goals and objectives, and partial financing to achieve them. But there is also a negative side — while we are moving in the right direction, we are not moving far enough nor fast enough. To meet the challenges of global sustainability, bolder objectives and more adequate financing are needed. Resolutions and projections on national and international levels are no longer sufficient. Action is needed on the global scale, and this presupposes the agreement and active participation of a critical mass of the world’s peoples.

The conscious involvement of the people of the world remains a precondition of heading off the advent of unsustainable and ultimately

unlivable conditions on the planet. The people factor remains crucial. Notwithstanding the recurrence of dictatorships and the persistently hierarchical way in which power is applied in nationalistic societies, now the overall system of humanity is at least aware of, and appears inherently to prefer, a democratic bottom line. International surveys by PEW, Harris, Yankelovich and *Financial Times* indicate that some 80% of citizens interviewed in the world believe that an ideal society would be democratic. People want a voice in electing their leaders and want to choose the services and products placed on the market by business enterprises. At the same time, the current statistics of Wikipedia's "Democracy Index" show that only about 6% of the world's governments are democracies, and only 30% are moving in a democratic direction. The rest are autocracies or some variety of dictatorships.

The discrepancy between people's aspirations and their actual conditions is a challenge we need urgently to address.³

What is actually done to enlist the active engagement of a critical segment of today's people for projects to create sustainable conditions on the planet? For the present, not enough. The engagement of people commands the active attention of concerned scientists and humanists and some social media, but not much more. For lack of a global-level public engagement, the sword of Damocles remains suspended above our heads.

Where we are going from where we are now depends on the recognition by a critical mass of the world's people that we need new thinking — a new way of looking at ourselves and the world. The current levels of local and global unsustainability are the result of a flaw in the current way of thinking. Building an effective political, social, and ecological system to replace the fragmented malfunctioning system now in place calls for a veritable revolution in most people's thinking — and in the actions inspired by that thinking.

Three Assessments

Here are noteworthy assessments of the human condition and its prospects for the future by three awakened and insightful individuals. They merit serious attention. One warns of the dangers that face us, the second calls for an almost messianic revolution, while the third perceives the dangers but places its trust in our power to overcome them.

“In the face of an absolutely unprecedented emergency, society has no choice but to take dramatic action to avert a collapse of civilization. Either we will change our ways and build an entirely new kind of global society, or they will be changed for us.”

—Gro Harlem Brundtland, former prime minister of Norway, Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development

“Ultimately, this Earth can be saved from mankind only if people are prepared to live with nature, rather than upon nature. Recognition of the oneness of life on earth, of its beauty and its sanctity, must be spread by an almost messianic revolution.”

—Sir Mark Oliphant, former governor of South Australia, founding member of the Pugwash Club⁴

“Here and there in history one notes a sudden concentration of energies, a more favorable constellation of social opportunities, an almost worldwide upsurge of prophetic anticipation, disclosing new possibilities for the race: so it was with the worldwide changes in the sixth century BC symbolized by

Buddha, Solon, Zoroaster, Confucius, and their immediate successors, changes that gave common values and purposes to people too far separated physically for even Alexander the Great to unite them. Out of still deeper pressures, anxieties, insecurities, a corresponding renewal on an even wider scale now seems open for mankind.”

—Lewis Mumford, noted historian, in his classic *The Conduct of Life*

Yes, Madam Brundtland, we are living an unprecedented emergency. Yes, Sir Oliphant, in today’s world, a revolution must spread that is almost messianic. And yes, Professor Mumford, we do possess precious, and in the contemporary world still largely ignored, capacities for overcoming the crisis: there is a powerful force in the universe that is *with* us.

Information Note (1): The Crisis Point in the Perspective of the Contemporary Systems Sciences

We have reached a crisis point. If we are to go beyond this point and shift up rather than down, we need know that upshifting is a realistic option. This excursion into contemporary systems theory tells us that it is. We have a real choice *because* we are in crisis. Crisis is not only danger, it is also opportunity — golden opportunity.

Crisis in a system constitutes what in the systems sciences is called a “bifurcation”: a forking in the trajectory of the system’s evolution. When a complex dynamic system becomes unstable, it is compelled to shift the trajectory of its evolution. The human system is in crisis, and it either bifurcates, or leaves the scene of history.

The opportunity for fundamental change does not appear in a functional system. For fundamental change, a disruption is called for in the system: a critical fluctuation. Fluctuations occur at all times in the system, and when they reach a critical point, the system either shifts its evolutionary trajectory to a more stable branch, or decomposes to its more stable components.

The system in question may be a group of cells in an organism, a species in the biosphere, or a species in the web of life on the planet. The system that concerns us is the latter: the ensemble of the social, economic, and political systems that constitute the system of humanity on the planet. This system is now in the throes of a critical fluctuation — it is critically unstable. Its evolutionary trajectory is on the point of bifurcating. Insightful people have been anticipating that the human system on the planet will sooner or later bifurcate — its trajectory will break down.

Systems scientists have been investigating the dynamics of the process of bifurcation and reached important insights. It turns out that bifurcation is one-way; it cannot be reversed. But it is not predetermined — it allows for choice. Even a small fluctuation within the system can “nucleate” and govern the evolution of the whole system. In today’s world there are many fluctuations —tipping points— that decide the choice among various alternatives. Bifurcation in a complex system is governed by “chaotic attractors” — a probabilistic process of change across chaos. This means extreme sensitivity to change, and significant openness in the system to alternative paths of evolution.

Living at the crisis point, we are granted a golden opportunity. Given growing instability in our political, social, and economic systems, even small groups of people can influence the way we go. They can create the small but potent “initial kick” that decides among alternative paths of evolution for our system.

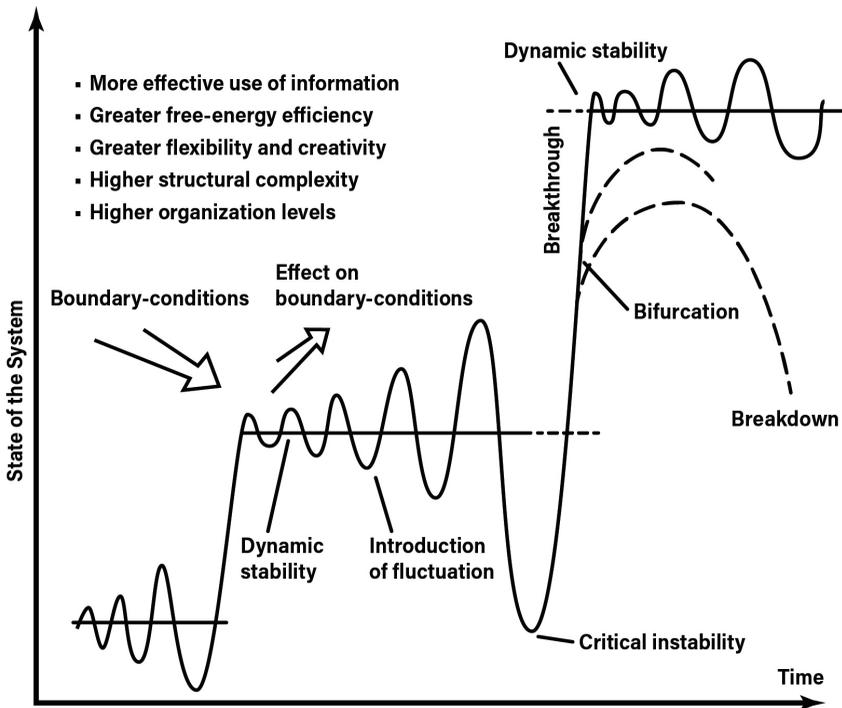


Figure 1

A typical sequence of events in a process of bifurcation. (1) Fluctuations augment in the system. (2) The fluctuations reach a critical threshold where the system no longer returns to its previous state but leaps to a new state of dynamic stability—or breaks down. (3) In interaction with its environment, a series of intensifying fluctuations appear in the system. (4) A fluctuation reaches a further critical threshold—the “tipping point”—and shifts the system to a new state of dynamic stability.

The iteration of the process of bifurcation either leads to the system’s demise, or shifts it to higher states and forms of dynamic stability. The resulting system is characterized by a more effective use of information; greater efficiency in the employment of the available resources; greater complexity in structure; and further increase in its levels of organization.

The difference between bifurcation in a system composed of human beings and bifurcation in every other system is the presence of an evolved consciousness. In the human system, the participants can be aware of what is happening and can consciously act to influence it. The decisive actions do not call for the exercise of brute force; they can be created by a shift in the values and beliefs of people. Victor Hugo said that there is nothing as powerful in the world as an idea whose time has come. A shift in the mindset of a critical mass can be powerful enough to decide the way the human system evolves — whether it shifts down to chaos and decay, or up to a more viable condition.

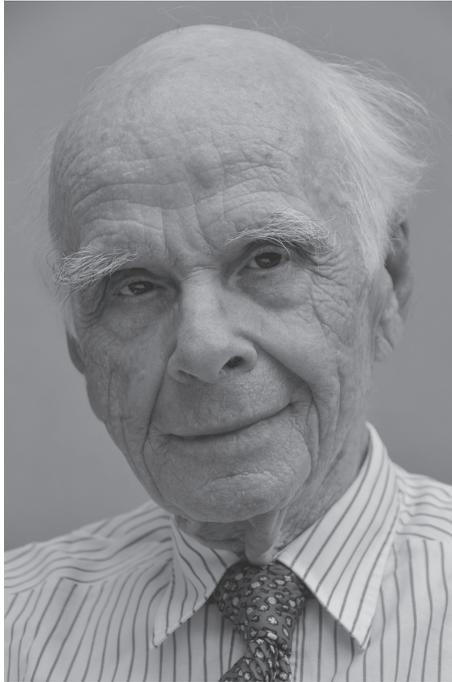
In the absence of the positive “kick,” the chances that the human system would evolve toward a more stable condition are slim. A well-placed initial kick in our destabilized system is needed to overcome the remaining, and currently still growing, resistance to change in mainstream society. Because as long as today’s society appears salvageable, those who have a significant stake in it are reluctant to abandon it in favor of something new — they fear for their privileges. They would rather try salvaging the system than reaching out to something else. Resistance to change can block the evolution of our system. However, the source of the resistance can be identified, and it can be overcome, or at least mitigated.

Shifting to another branch of our evolution is a disruptive development: it means fundamental change. And fundamental change does not come from the top — it comes from the bottom. The top becomes destabilized and loses its power to govern the system. At first marginal, but then more and more potent changes at the bottom take over the governing of the system.

This is the way evolution works in nature, and it is likely to be the way it unfolds in the system of human communities as well.

END OF EXCERPT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



© Photo by Bernard F. Stehle

Ervin Laszlo spent his childhood in Budapest, Hungary. He was a celebrated child prodigy on the piano, with public appearances from the age of nine. Receiving a Grand Prize at the international music competition in Geneva, he was allowed to leave Hungary and begin an international concert career, first in Europe and then in America.

Laszlo received the Sorbonne's highest degree, the Doctorat ès Lettres et Sciences Humaines in 1970. Shifting to the life of a scientist and humanist, he lectured at various U.S. Universities including Yale and Princeton. Following his work on modeling the future evolution of world order at Princeton, he was asked to produce a Report to the Club of Rome, of which he is a member. In the late 70s and early 80s, Laszlo ran global projects at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research at the request of the Secretary-General. In the 1990s, his research led him to the discovery of the Akashic Field.

The author, co-author or editor of 106 different books that have appeared in a total of 25 languages, Ervin Laszlo also has written several hundred papers and articles in scientific journals and popular magazines and is the subject of a PBS Documentary on his life and work. He is a member of numerous scientific bodies, including the International Academy of Science, the World Academy of Arts and Science, the International Academy of Philosophy of Science, and the International Medici Academy. He was elected member of the Hungarian Academy of Science in 2010.

Laszlo is the recipient of various honors and awards, including Honorary PhDs from the United States, Canada, Finland, and Hungary. Laszlo received the Goi Award, the Japan Peace Prize in 2001, and the Assisi Mandir of Peace Prize in 2006, and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 and 2005.

This is destined to be one of the most important and potent books of our time.

— **Jean Houston, PhD**, philosopher, author of *The Possible Human*

The Survival Imperative provides paradigm-shattering new knowledge revealing an extraordinary evolutionary event ... the dawn of a new civilization.

— **Bruce Lipton, PhD**, bestselling author of *The Biology of Belief*

This indispensable and inspiring book, grounded in Laszlo's mastery of systems theory and the science of evolutionary consciousness, provides readers with a lucid, energizing, and visionary handbook for human survival. It is a guide for the species on a global scale.

— **Richard Falk**, Founder, Center of International Studies, Princeton University

Laszlo's book catapults us beyond simply knowing that today's world is in the final throes of a dangerously unsustainable path; it provides a mind-map to empowering a new world.

— **Gregg Braden**, bestselling author of *The Divine Matrix* and *The Wisdom Codes*

I hope this book will encourage and inspire people to pick up the baton and play a part in creating a 'brave new world' — before it is too late.

— **Jane Goodall, DBE**, Founder of the Jane Goodall Institute & UN Messenger of Peace

This book is fundamental for all humankind ... it reconnects us to that universal in-forming field that underlies our existence.

— **Pier Mario Biava, MD**, discoverer of the cell integrity-based cancer treatment



Discover the Solutions to Ensuring the Wellbeing of Humanity

With humanity facing its greatest series of simultaneous crises, Ervin Laszlo offers a scientifically based perspective on what is called for at this critical juncture of our existence: a phase of upshift to higher levels of order and coherence to keep us on our evolutionary path. This book lays out why this upshift is needed, what resources we possess to draw upon, and what the action steps are that will move us all toward this achievable vision of wellbeing and wholeness. With an inclusive list of conscious organizations already contributing to this vision, Laszlo's book is essential reading for completing the process of global transformation already underway.



Ervin Laszlo, philosopher of science, leading systems theorist, author, co-author, or editor of more than one hundred books, was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. A celebrated child prodigy on the piano and discoverer of the Akashic Field, he is the founder and president of the international think tank The Club of Budapest and of the prestigious The Laszlo Institute of New Paradigm Research.



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