

Sacred Darkness

about blindfold, surrender and transformation

By: Aernoudt Knecht

When I wear a blindfold, it is usually during a trancedance which lasts about one hour and a half. Often this is sufficient time to create a certain amount of surrender to facilitate growth, healing, inspiration or transformation. In 2010 I took it a step further, and surrendered into Darkness for several days, to investigate and explore the effect more deeply.

Surrendering to Darkness

Here I am, sitting on the edge of my mattress, surrounded by silence and darkness. Could it still be night time? I have no idea whatsoever what the time is, nor what day it is. I have now spent roughly four days in complete darkness. I say “roughly” because I have lost counting. After several days in darkness your consciousness loses any hold it might have. The mattress underneath my body, is about the only sign from which I can deduce that I still exist.

Roughly one year ago I enrolled for a darkness retreat. My dear friend and colleague, Roel Crabbé, told me about the work of Naomi Lewis and Simon Buxton, a couple that initiates people into darkness in a profound way, in Great Britain. I was used to spending some time dancing blindfolded in the dark, so I seized the opportunity to deepen my relationship with darkness.

What remains of your consciousness when you let go of all contact with the visible world over a long period of time? I like to subject my consciousness to extreme conditions, once in a while. That is how it works when you really want to learn something. In the end, we wouldn't have learnt much about the atom just sitting there quietly watching it. Of course not! Instead we built a huge particle accelerator, which smashes it into pieces, so we can observe from the flying debris how it works.

Blinded by the Light

In the field of rituals and workshops in which I am working, much emphasis is put on the ‘Light’. There are many ‘light workers’ and light has become the symbol of the good, with terms such as ‘enlightenment’. The value of the darkness is heavily underexposed, and darkness has become a symbol of evil.

Reality check: the way our planet moves through space, and the dance she makes with the sun, there's always one part of humanity in the dark, whilst the other is in the light. Each day ends in darkness... And each new day springs from darkness.

Our fixation for the light is of such measure, that we are ‘blinded’ by it. However, the closer we move towards the light, the bigger the shadow behind us. Every step towards the light goes hand in hand – even comes after – a step into darkness. Indeed, in the beginning there was only darkness; as the great stories of creation tell us. Any big building, reaching for the skies, needs strong foundations. In the same way, the high branches of a tree are protected against storm and wind, because its roots are deeply rooted in the dark earth. A new world is always preceded by darkness; the undifferentiated state in which God is all, and all is God, and all is one. Darkness is the Mother of Mothers, the cradle from which all is born – even the light.

Sacred Darkness – then and now

Our relationship with darkness has not always been that bad. Long ago, when our societies were not dominated by masculine principles; when feminine principles were still honoured and revered, we held many of our rituals mainly at night, and in huts or dark caves. We recognised the value and transforming power of darkness. Later, in the times of druids, the Celtic bards spent a lot of time in darkness. Also, during the Middle Ages, it was usually dark in monastic cells.

In our dances and rituals we draw inspiration from various cultures around us, in which the value of darkness is still recognized and where she still plays a significant role in initiations and rituals. For instance, among the Kogi, an shaman apprentice spends long periods in darkness, and in Voodoo people are also initiated with the aid of a blindfold.

In many shamanic cultures, a ritual begins when the sun sets, or when the hut is closed and participants have descended into the cradle of darkness. Also in our contemporary trancedance rituals, we wear a blindfold, so that the mind gets a chance to return to the original state, in which there is no longer any distinction between the self and the surrounding world.

In Darkness we become Visionaries

Only from a certain age, do children realize the difference between the inner and outer world, and between the self and the other. From that moment onwards, our fears start; the inherent loneliness of our earthly existence begins, together with the longing to return to the blissful state of oneness. By going into darkness, the mental chatter in our head reduces, and we can experience life as we originally found it: an ocean of energy, beyond form.

The essence is that, after some struggle and hesitation, you allow yourself to slowly sink into another world. At first, the ego will try to stay in control through a stream of thoughts and awareness of time, but after a while this resolves itself. Everything slows down, and it becomes more silent inside. The rational mind dissolves; you arrive in the present and become part of the whole again. You get in touch with the entire spectrum of your senses, and experience a deeper contact with yourself. Now you are in a position where you are able to enter a new and different future, as you envision it from your deeper self, instead of from rules, frameworks and regulations from others.

A possible definition of 'shaman' is 'someone who can see in the dark'. We find ourselves living in a time where the veils between worlds are thin, and in which everything accelerates. Now that modern man increasingly begins to rise beyond form, and contemporary shamans have shed their complex robe, often what is left, is the blindfold as the pure essence. A blindfold is one of the most important ceremonial tools to enter into sacred darkness.

The blindfolded dancer

So here I am, sitting on the edge of my mattress. Because I know the value of the darkness well by dancing with a blindfold, I can easily surrender to it. I listen to the rhythm of my breath en stare straight ahead in the dark. Although I wonder for a moment, what day it is and what the time could be, actually, I don't really care. I am predominantly without thought and suddenly realize that the space between thoughts has increased enormously. I feel a profound sense of peace, which I have never experienced before, inside of me. A void has been created, in which there is space for a new vision, new insights and renewed inspiration.

The Darkness spoke intimately to me during the days I was in the dark. And she did not speak to my head, but to my heart. I have learned from her how to 'really' see; not with my eyes, but from the heart and other senses. I had the opportunity to intensively explore Darkness, and found her kingdom to be very familiar and safe. Ever since my return to the Light, I experience a new awareness of destiny and, among things, I choose now to be an 'Ambassador of Darkness'.

Just put on a blindfold, when you join us in a trancedance, and you will see: the empty void in the darkness, is an ocean full of memories and unimagined possibilities!

Aernoudt Knecht © 2010

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