



Darkness Calls Forth a Helpful Light

by Van Waddy

Several years ago, I was in Africa, in Tanzania, on safari. The local chief of one village invited us to his home to meet his wife and child.

The dwelling was a small hut made from cow dung. There were no windows—less access for flies and mosquitoes—and a small flap door. The interior was totally black, no lighting, another way of denying flies easy access. We had to hold hands as we bent our way in, moving along the wall until we realized the line had stopped and we were to sit, in darkness. Silence.

In a few moments, the darkness began to clear and faint images appeared. Shadowy body shapes along the wall, colors, shadowy faces; then, objects in the room. As our vision cleared and we began to see, we noticed the woman and child sitting in the corner. She had been there all along, but we could not see her in the darkness.

The darkness calls forth a helpful light: light present in the dark, not visible at first, then astonishingly present. How can we not see it? How can we miss what is there all along?

Light and dark live side by side, included in the other, one reality. We just can't see it from our biased perspective. We're uncomfortable with ambiguity. We don't want to see the darkness lurking in the light; we don't want our bright times muted by the dark within it. Our either/or thinking categorizes; it's either light or it's dark, good or bad. We miss the wholeness in things.

Sitting in the darkness of that dung hut gave my vision time to clear, to allow in the light that was there all along, initially hidden. I had to sit and wait. I knew I would see what I came to see, but I didn't know when. I didn't know how long it would take. I didn't even know exactly what I would see. I just

knew I would see. And then I did see, exactly what I came for. I've heard it said that hope is remembering in the dark what I know to be true in the light. Hope is remembering that the light is there, that I will see again, feel light again, even though I am now mired in darkness. Like a sacred chord of memory that winds its way back to some forgotten, ancient wisdom within, I re-member, reconnect with resources within and without me.

Just like the shadowy figures that emerged on the walls as I sat in the dark of that African hut, shadowy insights of what resources are available to me for healing begin to appear on the walls of my emotional darkness. Forgotten at first, due to my dark mood, then visibly clear.

I re-member, reassemble those resources that have been there for me all along—the people who love me, my gifts and passions, the healing presence of nature, the things about my life that restore me to wholeness. The life that nurtures me in the light can do this for me in the dark. If I can remain open to these healing powers already available to me, I can find the energy to allow them to carry me back into the light.

Besides the resources that bless my life, these shadowy images illuminate in the dark those things about my life I need to change. The darkness pulls the shade over my energy so I am forced to bring my focus inward and get in touch with what isn't working in my life.

The darkness highlights, singles out what needs to be the focus of my attention, things I need to change, things I cannot see in the glare of everyday living. Perhaps my career is not satisfying, my relationships, my spiritual journey. I can change these once I can identify them.

The light present in our darkness is the same light available to us in the light moments of our life. It is a numinous light, just beyond our conscious mind. We don't stop to notice the subtle shift of light, the color differentiation in the rainbow color, when we are in the light. We miss what Robert Johnson, a Jungian analyst, calls those slender golden threads that guide us and shape our lives.

We realize only afterwards that there seemed to be some larger power or energy at work in our life that opened up new opportunity, new energy, a new fork in the road. The more we can integrate these shadowy images into our conscious living, the more we can cooperate with them and make them work for us.

Discovering the light present in the darkness, discerning the subtle change of light when we are in the light—these are the tools given us by a God who first called light out of darkness so that we, too, can create a life that can heal.

What I know is that my experience in that humble dwelling in Africa stays with me today as a metaphor for how to sit and wait in the dark until the light present in it makes itself available to me. It teaches me how to become more sensitive to the shifting light in both the dark and light of my life. It reminds me to look for the surprise, the emerging other in all things, the not-yet-recognized of what is trying to catch my attention.

Those shadowy images on the wall become, for me, images of my own becoming.

Van Waddy is a licensed psychotherapist in Atlanta.
(See www.vanwaddy.com)