

# Coping With Darkness

With the coming of winter, we embrace not only the beginning of a new year, we are also faced with having to work through the season of darkness. During this season, days are still short and the nights are, determinedly long. The ground turns cold and vegetation is in stasis. There is no growth in nature, just extended darkness and cold rains.

There are seasons within our own lives when similar conditions prevail. Unexpected events, sudden change or misfortune, trauma or distress can affect us emotionally the same way. The loss of a job, the departure of a loved one, dashed hopes or broken dreams can send us into our own personal winters. That is part of the cycle of life.

For human beings, winter represents an end point. It represents the termination of an element or phase of our lives. There is a distinct finality to such moments, be it the conclusion of a relationship, be it the death of a loved one or be it the end of a personal era, manifested as a career change or a transition into middle age.

We humans, as sentient beings, have an option that neither the natural world nor the animal kingdom possesses. We have choice. We have the freedom and ability to alter our focus, to change the perspectives we have on our lives and our situation. We can perceive things differently, if we so choose to. An end can be mourned or it can be honored. The past can be pined for as an irretrievable loss or it can be cherished as valued experience. The decision is in our hands, exclusively.

During times of difficulty or pain, we can choose to sink into our own void and let the darkness overcome us. We can surrender to despondency, despair and melancholy. We can yield to anger, recrimination and aggression.

Surrendering to despair comes as a result of inaction. Outbursts of anger and hostility are reaction patterns to pain. Both approaches, one passive and one overt, lead to the same place, to a deepening of the darkness. Both stem from emotional investment in our own limited egos.

Winter, if properly understood, offers us a great opportunity. It is the season of regeneration, the season of rest. Darkness, in its truest sense, is not an absence of light nor is it the negation of light. It is the partner of light. Light is energy, growth and movement. It is joy, desire and achievement.

True darkness is the quietude of rejuvenation. It is the rebuilding process, by which the universe strengthens itself. It is the time, when the hidden forces of nature are busy regrouping. When there is darkness, life force is regaining its integrity, so that at the proper season it will reemerge and produce growth and revival.

Understanding this, we should look at the difficult periods of our lives in the exact same vein. When loss or disruption, misfortune or defeat affect our lives, we must embrace it. Such times are, in essence, an opportunity to close down what can no longer be, to relinquish what has already spent its energy or that which, simply, has finished running its course.

For spiritual, emotional and psychological growth to take place, we need to make room for it to happen. This involves a process of release. We have let go of what we no longer need. We have to relinquish that which we are still carrying within us, which may have been necessary and important at an earlier stage of our lives, but now has become either useless and burdensome to us or worse, detrimental.

This emptying process, though of great importance, produces a sense of loss and with loss comes grief. The aftermath of experiencing either a loss or a release is the process of grieving. It is, truly, necessary to grieve a loss. Grieving is essential to the process of letting go on all levels, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. To grieve is to empty oneself out. By so doing, one leaves the cup empty, so to speak, making room for endless, new possibility.

Once an individual empties out the old psychological constructs and disposes of the accompanying emotional contents, the way is open to internal regeneration and eventually, to the attainment of a new state of consciousness. There is a critical stage of transition between one's past, completed experience and a new expression of one's life. It is achieved by passing through the grief.

The stage beyond grief is that of neutrality, rest and peace. Our periods of darkness should be times of release, inner quiet and restoration. True darkness is the season of renewal. As such, we should accept it with open mind and embrace it with a tranquil heart. It is the gateway to spiritual evolution.

Periods of darkness, when understood properly, are the times of post-completion. After we have let go and released what we have finished with, in our life experience, there is a sacred time of peace. There is a period of great quiet when we become whole. During this sacred time, if we are using the darkness properly, we avail ourselves of the opportunity and the need to focus on the hidden resources deep within us. The season of darkness is the time to attune ourselves to the deep wells of spirit

within and let the waters, there, be replenished by our connection to God.

The season of darkness is not a time of barrenness. It is not a time of death. The season of darkness is the time of restoration and regeneration. It is dark, not in the sense of the absence of light, but rather, that darkness is the manifestation of the hidden, the secret and the sacred. It is peace.

May God who establishes peace in the highest heavens, grant us the courage to forego what has past, to dwell securely in the quietude within and to embrace its potential for the future. And we say, Amen.

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