

# **Making It Real: Initiation Instructions: Seattle '99**

**By Starhawk**

*Wednesday, December 1*  
*Day 2 of the WTO Action*

It begins before you leave home in the predawn dark. Remove all jewelry, everything you truly are unwilling to lose. Leave behind your identification, forget your name. Take only what will sustain you or serve you: pockets full of apples, sandwiches, chocolate, fingernail clippers for the plastic handcuffs, a bandanna soaked in vinegar against tear gas.

Make your way through dark streets to the meeting place. Waving the banners that have not yet been confiscated, begin the procession. Beat the drums. They have forbidden you to gather: your challenge is to disobey.

Get as far as you can before the police stop you. Your challenge now is to walk unarmed up to the massed lines of men of known violence, to face the weapons, the clubs, the tear gas with nothing but your body and the power of your spirit.

Sit down. Hold on. Hold on to each other as the violence begins around you, protect each other as best you can. Continue to talk to the police as the clubs whip down around you, as your friends are dragged off, thrown to the ground, beaten, their faces smashed down on concrete.

Keep your focus on the meaning of what you are doing as your hands are cuffed behind you. Your challenge now and for a long time to come will be to remember, at each stage of what happens to you, that you have a choice: acquiesce or resist. Choose your battles mindfully: there will be many of them and you cannot fight them all. Still every instance of resistance slows the system down, prevents its functioning, lessens its power.

Take care of each other. If you have wriggled free of your handcuffs, use the clippers to free your friends. Share all the food and water you have before it is taken away from you. Greet newcomers with song, chant your resistance. "We want our lawyers now/ They're just outside the door/ We want our lawyers now/ Or we will chant some more!" "Si se puede!" Yes, it's possible- it can be done.

If they try to separate one of you, place your body over his. Pile on. Never mind if they pull your hair, if they threaten more violence. Each time you act, you become stronger.

Eventually the time will come to move through the next gate of this initiation. At each one, another layer of your former self is stripped away. Now they take all your outer clothing, your packs, your food, everything from your pockets, your shoelaces. No matter how they intimidate you, do not give your name.

Your challenge is to walk proudly in shackles, wrists and ankles cuffed together, a chain around your waist.

You will wait for a very long time. Always they will tell you that what you want is just at the next place they want you to go to. Do not believe them. Gather your patience: you will need great reserves. Resign yourself to hunger. Sit in a cage with your sisters: continue to tell your stories, sing your songs. Fend off exhaustion. Do what you can to heal the woman with the broken nose and loose teeth who was jumped from behind by a plainclothes cop as she stood outside of the cafe. Greet as your sisters the woman arrested for a fight with her mother, the felon turning herself in on an old charge. Inside a cage, the locked door creates the only division that counts. We are all on the same side.

Inanna descends into the underworld. Now they will strip you of your last layer of individuality. They take your clothes, issue you identical blue pants and shirts, white plastic sandals, the same size underwear for all, the same name: Jane WTO. Your challenge, locked in a small, concrete box, is to laugh, to put on a fashion show. And when they take you away and lock you up in a tiny, airless concrete cell in ones and twos, your challenge is not to despair, not to lose your connection.

Keep breathing. Remember, every molecule of oxygen that makes its way through these concrete walls is a gift of the ancestors. They are with us: close your eyes and you will see them marching in rivers that swell and grow, breaking through concrete, tearing down walls.

Morning brings a small release. You are let out into the day room to reconnect with your sisters. Glutinous oatmeal, dry brown bread, powdered kool aid--the first food you've been offered in twenty four hours and though it is almost inedible you eat it.

You will spend the day locked up with fifty women in another airless, concrete room, waiting to be arraigned. Your challenge now is to ride the

waves of energy that sweep through this airless cell. A whispered chant becomes a dance becomes a circle a cone of power. A meeting becomes a circle becomes a song. A song is interrupted by a threat from the guards and becomes a meeting. We are demanding to see our lawyers in a group. The guard tells us it is impossible, has never been done, can never be done. Our challenge is to not believe him. Si, se puede!

Waves of elation, waves of despair. This is what you have been learning magic for--to ride these currents, to fortify the spirit, to call in our allies now. Hours go by. Tell stories. Sing again. Do not meet so long that you exhaust yourselves: play, dance. Whenever you sink, a piece of news arrives that will buoy you up again. They are marching in London, in Cuba. The Longshoreworkers have shut down the west coast. Protestors have surrounded the jails.

You are a vessel of a larger spirit that rises up again and again. Something new is being born here, something that will not quiet down and go away when the weekend is over. Your challenge is to be a midwife. At the end of the day, locked down until the protest outside is over, dance the spiral dance. Rising, rising, the earth is rising: turning, turning, the tide is turning.

Over the next few days, your challenge will be to endure. To keep talking, to treasure the friendships you will make, the web that is woven here. To treasure the clarity that comes inside a cage: here all the workings of power are perfectly clear. There is no more disguise, no more pretense that this system is working in your interest. And when you get out of jail you will see where the jail is thinly concealed in the shopping mall, the school, the television program. You will know that at every moment you do truly have a choice: to acquiesce, to resist, to create something new.

At night in the underworld, lying in that hot, airless cell, aching with fever, keep breathing. Use your magic, remember your power, call on the elements which exist within your body even if this place is designed to shut them off. Your cellmate massages your feet, wets towels to cool you. The air presses down but the burning within you is kindling a deeper fire. Close your eyes. A lake of burning light is rising, cracking through the concrete. Webs form, grass pushes up through cement. Structures that seemed invincible fall. Si, se puede!

Initiation. Not a culmination, but a beginning.

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