

Fear of Darkness

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Befriending darkness in our minds and outside is difficult though if we are able to embrace it, it can give a new texture to the lived experience of our lives. Tying together a couple of my experiences, I would like to elucidate more on this idea here.

Although I have never been afraid of the night and the darkness that it brings with it, on my most anxious and forlorn days, I find myself tied up in its cobwebs, struggling with its threads, wanting to outlive its pain. Nights bring in an uncanny fear, like I won't be able to breathe in its daunting darkness, like I would be suffocated by this black shadow powering over me. With everyone around asleep, an eerie silence hovers around my ears. It is difficult to befriend this night.

On one such night, I went to sleep turning and twisting in bed, and awoke with a terrible dream that shook me up.

In my dream, I was in a hospital with blue walls with really unknown people. The only other person I knew was a fond friend from my class. The rest of the faces were unfamiliar and unusual. There were varied alien faces sitting amongst my friend and I at a lecture in the hospital.

Somehow I wasn't enjoying my internship at all, so my friend and I decided to bunk this lecture. Subsequently, there was another lecture that my friend and I decided to bunk again. And then suddenly in my dream I realized I had bunked two lectures, without any guilt. In my dream, it felt like an impending sense of doom. The internship was so miserable that I just didn't care if we bunked lectures one after another.

That night I woke up with this very thought and it was far too dark and scary and I kept feeling like somebody is standing right behind me wanting to hurt me. I tried to look around but nothing could be seen. I couldn't sit still at all and so I started to breathe hard and I tried to switch on the lights.

Although, even with the lights on I kept feeling like there is something under the bed and behind me, trying to hurt me. I couldn't move from where I was at all.

I gathered courage and went to my book shelf and grabbed any book that came in my head, and I somehow while breathing hard and hyperventilating, for the very first time, took Thomas Ogden's *Primitive Edge of Experience* in my hands and opened it to a chapter called 'The Schizoid Position' which began with the lines,

"...or music heard so deeply that it is not heard at all,
but you are the music, while the music lasts..."

T. S. Eliot

I read these lines and though uncannily enough those words made sense then, I couldn't make any sense of anything. I started text messaging a couple of my friends about this dream.

When I was typing about the dream and telling them about it, I kept feeling like there is someone, trying to hurt me in my room. I felt like had I messaged my friends about this fear, this someone that wants to hurt me will hurt me even more.

But as soon as I typed it out and sent it, I glumly sat and stared at the message and realized that the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of the future was scaring me.

Uncannily enough, after this fearful dream had awoken me, I began to read a chapter about ‘the schizoid position’ described by Ogden (1992).

Ogden (1992) explains that in this schizoid position, we have a relationship with our self where we are in a state where even though we might be looking to turn to others, we’re so preoccupied with our own internal imagination of the world that reaching a whole recreational and objective sense of a world outside merely becomes impossible.

Nancy McWilliams (1994) explains that a schizoid person may be someone who is withdrawn into an internal world of imagination. The most exciting capacity for a schizoid person is their own creativity. The etymology of the word roots back to a German word ‘schizien’ which means ‘a split.’ McWilliams (1994) explains that split implied in the etymology of the word schizoid exists in two areas, between the self and the outside world, and between the experienced self and desire. This split may be a sense of alienation from parts of our self or from parts of our life.

Perhaps, it is these schizoid spaces inside us that became alive as dreams turn to nightmares and awake us in a frightful state.

Klein (1946) further expands on this idea in her theory. She explains that in the paranoid schizoid position we split all our experiences in terms of good and bad, black and white, day and night... with no space for a neutral grey. With these polarities, the badness of the world starts to linger paranoia inside us about how evil the world is and how it wants to hurt us.

Sometimes thus, it’s possible that our fears about our uncertain future, lingers like a ghost behind us, scaring us at every step, in a way where we split “day” and “night”. The bright sun-filled day contrasts the dark shadowy night that we drown ourselves in. Perhaps, in these “schizoid spaces” we ring ourselves our own very fear and live in our own internal worlds so much so, that the objective world fails and falls before us.

That night when I dreamt, and sometimes still, intoxicated from a heavy anxiety, I start to fear darkness, almost as though in this darkness sits a truth beneath my bed, in shady corners, that wants to encumber and smother me.

It is in dark spaces that we can’t see where we’re walking to next. And it is sometimes in darkness that we have to embrace uncertainties and these indefinite, nebulous, ambiguous boundaries of our mind.

Perhaps it is this that we fail to acknowledge befuddled and drowning in our own darkness.

Sometimes thus, a fear of darkness is nothing but our own internal fears and conflicts which we’re unable to embrace and move forward with. A fear of darkness may symbolize a fear of the uncertain future which we’re unable to stay with, which evokes and sets inside us an intimidating state leaving us fearful of everything around us.

A song in an Indian movie written by Swanand Kirkire explains this particular darkness with nuances of trying to talk to the night and befriend it. Roughly translated, the words read:

“...To my heart’s delight
I must talk to the darkness...”

This darkness is mad
It is so dense
It pricks me, it bites me

But it is still mine
In its lap
I have to rest my head and sleep
In its shoulders
I will shy away and cry..."

Our dim vision at night gives us a novel, subtle and soft way of perceiving things. Sometimes, if we try and befriend this darkness, we may begin to see things with a new light...

References

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