

The Great Turning

The Great Turning is a term coined by author David Korten to describe the great threats of our times and the opportunities they present for us all to be involved in the change that is essential. His thesis is that we are at a third pivotal moment in human history, after the agrarian revolution and the industrial revolution. Author and activist Joanna Macy has developed this to describe three main components of this change.

1. Actions to slow the damage to Earth and its beings (Hands)

Perhaps the most visible dimension of the Great Turning, these activities include all the political, legislative, and legal work required to reduce the destruction, as well as direct actions—blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience, and other forms of refusal. This work buys time. It saves some lives, and some ecosystems, species, and cultures, as well as some of the gene pool, for the sustainable society to come. But it is insufficient to bring that society about.

2. Analysis of structural causes and creation of structural alternatives. (Head)

To free ourselves and our planet from the damage being inflicted by the Industrial Growth Society, we must understand its dynamics. What are the tacit agreements that create obscene wealth for a few, while progressively impoverishing the rest of humanity? What locks us into an insatiable economy that uses our Earth both as supply house and sewer? When we see how this system operates, we are less tempted to demonise the politicians and corporate CEOs who are in bondage to it. And for all the apparent might of the Industrial Growth Society, we can also see its fragility - how dependent it is on our obedience, and how doomed it is to devour itself. In addition to learning how the present system works, we are also creating structural alternatives. We're not waiting for the politicians to do it, we are instead banding together, taking action in our own communities. Flowing from our creativity and collaboration on behalf of life, these actions may look marginal, but they hold the seeds for the future.

3. Shift in Consciousness (Heart)

These structural alternatives cannot take root and survive without deeply ingrained values to sustain them. They require a profound shift in our perception of reality - both as cognitive revolution and spiritual awakening.

The insights and experiences that enable us to make this shift take many forms. They arise as grief for our world, giving the lie to old paradigm notions of rugged individualism, the separateness of the self. They arise as glad response to breakthroughs in scientific thought, as reductionism and materialism give way to evidence of a living universe. And they arise in the resurgence of wisdom traditions, reminding us again that our world is a sacred whole, worthy of adoration and service.

The realisations we make in the third dimension of the Great Turning save us from succumbing to panic or paralysis. They help us resist the temptation to bury our heads in the sand, or turn on each other for scapegoats to vent our fear and rage.

See Joanna Macy's page for more <www.ecoliteracy.org/essays/great-turning>