



Dark Skies Show Us Stars, by Bear Guerra

One of my earliest childhood memories finds me waking from a deep sleep in the middle of the night, during a family road trip. Far from any city lights, I look out the window toward the sky above, and for the first time, I see what seemed to be an infinitude of stars. I never know for sure if I was actually dreaming or not, but I still have the distinct recollection of becoming aware of the immensity of the universe in which we exist. I still recall the intense mix of awe, fear, and hope that I felt, unable to look away until the stars faded with the first light of day.

I often think back to that night and the deep connection I felt to the natural world. But in recent years, the memory has also taken on a metaphorical connotation, reminiscent of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous words of hope, "Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars." Today it is not uncommon to read or hear or believe that we are living in "dark times" such is the state of the world, and our need for hope in the face of many challenges: climate change, inequality, isolation, pandemic, to name only a few.

I, too, have spent most of my life thinking of darkness as a problem demanding more light "in both the literal and the symbolic sense. But perhaps this fear of the dark has been part of our collective problem.

For all practical purposes, most of us now live in the perpetual glow of a world that never sleeps. As essayist and poet Mark Tredinnick has said, "Cities are factories for unmaking the night." We are driven by commerce, for which darkness is just another inconvenient obstacle in the path of production and consumption; we rely on the latest technology to offer the facade of a connection to one another. But more light is not what we need; it's more darkness.

Given the myriad ways in which we humans have all but severed our connection to the natural world, perhaps none will prove to be as profound as the loss of the night sky and of our connection to the dark.

The loss of our connection to darkness and to the night sky is emblematic of our deeper separation from the natural world. We need to question our blind acceptance of a world bathed in artificial light; to not fear the night but to reconnect with it, to be awed by it, to know that if we are patient, we will be able to see through the darkness. As I ponder how the technology to which we are now tethered is affecting me and those closest to me; as I wonder how I can guide my own child to embrace the night and understand that without darkness

we are not just incomplete â€¦ we fail to dream.

I think back again on the voice of Martin Luther King Jr., the famous dream maker, who saw stars through the darkness.Â

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