

THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE

By Stephan Schwartz

Predicting the future is a difficult task, and I am speaking here without any reference to the psychic. In 1935, Franklin Roosevelt put together a blue ribbon panel of scientists and academicians, asking them to look forward to the year 1952. That was only twenty seven years into the future, not terribly long. One would think that it ought to be possible to extrapolate from the known present to a future only 27 years down line; after all that is well within an individual lifetime.

This learned group of men labored long and hard on their forecast and, finally, rendered themselves of one of those “blue ribbon” reports announced in the paper - and usually never hear of again. Reading it the erudition and thoughtfulness of the group is apparent. However, there are a few things missing from their predictions. They had no thought of jet aircraft, nuclear energy, the atomic bomb, antibiotics, television, computers; indeed, most of the things we think of as defining the externals of our world today are completely missing. Even in their most free-form speculation they could not see these technologies just 20 plus years into the future. We should be advised from their lesson.

As another example, closer to the present, not a single analyst, in a single intelligence agency, in a single country, anywhere in the West, predicted the rise of Gorbachev, the fall of communism, or the broaching of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany within a five year period. All those billions and billions of dollars that all of us have been spending so that our governments could know what was going to happen even months into the future were unavailing. The most extraordinary events of post-war history took place completely unanticipated just weeks before.

Unquestionably, we stand on the threshold of a radically different world than the one most of us have known. Never again will the world look quite the same as it has for most of the recent past. What then, should we as individuals in search, use? Is there a sure place that we can stand, a clear track for us to follow?

If it is so difficult to predict that which is physical, or that which is mental, and its corollary, that which is emotional, then what are we left with? What can the seeking person use as the grounding for planning and guidance? I would propose to you that it is those things of the spirit, it's those ethical, fundamental principles of

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the self, and the path for searching, for self-awareness and service, that hold the real guidelines for the future.

To give you a sense of why I think that issues of consciousness hold the key to answering the question of the challenge of change, let me describe an experiment of unusual elegance. I'm an experimentalist, and I can tell you we don't often see experiments of such breathtaking clarity, that the results stand out for you quite this way. This research was carried out by Dr. Helmut Schmidt, at the Mind Science Foundation in San Antonio, Texas. Reduced to its basics here is how it went: Dr. Schmidt made a black box—a closed box—and in this box he put a nuclear isotope that was decaying randomly—that is, particles were being emitted in a random way. He incorporated into the circuitry of his black box six little computer chips, into which the record of the particle emissions was stored. The fact that there were six chips is important, as you'll see in a moment.

Now what is critical here is that no consciousness, human or otherwise, observed the emissions of these little particles coming off of the isotope. Schmidt drew an arbitrary mental line and all particles going to the right of his imaginary line were considered pluses, or ones, and those going to the left as minuses, or zeroes. Over a long period of time, an equal number of particles should be plusses and minuses. By definition they should be random.

Dr. Schmidt ran his device for a long period of time and, inside the box totally unobserved by any consciousness -- and that is important -- the little chips retained a record of the particle emissions. Exactly the same pattern of ones and zeroes was sent to each chip so each had an identical record. When the recording process was done, he took the little chips and sent five of them out to other researchers to be kept by them. The sixth chip he kept back. Remember, no one knows what is on the chips. Months later Schmidt began the second phase of his experiment. Using a computer he had it randomly select a single half-hour period months in the past, when the isotope was emitting its particles.

For the sake of an illustration let's just say it arbitrarily selected 3 to 3:30p.m. on December 27th. He, then, asked the computer to tell him which direction the particles during that single half hour should be influenced to go. Should they go the left, or to the right? Now remember, all this was recorded months before at a time when no one was aware of the information.

Dr. Schmidt, then had a volunteer listen to the data stored in the chip. A click in the left headphone while a zero would make a click in the right. The volunteer was asked to bias the clicks so that more came from one side of the headphones than the other. In essence Schmidt was asking the volunteer to go back in time to that moment, that half-hour — 3 to 3:30p.m. — asking them to influence in the present

tense—this is hard to hang onto — to influence at the moment when the little particles were coming out, which direction they ought to go. The volunteer was reaching back from the future into the past, when the past was present tense to influence the direction of the emissions.

After the volunteer had attempted to accomplish that task, Dr. Schmidt played back, for the first time, the information recorded on the chip he still retained in his possession. Lo and behold to a significant degree, the particles did go, only for that half-hour period, in the direction selected randomly by the computer, and all the rest of the time their distribution was perfectly random.

Now you could say, “Well, what really happened was that the volunteer was somehow affecting the structure of the chip itself, this one chip that was in front of him. That this was some kind of mind over matter event that had nothing to do with what had happened in the past. That, in itself, would be evidence of a psychokinetic phenomenon, no mean feat in its own right but, of course, as you can already see, Dr. Schmidt had something even more significant in mind. If the change on the chip were only -- imagine saying only about something like this -- the result of the volunteer affecting the structure of the chip, then the other five chips ought to be different from the one that Schmidt had retained.

In fact, when the other five chips were all played, all of them were the same. The volunteer did not even know there were five other chips, and Schmidt, himself, did not know exactly where these chips were stored. Therefore, the volunteer could not have read Schmidt’s mind and then somehow gone to where the other chips were stored, and somehow affected them as well. It just gets too preposterous, to hypothesize such an explanation.

The simplest, and most logical explanation is that somehow a human consciousness had gone back in time to that half hour -- 3 to 3:30p.m. on 27 December, when time was present time, and had caused the variation from an otherwise random distribution to occur. They had not affected the chip after the information had been recorded, but had actually caused the change when the particles were being emitted.

Now that sounds pretty astonishing, and if it is a little hard to take aboard, don’t be discouraged. Many well-trained scientists find the whole concept extremely difficult. But it gets better! Schmidt took his experiment another step. He discovered that if he played the information contained on the computer chip for a fish, while no human was observing, and created a situation in which there was a meaningful interaction between the information and the fish, in this case a mild electric shock, nothing harmful just something to stimulate the fish and, then, asked his volunteers to effect the change he requested, they were unable to do so.

Why were they unable to do this? The answer lies in the fact that until there was an interaction between consciousness -- any consciousness -- and the information on the chip, the unobserved outcome of that half hour months earlier was still fluid. But, once observed, the state of the information was fixed by the act of observation, even though it was only a fish. Once fixed it could not be changed.

This is an experiment of such significance that it's being published in one of the major international physics journals, and its implications for science are profound. However, this is not ivory tower science with no relevance to our day-to-day world. For those of us who are pilgrims, seeking individuals, Schmidt's research suggests some very important clues. First, that some aspect of the self exists beyond the confines of time and space. Second, that consciousness is capable of quantifiably altering reality. That our consciousness is having a material effect on reality. Third, that we are now entering an epoch where metaphysical speculation can be subjected to empirical quantification by science. Let me take healing as an example.

The idea that the consciousness of one person can have a therapeutically beneficial effect on the well-being of another is one of humankind's most ancient beliefs. Accounts are to be found in the literature of every civilization; healing was the *leit motif* of Jesus' ministry to cite but one instance. Obviously, people have believed this from one generation to the next because they have seen something that convinced them that healing was real. But was it just a psychological response, or was some physically quantifiable event occurring.

For almost 50 years researchers in a variety of disciplines have been studying healing, designing experiments involving how healing affected cell colonies, enzymes, and seedlings; and the results have been strikingly positive. The problem though has been that the high variability of living systems, even when nothing more than single celled structures were involved, made it hard to know whether healing or some other uncontrolled variable explained the positive results reported in such experiments.

Our Mobius team sought to develop an experiment which answered the criticism of this earlier work by using something that science did not normally think of as being alive -- water. We were drawn to water early on because of the long ethno-historic association between water and healing. Almost every culture has a ceremony involving water and healing or blessing. We also wanted an experiment in which the taking of the measurement and its analysis was completely conservative. One of the things which afflicts much consciousness research is that the very structure of the experiment is hard for many materialistically oriented scientists to understand. We chose to measure the water using something called infrared spectrophotometry, one of the most widely published of all scientific studies, and one well understood by researchers in many disciplines.

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There were 14 healers, and 14 healing recipients, each with a real physical problem, ranging from cancer to arthritis. Seven of the healers were experienced people who did such work on a regular basis and had a discipline for carrying it out. Seven other healers were just people willing to try. They had no specific discipline, but did have strong intent.

All were free to use any healing technique they liked as long as it did not involve manipulation of the body, or medication. Some of them did evangelical Christian healing, some channelled space people; they tried all sorts of things.

While they were doing this healing, we taped little hermetically sealed bottles of very pure water on the palms of their hands. There were three vials in each experiment, one on the palm for five minutes, one for ten, and one for 15 minutes. At the end of the experiment, we measured the water samples, using the infrared light technique, and compared the treated bottles to other vials that served as controls. Really a very conservative, basic sort of experiment.

Certain predictions were made before we carried out the experiment: First, that some or all of the treated water samples would show a change in the infrared spectra at a predicted point, in comparison with control samples; second, that there would a difference between water samples exposed five minutes to the healer's hands and those exposed for ten or fifteen minutes, the change being greatest in the 15-minute samples.

We discovered that those bottles that had been treated, that is, had been on the palms of the hands were, in fact, substantially different at the atomic level of the water's structure than the control vials.

Somehow the consciousness, the therapeutic intentionality of the individuals who were the healers, was causing a measurable change in a predictable way in the structure of the water. More than that, we learned that the naive healers—people who had never done healing before—and the experienced healers independently, as two separate groups, were each capable of making significant changes, but that the experienced people made bigger changes than the naive people. This experiment suggests many things, but for the moment let me concentrate on a point of relevance to the challenge of change. Consciousness affects the actual structure of materiality. And consciousness directed by will — focused intentionality — achieves a greater change than consciousness naively directed. To our surprise, however, there was no relationship between the time of exposure and the intensity of effect.

I describe both the Schmidt and Mobius experiments, in some detail, because as we look out and think about, the challenge of change we need to become aware of the tremendous power that each of us as individuals possesses. That this power is

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objectively real, and its effects can be measured, not just believed in. These experiments show that at the micro level, the quantum level, we literally have the ability to change physical reality. We also see that consciousness can reach back independent of time to affect change. This may not be easy to understand, for some it may even be philosophically repugnant, but the objective data compels us to this conclusion.

But what does that have to do with the challenge of change we face at the macro level of our daily lives, and the meta level of our civilization? As individuals, we are constantly interacting in hundreds of small events, small physical realities we have the power to change. I have been traveling to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc now for about two-and-a half years. I spend about a third of my year there, on both businesses and philanthropic activities. It has given me what I have come to see as a living laboratory, of consciousness at work from the individual to the meta level.

What caused those cataclysmic changes, why were they unpredicted, and what can they teach us? The questions, I propose to you are not abstract? The change taking place in those countries is not occurring in a vacuum, it calls forth a response from us. It is part of the challenge of change we face.

A good place to begin to seek answers to these questions is by posing another question: Why didn't thousands die in the tumult of these changes? The precedent was surely there, in Czechoslovakia, in Hungary, in a dozen other places. These governments were not restrained in the past. Why this time was it different? Consider particularly Romania where for decades people had been so beaten down that they did not even resist when their heat was turned off in winter. Why did things there happen with such astonishing rapidity and relative peacefulness?

I think the answer is that these individuals, these populations had arrived at a new critical consensus; one so powerful that even the people in the government, those people who would typically have given the orders to send the tanks or the infantry in, somehow drew back from such orders, were restrained, from doing so. A critical consensus had been reached not by action but by what Gandhi would have called "beingness," and it was so powerful that government systems that had always presented a monolithic and unchanging facade, one that had never shirked from murdering even the most innocent children could not move.

As recently as five or six years ago, Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick wrote a very famous essay in the geopolitical community. It discussed her perception of the difference between authoritative governments, such as the right wing dictatorships that previously ruled Iran and Nicaragua, and communist governments, such as those found in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Reduced to essentials, Kirkpatrick argued that because communist governmental systems, Dictatorships by public

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bureaucracies as opposed to being a dictatorship of an individual, they were almost impossible to overthrow and, thus, they were more pernicious.

It was a reasoned analysis by a senior and respected diplomat, a person who had access to the relevant intelligence, and years of personal experience. And yet it failed to take into consideration this issue of critical consensus. It was a logical prudent analysis, but it was wrong, because it missed the central dynamic that runs any society, the critical consensus shared by governed, and governor.

Hundreds of hours of conversation in the Soviet Union, with people from all walks of life, much of it impassioned private conversation across kitchen tables, with bread and salami between us, has convinced me that change in the East came from an awakening of consciousness that spread like a secret storm throughout the country. Those both in and out of government were touched and moved. Not spreading through newspaper reports, or media coverage, or books; those were all precluded, the media was controlled, the press was captive, the books could not be published. So what was it that quickened this?

What changed in Romania? Until a month before they rose up, the men and women of that sad benighted country were kept in total subjection by leaders who, during winter, would not even let citizens have sufficient heat in their apartments, on the theory that if they were kept cold -- and it gets very cold, and beaten down -- and tens of thousands were tortured or murdered -- they wouldn't cause trouble. What made these people change? People who had docilely complied when they were told that all the women had to bear children, when they were told to cut back on already deficient diets. What caused that change?

I suggest to you that society is a web of life, that we are each feeding into it and being fed by. This thing is not of the intellect, is not of the measurable physical world, but it is nonetheless real. When we consider the challenge of change, we need to acknowledge and incorporate into our thinking, the reality of this ineffable network of life of which we are all a part.

The fall of communism is a classic, textbook demonstration of the principle. No matter how bizarre, strange or repressive, painful or evil, or any adjective of negativity you would like to apply to a situation, when that critical consensus is reached change will occur.

It occurs when individuals collectively accept the challenge of change, and move beyond fear. Fear of pain. Fear of death. And, perhaps most important of all, fear of life being different.

If the principle is demonstrated, the next question for the pilgrim is: What changes do I seek? Where are we headed? Let's put a few bench markers down, as it were. We have the lowest voting record of any industrial society in the world. It is a tragedy. We consume, by some estimates, about as much as a third of the world's resources, and we squander resources with an abandon that would have made a Caesar blush. And, what we don't waste we pollute. In the San Joaquin valley, the richest farmland of North America, the soil has become so poisoned by pesticides, herbicides, and other chemicals that some analysts estimate that within 30 years it will be nonproductive. We have millions of gallons of incredibly toxic chemical and nuclear waste, and absolutely no idea what to do with it. It just sits there boiling like a witch's cauldron, often slowly poisoning the ground water in the area.

If the East Bloc can meet a challenge of change of the magnitude that is now apparent, can we settle for less? One way to answer this question is to ask another question: Are there proven alternatives that we could take? To answer that let me take just one area of our society, the largest economic sector in America, agriculture. Consider the following:

Alex Podolinsky of Australia saw the farmland of his country slowly deteriorating. He looked out over these dying lands, as well as hardpan soil that had never nurtured a crop and wondered if some alternative were not available. His search brought him to the biodynamic soil preparations, advanced by the clairvoyant social philosopher, Rudolf Steiner. Strange and exotic things, these soil preparations. Made by burying the horns of cattle stuffed with manure for half a year and then digging them up, taking the odorless powder that is all that remains of the manure, stirring it into water in a special way and, then, spreading it out over the soil. Viewed from the perspective of petro-chemical agriculture, the whole idea of these preparations, a kind of homeopathy for the soil is ridiculous. Yet, somehow via this simple, almost ridiculously inexpensive process, Podolinsky has reclaimed 1,600,000 acres of land in Australia. Land that had been previously written off as useless, was transformed into some of Australia's richest farmland.

There are many such examples. True stories of individuals who said, "Yes, it is within my power to make a difference." The overwhelming majority are not grand people, not wealthy, in many cases not even particularly well educated. Yet they succeed where others fail. Why? Perhaps because they are people prepared to commit their entire intentionality towards a specific goal while, at the same time, like the lilies of the field, surrendering to the process without, as the Bible has it, thought for tomorrow. It is one of the central paradoxes of the pilgrim. To work without reservation, while holding no cherished outcome.

One of the most moving stories illustrating this spiritual mystery is that of The Acorn Man. It is told as a true story, and it maybe. After the first World War a

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soldier who came back from the front was so shocked by his experiences that he hid himself away in a part of France that was almost abandoned because there were no trees. They had been cut down in an earlier century by people making charcoal. The land was as desolate and barren as the man felt his soul to be. But time heals and, after a while he thought, "What can I do to make a difference? He decided that he would plant a 100 acorns a day. So he got a bucket and he walked miles to the nearest oak trees and collected acorns on the ground. He put 100 of them in a bucket, soaked them in water overnight, and the next day went out with a stick with a nail on the end of it made a hole and dropped an acorn in. He did this 100 times, every day. Didn't ask anybody's permission, it was not a government program, there were no reports, no budgetary appropriations, just a guy with a tin bucket and a stick with a nail on the end of it.

He was a diligent man, and soon oak trees started growing, not all of them, but some, and he just kept planting his 100 acorns each day. Pretty soon the sprouting acorns became forests of young oak trees. Birds nested in the oak trees and insects appeared and, then, an even stranger thing happened. Streams began to appear, running down the valley and grasses began to form. The whole ecosystem of this area, which had been barren and desolate for over a century, came back to life. After a while, somebody noticed what was happening, and the government sent somebody down to see what was going on. They couldn't figure it out. Papers were written about how this was some sort of spontaneous regeneration. All sorts of theories were advanced until somebody happened to notice this guy going along with his little tin bucket and his stick with a nail, planting oak trees.

We each have our equivalent of The Acorn Man's potential. It's up to us. Intentioned consciousness directed by disciplined will, in the service of something greater than immediate self-interest. We have come to think of the world's problems as so complex that the simple solutions of which most individuals are capable seem beneath consideration. This is wrong.

We are an interesting society. I've been looking at a lot of our major institutions recently and I have been struck by a series of patterns which I see emerging. One of them is that we are terribly punitive. Whenever we extend assistance, we always seem to do it with a punishing component built in. "Yes, we'll support you, but we're going to make that help real difficult to obtain, terribly complicated, or humiliating." I have a brain-damaged, diabetic brother, so I have some direct experience with what getting help like this entails.

I'm a fairly competent person and, having been in government, I am no stranger to its paperwork. But trying to get a training program for my brother is like a bad hobby. It takes me about four hours a week. If you're an elderly person who needs to get a wheelchair for instance, you have to be very sharp and awfully diligent.

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There is that within us that seeks to punish those reduced to a lesser quality of life. I have been asking myself “Why?” What is it in our society that says, “We’ll take care of you but only at a price —not a price of money— but a price of life, quality of life.” The answer, I think, lies in our need to punish people who let us down.

Recently, after I made a presentation to a group of psycho-therapists, a group of them invited me to lunch. They said, “We have formed a network of therapists to try to help people who are having spiritual experiences, who aren't crazy, that is, who are not having mental health problems. They're having kind of altered reality experiences.”

I asked them, “Why are psycho-therapists doing this? I mean where are the ministers, and the rabbis, and priests.” They replied, “We get these people on referral from them.”

For the past 6-months I have been conducting a computer search of *The New York Times*, and the wire services involving religion. It seemed to me another one of those patterns I was looking for was emerging, and I wanted to make sure the data supported the observation. When the survey was completed, it demonstrated that almost all religious discourse in the United States essentially has to do with sex. Religion today is a kind of Genital Theology, one which has replaced spiritual search. The issues are premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, masturbation, adolescent sex. Where is the discussion about angels? Can you image a conclave of religious people discussing angels? I can easily imagine one discussing abortion.

We are a society which has lost track of the relevance of spiritual purpose. Now where is that going to come from? Where is this reorientation to that part of spiritual quickening going to come from? The answer is it's going to come from us.

We're the source of change, not the government, not the universities, us — you and I. We're the life-saving crew. We're the ones who are going to do it. Just like Eastern Europe's cobblers, and grocers, and seamstresses, steel workers, and brick workers. Those individuals changed, and the East Bloc changed and brought about the demise of communism. And God knows their task was harder than ours. Or was it? We need to affirm our values by our beingness, but what are they?

In the healing experiment we carried out, we thought there would be a relationship between the time of exposure to the palm of the hand of the healer and the intensity of change. In point of fact, that's not true. It seems to be a build-up of tension, a discharge and a release just like you clench a muscle to lift a weight. You can't keep your bicep under tension, or a smile on your face 100 percent of the time. Muscles get tired, and I think this same principle is at work here. Making things change doesn't require 24 hours a day of effort. But it does requires 24 hours a day of

intentionality. Just as the healers who were most effective were those who committed themselves to learning the discipline, and the beingness of healing.

Here is an experiment. It's very simple. It takes half an hour a day, that's it. A half an hour a day commitment that makes things better. I've been suggesting this for a while, and one time came back to a group to give another talk. Afterwards, an elderly lady came up and said, "I listened and I thought, 'What can an 80-year-old lady do, who's semi-crippled, to make any kind of a change?' I thought about this, and finally decided I would go for a walk every day and pick up the paper on the sidewalks, the gum wrappers and the styrofoam cups, in the little park across the street from where I lived. I couldn't do very much more than that, but I was determined to do that for a half-hour a day, so I started doing it. After a while, other people began to help and they started talking to each other about it, because, I mean if you can see a little old lady going around picking up pieces of paper, I mean you'd remark on that."

She said, "I had a little sack and my cane, and I'd walk along and I'd pick up a piece of paper and I'd put it in the bag. The park got prettier and then mothers began to bring children out to play, because it was kind of a nicer place, because we sort of looked out for each. Everybody that lives around the park got to know one another a little better so we'd sort of say 'hello.'

"Then I noticed that something was changing with me, not the least of which is that I can touch my toes, which I hadn't been able to do since I was a 22 years old."

A half-hour a day, that's all it takes.

If each of us would make that commitment for one half-hour a day, we would soon have extraordinary stories to share with one another, and the world would be a better place. We each have extraordinary potential, no matter who we are. There are proven techniques of bringing about the changes we would like to see. What would happen if we all choose to buy only those kinds of things that represented our vision of the world as we would like it? Think about the Alar problem with the apples — and the changes that effected, and the rapidity with which they occurred.

When will those of us, who profess a commitment to spiritual principles, make manifest those principles? When will our beingness added its weight to the emergence of a new life-affirming critical consensus? We have reached a point where one must think like a hero to behave as one merely human. I think that is our principal challenge for change. We are all heroes, potentially. When will we become heroes actually? Are we prepared to stand up and live in beingness, and not just in words? Live the things that we believe. We have that power, wherever we are, whatever our race, our education, our jobs, to give a half hour a week, as a start. Are we prepared to accept that? Are we going to live it or are we going to talk

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about what might be, and complain? The choice is ours as any choice is. And any choice is better than dithering indecision. Let's do this. If you take up the challenge of change, write me and tell me what happens.

Let's make the world different. Let's make it what it could become. Let's accept the challenge of change that lies within each of us.