

September 27, 2020

LIGHT VS DARK

Dear Friends,

Today's reflection in *Grief One Day at a Time* is so profound I would like to share it in its entirety: He begins with a quote from Confucius: "*It is better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.*"

"Because we were raised in a time and culture that eschews grief and darkness, we often curse them. We hate death. We hate loss. We hate grief. Yet darkness is as central to the human experience as is light. Why curse something that is essential and unavoidable? Paradoxically, if we instead learn to embrace the 'dark' experiences of life, we are lighting a candle of hope. We are saying, 'Darkness, we honor you. We are ready to pay attention to you and get to know you.' This thinking and being changes everything. It banishes fear and fosters hope." Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD.

I enjoy gardening and have been doing a lot more of it since COVID hit, and recently I've come to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the need for darkness for the plants to flourish, -too much heat and sun simply will pulverize them quickly. Also, recently, while watching a science program, it was made clear to me how humans have a need for nighttime in many interesting and profound ways.

Since I was very young, I have always been fascinated by stories about the battle between darkness and light such as Tolkien's, *Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars* or even sacred stories from different religions, as it seems every religion incorporates some sacred account about the struggle between darkness and light. It is a story, a drama, that unfolds in the creation of the universe and each one of our lives. There needs to be both darkness and light in order for both to exist. One cannot exist without the other. In ancient Chinese philosophy, yin and yang is a concept of dualism, describing how seemingly opposite forces can actually be complementary and interconnected.

It seems to be almost equally assured that every person's life will somehow be touched by struggle or suffering in some way. Because everybody dies, just about everybody will grieve at some point in their life. Only very, very few of us can get away with living a life without grief or suffering of some kind. And yet it is completely understandable to curse it. I think we will always curse the darkness in some way before we can ever even conceive of the notion to embrace it. But perhaps, just perhaps Confucius is right... maybe it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

When I think of the battle between light and darkness in the real world, my mind always immediately jumps to the Holocaust. The famous psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl is a great inspiration to me on many levels, but particularly how he turned the darkness in his experience of life into a beacon of light.

During this difficult time of struggle and worry, I would like to share some of his greatest quotes to help us with both our battle and our embracing the darkness and the light of our lives:

“Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.”

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

“I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of a [person] is through love and in love.”

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

Peace and Serenity, Kevin