

More in A Woodford Greenhouse Special

The Greenhouse: a very green conversation

Hans Baer: health impacts of climate change

Andrew Wilford: through the lens of sustainability

Graeme Taylor: made for change

Topics

[A Woodford Greenhouse Special](#)

[Book review](#)

[Eco Adventures](#)

[Eco Alerts](#)

[Eco housing](#)

[Eco Images](#)

[Environment Group Profiles](#)

[Exploring the Past](#)

[Featured Articles](#)

[Letters](#)

[News](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Schools](#)

[Sustainable Business](#)

[Traveston dam](#)

[Up Close Interviews](#)

[Wildlife Volunteers](#)



Recent Discussion

kiMmY on Fluoride is an enzyme poison

Ian Westmore on What Rudd and Wong should take to Copenhagen

Millie Maree on Lock up those cats
yaz on What we eat affects the world and its population

Kirsten@Nexyoo on What we eat affects the world and its population

To new horizons with Sohail Inayatullah

Posted by [Brian Rickards](#) • December 19, 2009 • [Printer-friendly](#)

Brainstorming with Sohail Inayatullah is an experience where you are taken on a journey to future horizons, to a limitless array of possibilities and social scenarios – whatever he can bring your mind to imagine.

To some people they might be mirages never to be grasped, for others with a different mindset it's like a door being opened not only to the potential of real global change but also a ray of light on one's inner self.

Sohail, only if you want him to be, is the gentle guide to changes for the better. This humble man with an aura of wisdom and peace opens up in the heads of his clients vistas for alternate, more sustainable futures. Some times the opening vista is featureless, requiring Sohail's soothing encouragement to form a picture, to form an idea.

This engaging man who spent the first six years of his life in Pakistan, then travelled the world, first with his family as a boy and then by himself as young man, studied at the University of Hawaii where he did a PhD in political science focusing on macro-history and the 'grand patterns of change'. He also became deeply interested in the thoughts of Indian philosopher PR Sarkar, the founder of Ananda Marga..

He was especially taken by Sarkar's theories of time, change and the future.

Because of his father's work with the United Nations, he'd had an early grounding as a boy in global affairs, having lived also in the US, Switzerland and Malaysia. But that was just a taster for Sohail who beyond his early formal studies is now recognised as one of the planet's great thinkers and futurists and is in demand worldwide with his 'foresight workshops', travelling widely.

In Hawaii, where like many other young men he found a love for the surf, he spent 10 years working with the justice system, looking at the future of law, future of mediation and the future of robotics. He also set up the court's foresight program in one of his earlier challenges.

At that time he had not anticipated his own change, his own future. While travelling, a chance meeting in a Finland sauna with a QUT academic led to a working association where they held courses in Fiji and Thailand. But from that point he was destined to live in Australia and become an Australian citizen.

It wasn't long after that that a position became available at the Brisbane tertiary institution where he worked for nearly four years. But the old call of the surf was strong and in 1999 he moved up to the Sunshine Coast.

He now lives at Mooloolaba in a comfortable home with his wife Ivana, who he met in Barcelona in 1993, and two teenage children, just a two minute walk to the beach and, of course, the surf.


At first glance, his lifestyle would appear to be very laid-back, but this very fit 51-year-old guru of future thinking possesses a CV that is exhausting just to read, let alone enact.

Although Sohail maintains a massive workload, he seems to carry it effortlessly on his shoulders. There's hardly a line on his face from contemplating future solutions at a time when the planet is in so much chaos and argument.



Sohail Inayatullah is a man of vision, peace and good sense

Archives by month

Select Month 

Popular Searches

A Woodford Greenhouse
Special Book review
Caloundra carbon trading

climate

change coal

Copenhagen development
Eco Adventures ecotourism
electric cars Environment
groups fluoride global
warming historical writings
illustrations interview Issue

8 Issue 9 Issue

10 Issue 11 Issue

12 Issue 13 Issue

14 mary river over
population peak oil
permaculture population
population growth public
transport renewable
energy solar solar power

solar thermal sustainability
sustainable design
sustainable housing

Traveston dam up

Close Interviews Vance and
Nettie Palmer wildlife wildlife
reserve Wildlife Volunteers
World Environment Day

While meeting many groups from big business, politics and local communities who are either searching for real future answers or going through the motions of the exercise, he maintains an inner peace with himself, although he does admit that some unseeing people can mildly rankle him on a bad day. But in the big picture he can look past that.

In his long list of commitments, Sohail has one which is important to him and that is to attend this year's Woodford Folk Festival. It's a place where he sees some of his ideals in practice, where the stiff wall of formal protocol and business bullshit has been swept away with enlightenment, social acceptance, plain good fun, hugs and smiles – not to mention some great entertainment and the delicious dandelion drink that Sohail searches out.

Indeed, Woodford's famous festival transports Professor Sohail Inayatullah back to his childhood and his place of birth.

"It has a Pakistani feel about it – village environment, people sharing, exchanging goods and ideas, a special colourful vibrancy," he said while stirring the tasty smoothies he was making for us.

"Woodford is a great example in showing that play is important in creating a better society.

"In my formal work I try to bring in play. But in play there needs to be a structure. The foresight workshops people love the most involve scenarios and drama and where we find a way to play with ideas, to play in the space and see what emerges."

At the festival, he will also be putting on his thinker's hat, to get the Greenhouse house audience to consider the topic 'Spirituality – The Quadruple Bottom Line'. He will also take part in a forum alongside intellectual and environmental heavyweights Clive Hamilton, Professor Ian Lowe and Dr Patricia Kelly. Their discussion, which invites questions from the audience, addresses the topic 'Can Humankind Make the Change?'

His topic on adding a fourth condition of spirituality to a business's triple bottom line of financial, social and environmental responsibility to make it economically sustainable should bring lively response.

"We have learned from the Green movement that you can't talk about economic progress without Gaia as the base," he said.

"At nearly every workshop come the questions 'Why am I on this planet? What is my purpose?' It all leads to a spiritual question – but I don't see it as a religious issue.

"A spiritual issue is one of the social technologies which allow us, firstly, to be more inclusive; secondly; to allow us to create a better world in terms of justice; and thirdly, to lead us into more inner bliss that comes from yoga, prayer, tai chi, meditation etcetera."

Sohail, says his role as a futurist is not as a planner or consultant dealing in detail, but as one with a sense of trends and with methods and tools that can help people make different and wiser decisions – to explore different pathways to different futures.

"At a time of global transition it's hard for many people because there isn't certainty and they feel insecure. It's hard for people to make that jump," he said.

"Our role, and the work at Woodford, is how to create the imagination first that makes a different world possible. Then it's into conceptual theories and all the practical examples – real live things we can hang our hats on."

In his work of finding alternate pathways to the future for any organisation, Sohail persuades people to look closely at their inner selves. In terms of ego there may be multiple sub-personalities in all of us, he says.

"There might be an 18-year-old self, a wise self, a hurt self and others all driving us," he said.

"The first thing I do is get people to have a dialogue with their sub-personalities. Once I can find out what their inner story is and which of their inner selves is active we try to find ways to speak to the self that's more future-oriented, that's more wise and can think through the changes that are happening.

"A leader could be operating, not from their wise self but from an immature self .

"With those in leadership positions, it takes the successful pusher/achiever self to get there, but in doing so it disowns other selves such as the emotional self, the child self, the creative self, the spiritual self. This disownment process and the lack of integration within the mind can lead to bad effects

"If you look at the past 500 years the collective world ego nature has been disowned. Now it's fighting back as global warming."

So Sohail always asks leaders what they have disowned.

"Hopefully, what they've disowned will come back in a positive way and help them change, but if they've totally disowned it, it could come back in pathological, evil way and strike them on the head," he said.

To bring about positive change, Sohail says it requires firstly a conversation of selves then a conversation of outer scenarios.

"With any group, it's how to integrate different sub-personalities and use that integration to create a different future. If there's not that inner questioning of the future, the questioning of oneself, it's the same old default future, the unquestioned future," he said..

"The core of my work is questioning the future so we can change the present."

Sohail says that in his foresight workshops he gets people to first consider their inner story, the shared history from their particular community and try to create a map for its future and how it might look, what are the trends and drivers.

The next part is to consider how that map might be disturbed by a range of inputs, such as climate change or even artificial intelligence. Out of this, more robust maps are created and a rescripting for the desired future.

"Once we've done that we do scenarios for alternate futures and then do a closed-eye visualisation of what they want the world to look like. It's very personal, emotive, whole brain stuff," he said.

"Once we can define the vision, the last question I ask is 'what happened to get there?'

"I don't do strategic planning, such as saying it's now 2010 and what three things need to happen to get to your 2020. It's more like you are in 2020 in your preferred future, what does it feel like, what does it look like? Now tell me the three things it took to get here.

Sohail said he was not looking at a masterplan approach, but back casting to find ways to achieve a vision.

Into his own future, he hopes to continue linking the global and personal.

"My vision is to continue to ?play a role in creating a different planetary future," he said.

This man says he tries to live up to his first name which means 'from the star' and his second name which means 'one who gets the benefits of God'; implied expectations but which he readily and generously passes as gifts to the future.

Professor Sohail Inayatullah has been and continues to be in great demand worldwide. As well as holding a number of academic positions such as adjunct professor at the University of the Sunshine Coast, professor at Tamkang University in Taiwan, and visiting academic at QUT.

He has authored/edited twenty nine books, journal special issues and cdroms. He has held countless 'foresight workshops' with major business, political and community groups around the globe.



Advertisement



Powered by [Max Banner Ads](#)

Related articles:

1. [The woman behind the greenhouse](#)

Tagged as: [A Woodford Greenhouse Special](#), [climate change](#), [interview](#), [Issue 14](#)

Leave a Response

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

Please note: comment moderation is enabled and may delay your comment. There is no need to resubmit your comment.

Submit Comment

From around the globe

- What if they didn't give a news conference and everybody came? December 19, 2009
- Copenhagen climate conference's giant globe: A sign of things to come? December 19, 2009
- Carbon trading and a new climate deal December 19, 2009
- Parallel worlds at U.N. climate talks December 19, 2009
- Packing while Copenhagen burns December 19, 2009

Around the country

- Australia ranks poorly on climate action index December 18, 2009
- Potential 3 degree temperature rise a reality December 18, 2009
- Copenhagen climate talks on brink of collapse December 15, 2009
- IUCN says climate change threatens koalas December 15, 2009
- More climate assistance needed, say developing nations December 12, 2009

ABC News

- Europe returns rare white rhinos December 20, 2009
- 23 arrested after coal train protest December 20, 2009
- Abbott still wants 'big ETS debate' with Rudd December 20, 2009
- Protesters dragged off coal train tracks December 20, 2009
- Wong hits back at climate deal's critics December 20, 2009