

THE GREAT REMEMBERING

A conversation-starting essay by Craig Neal

In 1963 my first *remembering* came spontaneously at the civil rights march "on" Washington DC, in which Martin Luther King delivered his legendary *I Have a Dream* speech. Although transfixed by the moment as I stood swaying with the crowd on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, it was the throngs of people I turned to during the speech that triggered my memory of a prior state, a remembering of the human condition as that of love in motion and therefore catalyzing my life's purpose into motion.

We've all had those moments of *awakening or remembering*, some fleeting as if from a dream, where we know and feel connected in a visceral sense to all things, human and otherwise. Then, for most, we return to the "real world" where day-to-day life resumes.

What if these moments were the *reality* in which we were born to live, and that what if these episodes are the *great remembering* of what it truly is to be human? What if the Hopi elders are right when they say in their prophecy that we all are "the ones we have come to find"? What if you are the wonder and gift to the world you dream about in the sweet dreams of your solitude?

In spring of 2004 I was accepted as a writing fellow at a writers refuge to work on a book that had been brewing in me since starting the Thought Leader Gatherings (TLG)* in 1998. Many had asked me for the recipe for how we created the dynamic dialogue form used in the TLG meetings. The common take away of these "leadership development" sessions is a heightened sense of communion* with a diverse group of people based on conversations of living our lives as if we matter, integrating who we are with what we do.

Midway into the retreat, while writing about my experience at the 1963 march, I suddenly broke into sobs of joy and revelation, feeling waves of love and gratitude for that time, myself, and a sense of complete integration with all things. The room glistened, my pulse quickened, I saw and felt from the core of my existence the interconnectedness of all things my "self" as an integral part of the whole matrix of life. A great remembering of who I REALLY am. Whew!

What came next was a flowing out of writing over the next several days of what is now the curriculum of The Art of Convening Trainings (AoC). Rather than a book, a living training in which I would engage

people from all over the world, by telephone, in a conversation about what it means to remember our essential selves in relationship to one another and the world into which we have been born.

Now 4 years and 25 groups into the AoC, this conversation has been and is being had with over 240 conveners. We ask to “listen ourselves and one another into being,” strengthening our internal and external listening muscles for the sometimes faint voice of our own awakened selves. We reveal to one another and ourselves our birthright of each human as complete and accomplished beings. This is a conversation of the Great Remembering.

In 2006 (and again in 2007) I joined 13 men over 50 years old for an “inventure” journey/safari to Tanzania, trekking into 3 tribal lands as new elders, to meet and share with male elders of these tribes about what it means to hold a purpose and vision for our people and ourselves. Remembering together our humanness for a shared future.

On one of the evenings while visiting the Hadza, a hunter-gatherer people, we assembled on a large rock with 10 Hadza elder men to hear their “creation story” of how the Hadza came into being on this land in the south Serengeti plains. Led by 94-year-old Kampala, they wove a story unbroken over tens of thousands of years of their people, the land, its inhabitants and, most importantly, the nature of their connectedness to all things.

Their lives are a continuous cycle of interrelated and interdependent relationships with the land, animals, the elements and humans—indistinguishable, and in rhythm. Their remembering is current and deep as an aquifer running swift and clean beneath the surface of our lives.

In their story we, too, were called to our essential selves, to remember our nature and purpose as humans.

Now sitting on a plane 40,000 feet over the Rockies, I wonder what shall call to us from the depth of our yearning our true selves?

What is it you wish to remember about who you are, why you are here, and to whom or what you belong?

*Thought Leader Gatherings:

The Thought Leader Gatherings begin a 10th year of rich on-the-ground discourse. We created the Thought Leader Gatherings in 1998 as a venue for the conversations between the new leaders. The TLG format synthesizes ancient practices and modern dynamic group processes, engaging the authors and point people charting the course for an emerging positive future from business, politics, society and our cultural institutions.

The Thought Leader Gatherings are for new leaders and organizations who support them to create the conversation of possibility, vision and living into/leading into a future that is sustainable for a majority of people on the planet. This leadership must come from all levels of business and organizational life.

Each Gathering explores the nexus of leadership development and personal development with a core belief that leadership development and organizational transformation is rooted in personal development.

Today's leadership must have a vision for stepping up to creating the future—the TLGs are helping to create this conversation.

