

Spiritual Warrior 2.0

In Tibetan folklore there is a legendary kingdom called Shambala. Whether it is purely mythical or once existed is unknown. The legend is of a utopian civilization with a model society of wise and compassionate kings, courageous warriors, and kind and peaceful citizens. Many consider it the ground of wakefulness and sanity that is potential in every heart and mind. We may now use this image to envision the possibility of personal and societal enlightenment without religious undertones.

The Shambala traditions are based on the premise of basic goodness and wisdom that can be very helpful for us and the world. It is of course not unique, as there have been many traditions of warriorship throughout history, such as King Arthur and his knights of the round table. The Tibetan word for warrior is *pawo*, which literally has the same meaning as the native American warriors, or *braves*. These warriors do not seek wars of conflict however, as aggression is one of our root problems.

For my generation, this kingdom was popularized by the song Shambala written by Daniel Moore that made it to #3 on the pop charts in 1973 sung by Three Dog Night. The lyrics are worth mentioning here and the song worth hearing.

Wash away my troubles, wash away my pain, With the rain in Shambala
Wash away my sorrow, wash away my shame, With the rain in Shambala

Everyone is helpful, everyone is kind, On the road to Shambala
Everyone is lucky, everyone is so kind, On the road to Shambala

How does your light shine, in the halls of Shambala?

I can tell my sister by the flowers in her eyes, On the road to Shambala
I can tell my brother by the flowers in his eyes, On the road to Shambala

How does your light shine, in the halls of Shambala?

This legend is currently honored in this Wikipedia (as of 10/14): *"Tibetans imported this order to help change their society to one based on education, social welfare, peaceful progress, with a self renouncing monastic class of rulers. The monastic community were supported and organized like a military; however, they were set on a self-discovery mission for reconnaissance to perfect and develop methods in eliminating ego suffering.*

The society flourished to produce one of the best assemblies of peaceful enlightened self-knowledge known to human kind. When modern Chinese communist military economic industrial forces swept in to dismantle and uproot it based on monarchic upheaval, this caused a spread of the seeds of this spiritual warrior way throughout the rest of world, which are now taking root in new democratic forms. The spiritual warrior archetype helps to constructively answer questions about aggression and competition with a healthy direction. Unlike the soldier character, the spiritual warrior is in touch with the joy, the sadness, the expansiveness in their heart; able to share and give it to others.

The warrior knows about death and seizes the day. They have learned to let go with forgiveness and avoid chasing others in revenge. The warrior commits to growing the heart and soul in becoming a creative being. The warrior serves in love of strangers and gives generously while giving to themselves. The spiritual warrior seeks to change others with rational and compassionate decision-making in service of a higher goal".

The first principle and key to being a Shambala warrior, is that in the face of the world's great problems we can be heroic and still kind and gentle. The first fear we must overcome is of ourselves, of being selfish in the face of the world's challenges by hiding safely in our own small nest or cocoon. We must summon the courage to look beyond our own family, home, job, etc, and try to be of help to the world. We don't do this by abandoning ourselves, our family, or smaller world, on the contrary, this is exactly where we begin.

In our efforts to be of true service, we must be aware that it only creates more problems if we try to convert others to our point of view and impose our own ideas, opinions, and causes. Many people have ideas of what is needed, some say capitalism, others say socialism, some say more government, others say less. We start by looking within ourselves past our confusion and doubt, past our emotional swings, to where we connect with others for greater good and higher purpose. Until we find that place of basic goodness, all of our efforts may be in vain.

Where do we look for happiness? In the good feelings we get from new cars, weddings, or elegant meals? Yes, but *basic goodness* lies in simple pleasures that don't depend on anything special we do or have. Just taking a good shower or bath, lying down in bed after a long day, hearing the laughter of children, seeing a beautiful sunrise or sunset, eating a juicy peach, or having a long talk with a good friend can be very satisfying. These happen a lot more often than we realize because we are too busy running away from anything unpleasant and running after fancy pleasures and entertainment. In fact they are often missed because they are so commonplace.

It is worthwhile to acknowledge these moments and take advantage of them. Life has many ordinary pleasures, but none the less good. Each of us has this basic goodness within us as well and express it when we act with loving kindness, gentleness, and understanding. Our own experience is also basically good when we see or hear something beautiful, taste something delicious, or feel the peace of taking good care of ourselves. These moments not only can cheer us up, but help to overcome our suffering.

These things are thoughts of course, but much more profound if we take the time to feel them fully and deeply as a real experience in our bodies as well, on the gut level, heart and soul. We tend to have a habit of running through life, often ignoring our feelings, perhaps even more so for men. But these are what real life is made of, and so we are wise to take the time to enjoy them.

If we look deeply into basic goodness, we find it to be primordial and fundamental to our existence. The spiritual warrior's task is tuning in to, and waking up to that power and presence. Once we have, we may use it to benefit ourselves and others. We may enjoy these experiences in the moment, but must be careful not to try and concretize, capture and possess them. A friend said that he wanted to work hard to earn the money to buy a house so he could sit on the porch and drink a beer to be happy. It seemed he could save a lot of time and trouble and just be happy now, house or not!

Personally, what keeps me going through the toughest of times is keeping an eye on the big picture. I start with the universe. If it was just all the planets, stars, solar systems, and galaxies, that is absolutely amazing in itself. Do you ever consider what a marvel the universe really is? Yet after many years of that incredible scenario expanding and unfolding, something infinitely more amazing happened; life. Something magnificently diverse, tenacious, abundant, intelligent, and beautiful came to fill the landscape, even changing the whole dynamic of the surface of our planet and most likely many others.

Imagine the great flocks of birds in the skies, schools of fish in rivers, buffalos and wildebeests across the plains, wolves playing in the forests, whales breaching in the ocean, and so on. The story of life

through-out the ages is certainly amazing, emotional, and dramatic. The way the sun rises and sets each day and the seasons change to make life possible in the first place is no less a miracle.

Consider now, the also wonderful and beautiful story that is humanity. We have developed the sciences of astronomy, geology, oceanography, psychology, biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, reasoning, and philosophy as well as the fine arts, liberal arts, visual arts, decorative arts, applied arts, design crafts, performing arts, to an incredible degree. The play of human events has been just as amazing, emotional, and dramatic. Consider how so many weddings, births, elections, championships, celebrations, and other events have affected us deeply.

Unfortunately it has also been a story of great misery, suffering, and pain in wars, famines, and other tragedies. But let's set that aside for now, and tap into the helping, healing, and beneficent side of the story. Think on that for a few minutes, the great intelligence of the sciences, and beauty of the arts we created and elevated to a profound degree. That should stir your soul.

If not, there is one more superb example of the excellence of life; *you*. Think for a moment all of the wonderful, relationships, experiences, learning, trips, meals, books, movies, games, music, possessions, pets, homes, friends, and love you have had or seen. Then there are the simple things like doing chores, walking in the wilderness or neighborhood, and conversations. Eighty two years of life are thirty thousand days to enjoy, many of them etched into eternity by their profound experiences.

Again, any of these experiences can cause problems if we try to capture and keep them somehow. We are willing to spend great amounts of time or money to get them, even die for them. Serious business indeed, too serious! Here the spiritual warrior keeps a sense of lightness and humor, willing to laugh at the ways of the world, and him or herself. Laughter is still one of the best medicines, as many have been healed on a steady diet of play, humor, and fun. In times of trouble, misery love company, but better yet, misery loves comedy!

"Ordinary life, ordinary mind" reminds me of the plain, ordinary, mundane pleasures of life that are actually very abundant and pervasive. Take a knife, fork, or spoon and consider what a wonder they really are. Refined over hundreds, perhaps thousands of years now manifest in stainless steel that will outlast us if cared for, even if used daily. Going for a walk is one of my greatest pleasures no matter how simple or small. Just now a piece of applewood smoked bacon came my way and made me close my eyes and take a moment to really savor and enjoy it.

Living a natural and ordinary life is so amazing and wonderful, it is easy to consider it super-natural and extra-ordinary. When I see a plant growing or clouds moving in fast motion, a bird or insect flying in slow motion, or people swing or break dancing I can't help but be in awe of the incredible blessings of life. The basic goodness of life is always shining brightly if we take the time to look and really see it.

The way we conduct our lives can have great significance as well. For instance, how we walk, talk, and relate with others says a lot about how much compassion, care, and dignity we express as our own basic goodness. I have heard stories of monks taking years to learn how to properly open and close a door, sweep, or wash dishes mindfully. The point is, we can enjoy basic goodness in many things around us, and what lies within us as what we say and do. Respect for our world starts very close with the thoughts and feelings we entertain most. Are they really life affirming, or a mixture of prejudices and outdated beliefs we have been carrying around for years or decades?

How we treat our bodies internally is the next concern; do we consistently eat well, or get the rest and exercise we know our bodies need? Then, externally how do we dress ourselves; with clean, appropriate properly fitting clothes or do we tend toward the overly casual or even sloppy? How about our personal space in our rooms or house, in the yard, at our desk, in our workspace, or in our cars? Are any or all of these always or often a mess?

If there is a lack of respect for ourselves and our personal space, we send that message to others we influence whether family, friends, or co-workers. This is particularly important for those we are responsible for such as our children, workers, students, and others. We are speaking our character, and our personality all the time, whether we realize it or not, and so should take care to send a message of respect and dignity.

I have taken this message to heart, taking the time to clean up and organize my spaces on a regular basis. I allow others to have their space as they prefer, but try to be a good example and offer to help them tidy up when the time is right. This extends to my workplace and neighborhood as well. I don't mind picking up trash as I go for walks, particularly hiking in the canyons, as it just feels good. On occasion I am inspired to clean up messes left in my neighborhood by others as well.

My wife and I enjoy drawing with chalk, but don't seem to get to it often enough, so as an extension of our artistic expression of basic goodness we have taken to "guerilla chalking" when out walking the dogs at night. We have started with slogans of "All you need is LOVE is all you need, LIFE IS GOOD, Bark Less - WAG MORE, and others. It makes us smile to see them on subsequent walks, I expect others are enjoying them as well.

Some say that the hugely successful recovery program that is Alcoholics Anonymous started with a man working with Carl Gustav Jung. It later trickled down to Bill W. and Doctor Bob, mainly as no one can really understand a drunk but another drunk. For me, the most significant aspect of Jung's input was that after hitting bottom again the man returned to Jung for help and was told it was hopeless, UNLESS he had a religious experience or "conversion".

Before you shut off your mind to this loaded word filled with centuries of baggage that is religion, consider that one definition of religion is "re" is again, as in "return", and "ligion" is from ligare, which means to bind or connect, so religion can mean "to bind back". Bind back to what? To our essence, to our source, to the intelligence, power, and presence that we might call God, Higher Power, or as George Lucas calls it in Star Wars "The Force".

It is very popular today to identify as "spiritual but not religious" because of all that baggage, but if I can think of religion as plugging me back into all intelligence, power, and presence of the universe, I now consider myself deeply religious, but without all the baggage. Just words, just semantics? Perhaps, yet perhaps Jung was right when he said that *every* problem we have, is at its essence a spiritual problem.

Why is this one decision so important? Because it is this split, this turning away, this tearing away from source that tears us away from not only God, but others, all life and creation, and our own authentic self. All is lost, and we are left alone with a false sense of self apart from all life and others. We now struggle to build up our little kingdom of the "right" education, career, spouse, children, car, clothes, house, vacations, and so on. It is a heavy load "out there" all by ourselves, and so also very exhausting. This often leads to a myriad of self soothing behaviors, possessions, relationships, and addictions.

What happens when it all becomes too much and we hit bottoms in despair spent and bewildered? Good news my friends, for when the walls of our little kingdom come down we find the great kingdom of all life was just outside. We find the walls we built to protect our precious treasures were just keeping greater grace and blessing out. When we acknowledge that our lives had become unmanageable, and come to believe in a power greater than ourselves, then turn our will and lives over to the care of God as we understand God, everything changes. We have once again connected with the bigger picture in service of the greater good.

The fear, the lie, the threat we had been living gives way to real life with others, in service of others. On the one hand, we can't give up on anyone or anything, there is always hope, always work that can be done to make improvements. On the other hand, we need to give up our old ways of thinking, the short sighted, selfish ways of our own interests and those of our families and affiliations over those of the family of all life we are all a part of.

It is up to each one of us to save the world because to change everything takes *everyone*. And to create this new world takes an enlightened society, but an enlightened society is built of enlightened individuals, of brave persons, of spiritual warriors. This is what we seek here, not to march through the streets with signs and banners blaming others, but to look deeply into ourselves and see the causes of the world's problems we carry within and work from there, together. It is a personal journey. All of our theory's and speculation won't help until we each find the true meaning of an enlightened society and realize it in how we live our individual lives.

Practicing the Power of Now is an amazingly wise yet small book I highly recommend. In it Eckhart Tolle calls this place "Being," "an eternal, ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life subject to birth and death. It is not only beyond but also deep within, your innermost invisible and indestructible essence, your true nature. Only known when your mind is still, when fully present in the Now. A vast realm of intelligence beyond thought. Beauty, love, creativity, joy, inner peace - arise from beyond the mind".

Spirit could also be seen as energy, also the essence of all that is, appearing physical, but actually pure energy, formless, stainless, and perfect. I like to think of this when people or things get really ugly and awful. Even the filthiest things in existence, even poisons are in essence pure energy. Another nice image is how all of the four commonly known elements; earth, air, fire, and water, accept and purify all things. Another element is space or consciousness. Here we may take anything into our own personal space and consciousness for acceptance and purification.

I like to think there is a connection between the spiritual and physical evident when we consider the spirit of things like trees, wolves, and wind. There is a certain personality and character to things like these that goes deep into our psyche and soul. Perhaps it is the soul of these entities, their collective consciousness I can't help but feel has some undeniable power and presence. For me, there is something very beautifully sublime and peaceful in the idea that things have an energetic signature and personality of their own.

The problems and chaos in the world can be traced down to a lack of caring and concern for ourselves. It is an internal problem, made manifest in the world. We often don't have the loving kindness, gentleness, caring and concern for ourselves that is needed in the world, so of course we can't express what we don't have. Instead we feel confused, upset, and bewildered and spread that. Living in America and in particular Los Angeles, I feel it as an intensity, a pressure and anxiety often just below the surface ready to explode with the slightest provocation. Obviously this is common as we see people who have snapped and acted out that energy and aggression on the news every day.

It is all too easy to see life as a constant struggle and battle to survive, but this saps the joy of life and leaves us with a grim determination that slowly drags us down. Yes, we should take life and its challenges seriously, but a light touch is needed as well to give life a more positive purpose and meaning. We must each take personal responsibility for uplifting our lives, and help others do the same. When we get past punishing and condemning ourselves to relax and appreciate our bodies and minds we again contact the basic goodness necessary to feel good about ourselves and the world.

This is why it is so important to exercise insight and good self care. We mustn't exaggerate our defects or our strengths, rather see them for what they are and work on them as needed. Each one of us is a microcosm of our world, in fact of all creation, so are wise to start where we are and make needed changes there as we reach out to affect and improve our personal world however large or small. This working basis allows us to cheer up and uplift ourselves first, then our actions and others.

For example, if we tend to anger or jealousy, we need to spend time in quiet reflection with those energies to discover their seeds and roots, and bring them into the light of awareness for understanding and the resulting transformation. Again, condemnation is not helpful, for these and other "negative" tendencies are also coming from our essential self and provide energy to work with real or perceived problems and injustices. Looking into strengths such as compassion or perseverance also can find their root causes so we may tap into them for even greater power and usefulness.

This precious human life we have been given is a great wonder, why not appreciate it and make the best use of it? How can we realize this marvel, this miracle as a living, breathing experience in our daily lives? Through prayer and meditation. These are ancient practices, yet just as vital and practical as ever. I'd like to give you my personal take and experience with these two, starting with prayer.

My daily experience of prayer is through journaling as I speak with my Higher power as my dearest and closest friend on paper. It surely is a most intimate relationship as my creator knows my every thought and feeling, triumph and mistake, story and cell. It usually begins with good morning, afternoon, or evening Lord, as I tell everything that is going on with me inside and out. It reminds me of the good things and takes burdens off my shoulders to leave them on the pages.

Abraham Lincoln said "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." This is my experience as well, as there are times I must express full submission to the moment and my maker, usually attended by an abundance of tears. I find this very comforting and enlightening, as although peace and answers may not come right away, they do come.

What is spirit? A simple explanation is the nonphysical part of us, the seat of the soul. This is why it is advised to use prayer and meditation to access spirit, as the noise and activity of the world tend to deafen and blind us to it. It is a wonderful "place" to go, serving no obvious purpose, yet giving us peace, clarity, and freedom that are of great value. Some spend weeks, months, even years in retreat enjoying silent meditation, yet just five minutes a day is considered a good start and very helpful.

This new skill takes some practice, so practicing meditation is a good place to begin. I imagine most folks have heard of meditation and it's many benefits, perhaps it is time for you to give it a try if you haven't already. There are many schools and teachers of meditation both inside of religions and out. If you wish to avoid the baggage of religion I suggest Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, or MBSR, as it has taken meditation and put it into the hands of educators, doctors, and corporations in many very effective ways.

Is it just an escape, just "blissing out"? It can be if misused, but it can also serve as an extremely valuable tool to step aside from the cares of the world for a time in "calm abiding" meditation, or help us get to the source of our suffering through "insight" meditation. Either way it gives us great release from the bonds of the often incessant chatter and judgment of our minds and the pains, desires, and other issues of the body.

My years of meditation have brought a few revelations I don't often see that can be very helpful. First, calm abiding is where we practice total acceptance and surrender to the moment and what is. Here we don't focus on feelings and thoughts, rather we let them go as best as we are able again, and again, and again. The suggestion is to just label thoughts as "thinking", and let them go. How is it possible to stop thinking? This is one of the big keys, and in a word; perceptions. Perceptions come before thinking when we simply become aware of something on a preverbal, sensory level.

For example; the most common focus is on the breath, but other sensations such as sounds, or a forward gaze work just as well. We aren't thinking about these, just feeling the breath going in and out, or feeling the "being" of the sounds or sights. This shift from thinking to perception works so well I use it to stop my racing mind for naps or sleep. This can happen in meditation also, so we are advised to sit up straight to find the place in between thinking and sleeping that has contact with the infinite.

We fall out of this place easily, taking head trips to work, home, school, and near and far lands. We may find ourselves arguing with others or ourselves mentally, or thinking of foods and drinks we desire, or what we will do or say next. The point is to smile at it all, not take it seriously and beat ourselves up for "bad" thoughts or congratulate ourselves for "good" ones, instead just let them go.

Knowing that calm abiding meditation is about pure peace beyond concepts allows the freedom to just be for awhile without worrying about *anything*. Ideas, opinions, prejudices, and beliefs will be dealt with later with a kind and gentle handling in insight meditation. It is there that we will deal with attachments, aversions, and indifference when the time is right. Now is the time to disconnect with worldly cares and connect with the primordial preverbal intelligence, power, and presence available anywhere, anytime we want to "be still and know, that 'I Am'; God".

Besides keeping us alert, sitting up straight exudes a dignity and confidence like a great mountain or magnificent tree, deeply rooted, strong, sure, and powerful. This posture of dignity and confidence is just what is needed to overcome our hidden and obvious doubts and fears. Sitting this way we are well grounded with a solid base, relaxed and composed torso and limbs, and straight head and shoulders expressing a regal nobility, all traits of a deliberate, distinguished, and respected warrior.

This sitting practice is useful "off the mat" as well as we learn to overcome our embarrassment to walk, work, and live with a dignified and proud posture and presence. How we talk with others, organize our space, drive our cars, etc, can all be reflected in this noble manner. The image here is that of a king or queen, in all their majestic glory, meting out benevolence and justice to their subjects, just as we may with our family, friends, and acquaintances.

My experience with insight meditation is much the same as my prayer routine as I sit and let the thoughts come and go with a light touch making mental or written notes of the more emotionally charged ones. We can simply sit and see what comes up, or choose a subject we feel needs attention and work with that. We still can use the breath or other things to stay focused, or perhaps a word, phrase, or image of that refers to our concern.

Just sitting with problems lets us know we needn't be controlled or overwhelmed by them. I'm not looking for quick and easy answers or resolutions, although they are certainly welcome, but I find if I

sit with the highly energetic thoughts and feelings long enough, peace eventually comes one way or another. I certainly don't always get my way, but come to accept them.

A good way to focus the mind is with very simple slogans. We can follow the breath mentally with the word "in" on the in-breath, and "out" on the out-breath. This is so boring and simple the mind can soon become still. If tired, I will use "rest" on one breath, and "ing" on the other so my mind has a subtle clue of where we are going. Any short simple words will do, play around with this and they will come to you. Life certainly has its ups and downs, but meditation helps us ride them out without as much drama and resistance.

Calm abiding forces us to pay attention to our bodies for a time, then let that go too. We spend way too much time in our heads, often justifying the havoc we wreak upon our bodies. We think we are just too busy or stressed to take the time to eat well, rest well, or exercise properly, so we rush through these often taking very unhealthy liberties as in many other areas of our lives. The first battle for spiritual warriors is taking back our own lives.

Who took over? The voices we heard growing up of parents and siblings, influential voices of relatives, culture, society, the media, religious, political and other figures. These voices became so ingrained we take them on as the voice of truth and reason. We were told not to feel anger, sadness, and other feelings because they were inconvenient for others, or that's what they were told so insist on passing it on as their truth.

A friend told me that because of these fallacies she couldn't express her truth. It was as if there was a knot in her throat that held it back. She knows when this is happening because there is a welling up of energy and pressure in her chest, coupled with a tightness and constriction in her neck and throat. Knowing this, she can watch for problems, and when they occur sit with them, and then act coming from a place of wisdom, compassion, and strength. Those feeling similar constraints can do likewise.

This constriction is "poor circulation" so leads addictions and other unhealthy behaviors in the short term, and eventually many health problems in the long run. We now have the opportunity and choice to become the observer, to step aside and see if these voices really serve us and others, then make new choices and create new voices. Synchronizing body and mind is a giant step forward to synchronizing ourselves with others, our institutions, the earth, and all life.

Harmonizing body and mind can be a lot of hard work, particularly in the beginning, but the rewards can be great, even life saving, as many ailments and diseases ensue from ignoring the bodies signals and signs. We are learning to be present not only in the here and now but in our bodies fully, completely, and genuinely. We are learning to be true to ourselves, and for ourselves. Self care takes on a new meaning and value as we inhabit our feelings and flesh intimately, and entirely.

We actually have an obligation, as part of this symphony of life, to do our part to respect and protect it. It is possible to accept this burden from a place of delight. Being open and honest with ourselves regarding *our* thinking, feeling, and bodies, we can carry that to others based on the basic goodness we discover within ourselves. This practice is an excellent way to overcome the warfare in ourselves and in the world.

Sitting on the earth we know we can trust it, it is our mother and our home. We trust the sky above will give us breath and protect us from deadly cosmic rays. We trust the sun will continue to shine to warm us and light our days, and the clouds will come to cool us and rain down life giving rain. Basic goodness acts in just the same way, we can trust it is there for us always unconditionally. The seasons come and go, the sun rises and sets for everyone without fail.

These are expressions of the basic goodness that we are part of, a natural law and order we usually take for granted. These things are so basic we fail to appreciate them. Yet without these, we wouldn't last long. The same applies to us. We each have frustrations and compassion, talents and fears, wisdom and ignorance. We go after what we want and avoid what we don't want. These traits aren't rewards or punishments, just the natural and normal aspects of human life. It all works very well, in fact, our systems of digestion, balance, smell, sight, sound, disease prevention, thinking, and many others work excellent for many decades, usually without major difficulties.

We may praise a creator or creation, but the result is the same, we are all blessed with an abundance of basic goodness. At least for now. Pollution, over population, warfare, climate change and other challenges threaten us on many fronts. No one is excluded. We must all be committed to a sustainable environment and future. Some will have to make bigger changes than others, as many learn to make do with less, and others resist the pull to acquire and achieve more, more, more. Again, as an American, I know we have a long way to go to reign in our rampant consumerism and be much more responsible as world citizens.

Is basic goodness the antidote? Perhaps, if we can slow down and appreciate our natural and amazing bodies and world, and the little things in our daily lives that are common and ordinary, yet actually great blessings, we may yet save ourselves, others, and life as we know it. The first step is to acknowledge and appreciate who we are, all that we can do and be, and already have. I grew up in the space age, but this is the information age, and the information coming in is alarming. We must wake up, and fast if we are to avert the coming crisis's. Much evidence indicates the coming war for resources has already been going on in the middle east and elsewhere for years.

The battle we most need to fight is within, to really get to know ourselves intimately and completely without deception or reserve. This is no small task. The blinders were put on years, if not decades ago, and the habits have become deeply entrenched. It isn't fast, easy, or painless, but a very necessary step if we are to change our ways of living before we are buried under the immense weight of our self importance and arrogance. We simply can't continue to fill the air with carbon dioxide and filth, flood the lakes, rivers, and oceans with plastic and pesticides, and dirty the lands with all manner of toxins and trash due to our rampant consumerism.

Are we up to the task? Some will accept the challenge, many will not, yet we mustn't lose heart, we can't give up, life as we know it is at stake. Even if we aren't able to make big changes in our outer lives, we can make big changes on the inside heart and mind, and work from there. We start by listening deeply, again to our hearts and minds in sitting on or off the mat (for me the couch). Here what we discover is our own basic goodness, and the solid foundation to build a saner, healthier life and world. Listening this way we develop a genuine sympathy for ourselves and others that changes everything.

Is there hope? Will the winds of change blow the house of cards that is modern civilization completely flat? All I can say is I hope not! Humanity may yet survive the coming calamities, if not in whole then in part with outposts of people that have learned a self sustaining way of life. Hope is a strange thing, defined as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. It can be unrealistic and counterproductive if we live on hope of being rescued and make no effort of our own. But hope is also defined as a feeling of trust, of faith. For us, as spiritual warriors, it is faith in basic goodness, in the big picture of life as a whole through-out time and space here on earth and through-out the cosmos.

How big is this challenge? It may be no less than the collapse of life on earth as we know it as dwindling resources, global pollution, and climate change if not stopped or reversed, and very soon, promise to significantly cripple or topple many, if not all human societies in the near future. With the

stress of these developments, mankind is likely to take the warring to unprecedented levels, endangering all life with the real threat of nuclear holocaust.

How can we maintain composure and a positive working attitude as our parents, children, and other family and friends suffer greatly and die as this conflagration ensues? And if we are fortunate enough to have our family and friends safe and prospering, how might we muster the inspiration and energy to work for social and environmental justice for our brothers and sisters across borders and world-wide?

One of my favorite songs states; "I will praise you in this storm, and I will lift my hands, for you are who you are, not matter where I am, And every tear I cry, you hold in your hand, and though my heart is torn, I will praise you in this storm" (Casting Crowns). How can we "praise God" through-out this possibly and likely dreadful scenario? Many masters and sage have contributed much to help us keep faith in hard times, but perhaps my own story would serve here.

In my late teens I lost faith in God, so would say I believe in good rather than God. I can't recall what prompted this protest to my casual Christian upbringing, but I remember it well. A decade or so later I read the book *Original Blessing* by Matthew Fox and learned that the angry, jealous, punishing, or indifferent God could be seen as man-made aberration, while a loving, caring, life giving God was present and alive in nature for all ancient peoples. As I have always been a nature lover, this was a real homecoming for me.

Thus praising God or praising (basic) goodness we can shift our perception to one of acceptance and gratitude, so that we can have the presence of mind to face our failure to properly care for life on earth, work to improve and correct our thinking and actions, and turn the tide of the coming world-wide apocalypse. Does this mean we must give over concern for our friends and family in the name of greater good? Yes, but in a balanced way, with the scale leaning towards a globally sustainable future over our personal wants and needs.

I am sorry to have to speak in such strong words and images, but honestly, the future for us appears to be in great peril. The news continues to sound the call for quick action on the climate on a grand scale as evidence mounts that there is no time to lose. I came across a Great Pacific Garbage Patch video, and after watching a few, found to my horror that the oceans are being filled with plastic. Albatross on midway island sometimes die with fifteen pieces in their gut including toothbrushes, lighters, and bottle caps. The island and oceans are littered with old nets, tires, computer monitors, buoys, bottles, bags, on and on and on. An albatross bird is also defined as something that causes deep concern or anxiety, so is a very appropriate word and image for this blight.

Plastic lasts hundreds of years, often intact, eventually breaking down into tiny pieces that ocean creatures can't help but swallow. How much plastic do you think you could eat before getting sick or dying? Besides that the ocean is soaking up about 30% of the carbon dioxide from the atmosphere causing an acidification increase in the water also approximately 30% since we started burning fossil fuels. Sea animals such as crabs, coral, and lobster suffer as their shells weaken from the acid, and eventually their shells will simply melt and they will disappear, breaking the food chain for the oceans and many of us.

I doubt I scared anyone into action in the last two paragraphs, but I for one am fearful in light of what I have seen. I urge you to look into these and other concerns on websites and videos. Being a "car guy" I was wondering how we could make helpful changes in reducing automotive pollution. Researching natural gas vehicles the top website that came up was from a big oil company, stating how natural gas cars are too expensive. The closing statement was that through gasoline and diesel "the nation's energy needs are met at the lowest possible cost to consumers and taxpayers". Plastic

companies can likely make similar claims for our packaging needs, but what really is the cost? Life as we know it? That is the highest cost imaginable, one we surely do not want to pay.

I don't mean to blame big oil or big plastic companies, for If I did I could add many other corporate cultures such as big grains, meats, media, banking, and politics. Blaming won't help, as each and every one must take responsibility with what we do or don't buy and do. We are deciding with our dollars and our actions. Responsibility simply means able to respond (response-ability). How will we respond and when? My hope is the people behind the corporations will see this dilemma for what is and be inspired to make their votes count for all life just as we must.

Growing up as a big fan of muscle cars and auto racing it would be easy to blame myself, especially since I have owned forty five cars and fifty motorcycles to date. But back in the sixties and seventies most of us didn't know anything about carbon buildup and had no idea how bad ocean pollution would become. Now we know, and now we must act.

In 2010 Tom Shadyac, a big Hollywood producer had an accident that made him question the nature of humanity and the worlds ever-growing addiction to materialism. He went on a quest speaking with and filming top scientists, religious leaders, and philosophers asking: *what's wrong with the world? and what can we do about it?*. The bottom line image of human insanity he showed wasn't what you would expect, it was a picture of him with his Rolls Royce and personal jet. He proposed the real problem, which is also the title of the movie was; I Am.

Researching this writing on the internet a commercial kept coming up showing thin, young, beautiful rich people walking the red carpet and eating in expensive restaurants. The final image was of them going from their brand new Cadillac to their private jet. Apparently things haven't changed. The good news, and the reason I am trying to reach you now, is that the answer to the question of who or what is going to save us and the world is also; I Am.

Each one of us lives at the center of their own universe. Starting from the inside we can yet make the changes within ourselves, then in our actions and smaller world, through our family and friends, communities, work places, schools, churches and other institutions, out into the world at large. We all, unknowingly, have been part of the problems, and we all can be part of the solutions.

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