

The Shambhala Worker



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An open letter to Sustainable Food and Farming majors.....
(adapted with permission from Joanna Macy).

Many students who choose to study Sustainable Food and Farming have discovered their major through a circuitous route in which they tried other paths and found they just didn't belong. For you, I have a gift. This is a story about people who don't "fit" into the mainstream institutions, the citadels of learning, you know.... higher education.

There is a prophecy that emerged from Tibetan Buddhism about 12 hundred years ago. The signs it predicted are recognizable today... in our time. There are several interpretations of this prophecy. Some portray the coming of the kingdom of Shambhala as an internal event, a metaphor for one's inner spiritual journey. Others present it as a transformation of the human social system that will occur at the just right time.

The Shambhala Prophecy says... there will come a time when all life on Earth is in danger. In this era, great barbarian forces will have arisen which have unfathomable destructive power. New and unforeseen technologies will appear during this time, with the potential to lay waste to the world. In this era, when the future of sentient life seems to hang by the frailest of threads, the kingdom of Shambhala will appear.

The kingdom of Shambhala is not a geopolitical place, but a place that exists in the hearts and minds of the Shambhala worker. These workers wear no special uniform, nor do they have titles or ranks. They have no particular workplace, as their work is everywhere. In fact, they look just like the barbarians on the outside, but they hold the kingdom of Shambhala on the inside.

Now the time comes when great courage – intellectual, moral and spiritual – is required of the Shambhala workers. The time comes when they must go into the very heart of the barbarian power, into the tall buildings, offices, factories and citadels of learning where the weapons of destruction are made – to dismantle them.

The Shambhala workers have the courage to do this because they know that these weapons are "mind-made". That is, they are created by the human mind, and they can be unmade by the human mind. The barbarians lie that these weapons are the inevitable result of progress must be exposed by the Shambhala workers. Shambhala workers know the dangers that threaten life on Earth are not visited upon us by any extraterrestrial powers, satanic deities, or preordained fate. They arise from our own decisions, our own lifestyles, and our own relationships. They arise from within us all.

The Shambhala workers go into the corridors of power (government, industry, the marketplace, higher education etc.) armed with the only tools that the barbarians don't understand, and for which there is no defense. The tools of the Shambhala workers are **compassion for all**, and **knowledge of the connectedness of all things**. Both are necessary. They have to have compassion to do this work, because this is the source of their the power, the passion to act. It is said that when you open your own heart to the pain of the world you can move, you can act. And when your work results in your own suffering..... you should know that a broken heart lets the world come flooding in.

But that tool by itself is not enough. Compassion alone can burn you out, so you need the other tool – you need insight into the radical interdependence of all things. With that wisdom you know that the work is not a battle between good guy and bad guys, because the line between good and bad runs through the landscape of every human heart. With insight into our profound interrelatedness, you know that actions undertaken with pure intent have repercussions throughout the web of life, beyond what you can measure or discern. By itself, that knowledge may be too conceptual to sustain you and keep you moving, so you need the energy that comes of compassion as well.

Within each Shambhala worker these two tools, compassion and insight, can sustain you as agents of wholesome change. They are gifts for you to claim and share now in healing our world.

You Sustainable Food and Farming majors have chosen the kingdom of Shambhala by coming to this institution of power and carving your own path. My wish for you is that you may continue to hold the kingdom of Shambhala in your hearts as you face all of the institutions of power you may meet in the future.

I want to thank those students I have worked with for the privilege of knowing you while you are here at UMass. And for those of you who feel the weight of the world, I'd offer you a few words from the late Arthur Ashe, African-American tennis player and social activist.

When asked how does he get through the day with everything that seems so wrong in the world, Ashe replied suggested that we:

- Start where you're at.
- Use what you've got.
- Do what you can.

That is really all we can do.....

The story above was adopted and adapted with permission from author Joanna Macy (see; <http://www.joannamacy.net/>). She writes about the Shambhala Warrior. I decided to change it to the Shambhala worker. I don't think the Buddha would mind.

Peace...

John M. Gerber