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Compassion Issue

The Shambhala Warrior Prophecy

From Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* (New World Library, February 22, 2012), pp 101-102.

This is the Shambhala Warrior Prophecy, 12 centuries old, from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The term "Shambhala warrior" is a metaphor for the Buddhist figure of the bodhisattva, one who deeply understands the doctrine of the radical interdependence of all things.

When taken seriously, this leads to the recognition that if one person has the capacity to be a bodhisattva, then all others do too.

This version of the prophecy was given to Joanna by her teacher, Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche in northwest India. It could be about any of us.

There comes a time when all life on Earth is in danger. At that time great powers have arisen, barbarian powers. And although they waste their wealth in preparations to annihilate one another, they have much in common. Among the things they have in common are weapons of unfathomable destructive power and technologies that lay waste to the world. It is just at this point in our history, when the future of all beings seems to hang by the frailest of threads, that the kingdom of Shambhala emerges.

You can't go there, because it is not a place. It exists in the hearts and minds of the Shambhala warriors. You can't tell whether someone is a Shambhala warrior just by looking at her or him, because these warriors wear no uniforms or insignia. They have no banners to identify whose side they're on, no barricades on which to climb to threaten the enemy or behind which to rest and regroup. They don't even have any home turf. The Shambhala warriors have only the terrain of the barbarian powers to move across and act on.

Now the time is coming when great courage is required of the Shambhala warriors – moral and physical courage. That is because they are going right into the heart of the barbarian powers to dismantle their weapons. They are going into the pits and citadels where the weapons are made and deployed, they are going into the corridors of power where the decisions are made. In this way they work to dismantle the weapons in every sense of the word.

The Shambhala warriors know these weapons can be dismantled because they are manomaya, which means "mind-made." They are made by the human mind and thus can be unmade by the human mind. The dangers facing us are not brought on us by some satanic deity or some evil extraterrestrial force, or by some unchangeable preordained fate. Rather, these dangers arise out of our relationships and habits, out of our priorities.

"So," said Choegyal, "now is the time for the Shambhala warriors to go into training." "How do they train?" Joanna asked. "They train in the use of two implements," he said. Actually, he used the term weapons. "What are they?" Joanna asked, and he held up his hands the way the dancers hold up the ritual objects in the great lama dances of his people. "One," he said, "is compassion. The other is insight into the radical interdependence of all phenomena."

You need both. You need compassion because it provides the fuel to move you out to where you need to be and to do what you need to do. It means not being afraid of the suffering of your world, and when you're not afraid of the world's pain, then nothing can stop you.

But by itself that implement is very hot; it can burn you out. So you need the other tool, the insight into the radical interconnectivity of all that is. When you have that, then you know that this is not a battle between the good guys and the bad guys. You know that the line between good and evil runs through the landscape of every human heart. And you know that we are so interwoven in the web of life that even our smallest acts have repercussions that ripple through the whole web, beyond our capacity to see. But that is kind of cool, even a little abstract. So you also need the heat of the compassion.