

chapter 2

by Audrey deCoursey

You needn't look long before finding a reference to light or dark in our Christian Scriptures, prayers, and hymns. Taylor has collected quite a few, but you're probably already thinking of some yourself, from Jesus as the Light of the World to the face of the darkness over which the Creator's Spirit blew. (During my online conversation about the book, with Elizabeth Ullery Swenson in [Living Stream CoB worship last week](#), the congregation came up with these and more.)

It seems like an obvious truth that when our Creator separated light and darkness, in that primordial stew of being told of in Genesis, that it was a division of good from evil. Yet our own experiences reveal that the stark dualism of dark and light can obscure our vision of the subtler hues of Truth: the multiple meanings of any symbol, such as light or darkness. Or that these are *symbols* and thus extricable from what they are used to signify, especially good and evil.

In the world around us, we witness examples of evil emerging in light: the flash of an atomic bomb decimating cities. We witness the evil of racial hierarchies founded on an assumption that 'white' (European) skin connoted the goodness of Light - at the expense of those people labelled 'dark.' From our own lived reality in this world, we know that the dichotomy of dark and light is false - and can have dangerous implications.

Our own Christian traditions include references to the goodness of dark as well:

- the space underground where seeds scattered and sown can take root and grow;
- the nighttime when people and the earth get a chance to halt their labors and rest, spending time with God;
- the dark sky where a multiplicity of stars can speak God's promise to Abraham;
- the night when an angel can wrestle Jacob and bestow on him a new identity;
- the time of sleep when God can communicate in dreams to Joseph .

Taylor's book is not the first to gaze into the sacred within darkness, but it is nonetheless a welcome journey.

But I have been especially drawn to Taylor's concept of **lunar spirituality**. On one level, I just love her calling out its opposite: *solar spirituality*, that glib, shallow-seeming religious worldview so many of us have encountered, in which the hard parts of our lives are seen as our own moral failings (and possibly contagious). The depths of our pain are minimized or explained away. The reality of darkness is denied.

- God never gives us more than we can handle.
- God has a plan.

Or, for the more liberal or secular, a different version of the same message:

- You think that's bad? Listen to what I went through, and I made it through.

- You'll grow out of it. Everyone has to face struggle.
- Maybe you should try.../should have tried...

That solar-obsessed theology has no space for shadow. It's a simple theology: follow the sunlight. It feels good, and even warm. But it is incomplete. Our theology, to be full in its Truth, must have space for the half of the day when the sun is not up.

You wouldn't think this would be so hard for a faith tradition grounded in a moment of brutality and despair: Christ's crucifixion. But often, Christians have interpreted the ending of that story - Christ's resurrection - as erasing, justifying, or minimizing the horrors of the murder that preceded it. And all the horrors that have come ever since. No wonder some Christians (and others) don't seem ready to hear about anyone still living through their time in the tomb.

Taylor takes on a bold but worthy goal of finding ways to incorporate those 'dark' times of our lives into our total theology, so that we can embrace both the solar and lunar elements of our spirituality and ourselves.

Finally, I was also drawn to her lunar spirituality just because of the moon itself. I've been noticing the moon more lately, and appreciating its monthly rhythm overlapping the daily and annual rhythms of the sun. Together, they make concentric spheres of time wrapping around us and carrying us through natural, blessed cycles of life.

[I want to correct any wrong impression from this reflection: I do indeed love the sun! At the time of year when days are long, though growing shorter, I am noticing the sun in its course as well. And with gratitude, knowing how much I will miss it in a few months' time.]

This week, the Perseid meteor show arrives, with a rare occasion for exceptional visibility, because this week of maximum meteors syncs up with the week of the New Moon. And less moonlight means better visibility for the fainter stars and meteor showers. It's like a subset of the phenomenon of the daily rhythm: until the sunlight sets, we can't see stars; as moonlight dims, we see brighter showers.

The night sky offers us a fitting reminder that we comprehend better when we see from many perspectives, in many ways, and over time, before assuming that what we see right before us is all there is to see.

If we can understand that with the stars and moon and sun, perhaps it is a lesson we will learn as well for the challenges we face in our lives. Perhaps with time and multiple perspectives, we will be able to learn from even the 'darkness' we walk through. It won't take away the depth of pain or the heaviness of despair, but it will allow more meanings to color it as well. And if it can do that, then it is a spirituality for our whole lives.

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