

The Force is With Us: In conversation with Ervin Laszlo

By Wayne Visser

This is a summary of a conversation from my podcast Thriving: The Breakthrough Movement. You can listen to the full episode [here](#).

Speaking with Ervin Laszlo is like plugging into a universal field of wisdom. As a philosopher and systems scientist, Laszlo has long helped shape how we understand complexity, chaos, and conscious evolution. His book *The Chaos Point*, which I featured in my *Top 50 Sustainability Books*, has remained a guiding framework for my own work on thriving. So it was a joy to reconnect.

“We are at a chaos point now. It’s a bifurcation point ... a tipping point.”

Whether ecological, social, economic or political, Laszlo said, “the system is sufficiently disturbed”, so that we face an undecided future—not a continuation of the past, but a critical juncture. As he put it, “It has to be something different ... Which way it goes is still very largely to be decided by what we do today.”

Laszlo draws on complexity science to frame this moment. He invoked Prigogine’s concept of “critical fluctuations” and Margaret Mead’s idea that a small group can change the world. “We are still that critical fluctuation,” he said. The direction of change hinges on us.

I confessed that I sometimes feel criticised for being hopeful, and asked Laszlo how he relates to the future. “I’m neither optimistic nor pessimistic. I like to say I’m possibilistic.” He explained that what matters is that we create the conditions for positive evolution. Even violence, he suggested, “forces the hand of history ... to create change.”

He pointed to war—such as Putin’s invasion of Ukraine—as a disruption that could catalyse greater unity. “We are being forced to join together ... in the energy field, in the policy field, in the ecology field.” Climate change, too, is pushing us toward “oneness” and shared vulnerability. “Even the most tropical island in the Pacific is affected ... as much as the cities of New York or Hamburg.”

That convergence can become a force for good—but only if we act.

“To make it a creative chaos, or to make it a disruptive chaos? That is the question before us.”

As a systems scientist, Laszlo sees two key principles maturing: holism and information. “What is good for the whole is ... good for the part,” but not vice versa. “We are all embedded in a joint field ... in a joint matrix, in which we either swim or sink together.”

He credits early systems thinkers like Jan Smuts, who coined the term “holism,” and quantum physics, which revealed the primacy of information and non-locality. “These are long-term insights that are maturing,” he said. “The tendency is toward information, communication, and collaboration.”

And yet, we still encounter resistance—especially from hierarchical systems. But for Laszlo, evolution has its own momentum. “There is reason to believe that there is an intrinsic movement or dynamicism ... toward the creation of integral units of diverse elements that work together.” He calls this *holotropism*: “an attraction toward wholeness.”

Drawing on Stanislav Grof’s work on holotropic states, Ervin believes this force is embedded in the very fabric of reality.

“It’s attracting and attractive to oneness, to wholeness ... It’s what the young people should be referring to when they say, ‘Go with the Force.’ This is the force of evolution.”

As a Star Wars fan, I loved the reference to The Force. It turns out Laszlo has a subsection in his latest book, which he calls *The Force Is With Us*. The book—*The Upshift: The Path to Healing and Evolution on Planet Earth*—calls for a paradigm shift to a mindset that is “holistic ... peaceful ... cooperative.” Not Newtonian or Darwinian, but quantum, ecological, and biological.

“The key is not in commands from above,” he said. “The key is in what people believe in... an internal motivation towards cooperation.” That’s what *The Upshift Movement* is all about. “It’s a means to bring in people’s ideas, how we can live wiser, how we can live more cooperatively and peacefully on this planet.”

I asked him about signs that this upshift is happening. “Look at the ecological movement,” he said. “Look at the climate change movement ... even political systems, which are so difficult to move, are now moving ahead.” He mentioned climate pledges and youth activism as signs of awakening. “We are part of a living, growing, dynamic and evolving system ... and this recognition, this so-called waking up, is occurring.”

Then Laszlo introduced a marvellous metaphor: the **hopeful monster**.

“A hopeful monster is a system that’s more evolved than its surroundings ... it doesn’t fit, but... if it can survive ... eventually they will prevail.”

This, he said, is the role of pioneering individuals and ideas today. And so we closed by reflecting on young people—many of whom are gripped by eco-anxiety. What message would he offer them? “You are the most fortunate generation ever in the history of humanity,” he told me. “You are able to wake up and to take your own future into your hands ... Now we can change ... **we can be the butterflies that create the tornado.**”

Laszlo has lived a long and purposeful life, but rather than looking back, it’s clear his eyes are firmly on the future. “We have to learn to thrive,” he told me in parting. “Because we *can* thrive.”

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Source:

First published on Purpose Inspired, July 16, 2025. Available at:
<https://purposeinspired.substack.com/p/the-force-is-with-us>