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Return to the Dark Side, We Need You Here

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Where is the Dark?

It's deep within.

What is in the Dark?

Roots, seeds and fluids.

When is the Dark?

All of history. All of Now.

Who is the Dark?

The Mother of All.

How do you get to the Dark?

Rest...rest...rest...

I am going to say something controversial: I am fed up with everything being blamed on “the patriarchy.” If we want to save our current and future generations on this beautiful blue-green planet, we must stop talking about “patriarchy” as if it is something apart from us. As if we are not steeped in it, participating in it every single day. As if all of us are oppressed by it equally. Reducing our personal, professional and societal ills to the label of patriarchy robs us of our power and accountability. Instead, let’s talk about another way to look at this divisive and calamitous disorder. One that gives us options for making changes.

First, let us call it what it really is: WAAAAAY out of balance Yang. Overly, outwardly directed,

production-oriented, results loving, exploitive, hierarchical, self-aggrandizing out-of-balance Yang. We all suffer from it: bigger, better, faster, flashier, more, more, MORE! We are trained to believe in it; we are trained to submit to it; we are trained to measure ourselves against it. We lose every kind of energy to this out of control emergency culture and its assaults on Mother Earth, Her animals, plants, minerals and people. This is tragically unsustainable.

Yang’s partner, Yin, keeps the books. She knows what has been taken out, and she knows what precious little has been put back in. If you think you are somehow outside the huge Debt to Nature accrued from your being here, you are mistaken. Yes, even if you are a vegan, even if you drive a Prius, even if you have solar panels on your home — you still owe Her *everything*. She has fed you every meal you have ever eaten. She has provided materials for every home you have ever occupied. She has clothed you in every stitch you have ever worn. She is the Mother of All Mothers. And it is time, especially now, during Her precious time of year, to honor Her.

Let us first honor Her by becoming childlike. Try Child’s Pose as a supplication, unless you have knee problems. Kneel on the floor, move your knees apart and allow your big toes to touch, fold your torso to forward and toward the ground. Extend your arms



in front of you and lower your forehead toward the ground. In this position your head is open to Her, your heart is open to Her and your genitals are open to Her. Rest here in a state of deep gratitude for all you have received; all that will go to feed the next cycle, all that is growing now, deep and invisibly inside the world and inside you. Thank you, Mother of All Mothers.

The deep gratitude for the Yin, for the sustaining force of Life, is not another thing to add to your “to do” list, another thing to get done that oppresses your sense of the time that is available in your life. Rather, it is the natural consequence of slowing down and observing the wonders of the world; of engaging in contemplation, of experiencing awe. Winter calls for this.

The word contemplate comes from the Latin root *contemplare*, meaning “with” + “an open space for observation,” originally, a temple. The practice of contemplation is inherent in the winter landscape with its greenery gone and only the skeletal remains of plants, often covered in ice or snow. A world of quiet and sparse activity, perfect for reflection, meditation, prayer, dreaming and imagination. These are the province of the Yin and are a necessary part of creating the vitality to come. This is the substance that makes the Yang possible.

It is like this every year. At the Autumnal Equinox, the life force of the world leaves the bright, aboveground Yang realm to dive deeply into the Mystery of the Underworld, to feed that which we cannot see. We may mourn the loss of the light and become melancholy. We may resist this time of dismantling as the force of nature takes apart the summer in order to retrieve the minerals and compost the organic matter to provide for the cycle yet to come. Death, decomposition and decay are necessary for the raw materials of life to be freed from their old forms and made ready for new ones. This is the Metal season that is called the Young Yin in Chinese Medicine.

The Mature Yin comes now, in winter. The season

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of Water. At the Winter Solstice, the dismantling is largely accomplished and the water within the Earth is charged by the minerals that were released. That magnetism enables the motion that feeds Life. The contraction of Yin, the creation of incredible density of matter — each seed a tiny black hole — contains, in holographic form, the compressed expression of the fully mature animal or plant it will become. This dream calls into the center of itself all the fluids and nutrition that matches its needs and the stockpiling begins. Now the roots of trees expand and grow, moving deeper and deeper into Earth. In the quiet darkness miracles are happening.

It is in the utter stillness of Yin that matter, from the Latin word “mater” or “mother”, dreams its way into a new form. We, too, are subject to this centripetal motion. Throughout winter our ability to rest, to turn inward through contemplation, meditation and prayer, to focus on gratitude for blessings already received, creates a deeply nourishing environment for the future to begin to constellate. When we engage in conscious inactivity, we make significant deposits to our “energy bank account” from which we will make withdrawals all through the year. It is a year-long effort you are building through steady contribution during the winter, so you can work and play to your heart’s content when the warm months return.

Every summer I see clients who are experiencing deep fatigue. I always ask them the same question: “What were you doing in January and February?”



My clients are usually puzzled by this question, yet without exception they relay tales of an aging parent with increased needs, a big work project, a sudden decision to move into a new home, etc. One or several big expenditures of energy during a time of year that should be quiet and inward. Six months later the bill comes due. Remember, Yin keeps the books.

Our constantly expanding Yang culture suffers from an apparent inability to accept the fact that we are part of Mother Nature and as such cannot live apart from Her laws. We feel compelled to function at the same speed and intensity all year long. We are not made for that. When we stop “producing,” when we take time off, we are trained to feel shame. Practical Mystic Ellae Elinwood’s definition of shame has stayed with me for many years. Shame comes from “the child acting from altruism and the world responding inappropriately.” When we give ourselves permission to rest as a child naturally would, to take a break from responsibilities, very often the world responds inappropriately with censure and judgement. When we align with the natural rhythms of life, we become more, not less, creative and engaged in life, even if the outward signs are not visible to others.

Of course, we are not just going to sit around for the three months of Winter. But the wisdom of winter asks us to be judicious about how and when we use our energies. First and foremost, like the seeds underground, we should be dreaming, planning, imagining, repairing. Quiet creative pursuits you enjoy, as well as meditation, contemplation, reading, doing puzzles of all kinds, catching up on your mending, sorting through those old photos, handwriting letters, making warm clothing for needy children in your community are a few examples of things that will tap into the Yin of winter. Anything that feels quiet, nourishing or reflective will work.

This is an excellent time for “ritual bathing.” It can be deeply satisfying, during this time of year, to enjoy a leisurely bath with bubbles, oils, candles, incense or a favorite book. Yin revels in the senses and the many ways they can be activated for pleasure and

relaxation. And it is a good time to give thanks for clean water that runs effortlessly into your home.

Give yourself permission to take time away from technology. There are very few things in life that require you to be immediately accessible. There truly are few genuine emergencies. Turn your phone off. Close your computer. Turn away for a time from the endless stream of distraction. Take a deep breath.

It is important to protect your body both from the wind and cold during the winter. Your grandmother was right — do not go out without a hat, a scarf, gloves, socks and shoes or boots. Yes, really. Even on the mild days, the light can change without warning and the temperature with it, and the head, hands and feet are places where we lose heat quickly.

It is equally important to protect your kidneys in the winter. Traditional peoples, especially women, would often wear wide belts of felt or silk wrapped around the body at the waist to cover the kidneys, keeping them warm and protected from the wind. This is especially true for those wanting to conceive and maintain a pregnancy. You can easily accomplish this by wrapping a silk or cotton scarf around your midsection and securing it with pins before putting on your outer clothing. It may feel bulky at first, but you may find that the yummy security it provides is a great tradeoff. My favorite medical device of all time is the hot water bottle. Mine comes out in October and is put away in May. I even travel with it in the winter.

The kidneys need to be working well to process the metabolites of a more sedentary season. Rest helps them do this. Excessive excitement or stress in the winter depletes the kidneys, decreasing resilience and increasing susceptibility to stress.

In addition to keeping warm, consider your diet. Less physical activity calls for fewer calories so make them count. We best thrive when we can metabolize the foods we are eating. One way to optimize our capacity to metabolize is to try, as much as possible, to eat foods that are in season and grown not too far from home. Winter is traditionally a time of broths,



soups and stews, especially those made from roots of all kinds, preserved foods, nuts and seeds, and for some of us, ethically raised meats. These foods can make use of warming herbs and spices like turmeric, cardamom, cinnamon, black pepper, ginger and cayenne. It is best to stay away from sugar, which creates dampness and leads to phlegm. If you are craving sugar, you are probably under too much stress. Getting someone to energy test the foods you are eating so you know exactly what you can metabolize is even better!

It can be hard to take in enough water during the winter months. Yet, in this season, too, we need to

Another area that can give valuable feedback about the adrenals are the Sacroiliac joints, which join the sacrum to the hip bones. If you have ever noticed sudden pain in these joints, which vanished as quickly as it appeared, you got a message from your adrenals! Chances are the pain went away because you rested. This is a great time to use the hot water bottle. The adrenals love for us to sit with our feet elevated and this is a perfect position for leaning the lower back against a hot water bottle.

The adrenals also love vitamin C and it is a great help that citrus fruits are in season during the winter. It is a boost to the immune system when we need it

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make sure that we do not become dehydrated. This is a great season for nutritive teas. Parsley, which is especially good for the kidneys and bladder, is a good addition.

Humans are unique in walking upright. Our adrenal glands make that happen. You can spot a person whose adrenals are struggling by observing how they hold their head. Does it drop to one side, as if it's hard to hold it up? You might also hear things like: "I just can't stand up another minute." Or: "I just need to get off my feet." These are all warnings that Yin is depleted. The adrenals sit atop our kidneys, the primordial Yin energy and the Battery of the Body. When we do not have enough Yin, the Kidneys and adrenals suffer.

There are a number of ways we can assess our adrenals' vitality. One of my favorites is salt. Salt is the "flavor of winter" and a great indicator of the health of the kidneys and adrenals. If I notice I am gravitating toward salty foods, or salting my food at the table, I know my adrenals are trying to get my attention.

most. When our adrenals lag, we are much more susceptible to colds and upper respiratory infections. I always increase my consumption of foods rich in vitamin C and supplemental vitamin C during the winter months.

Exercise that is too vigorous is very hard on the adrenals, especially in the winter. Movement is important and the adrenals love outdoor walks and Yin yoga, but anything more challenging may set you back. Make sure to stay warm as you walk outside.

The adrenals help us manage shock. Releasing old shock, to be ready when a new one arises, is crucially important for optimal nervous system function. Our efforts to protect ourselves from suffering or loss describe our lack of stress resilience. We "can't take any more" so we become more rigid in keeping life at bay. This is when water "freezes." TRE — The Tension and Trauma Relieving Exercises — are a great "Daily Energy Routine" for the nervous system. You can find more information about TRE at traumaprevention.com



Try Savasana, the pose of conscious relaxation:

- Lying on your back, arms relaxed at your sides, palms up or down focus on letting go of tension anywhere you find it in your body.
- Feel the Mingmen — the “reverse navel”— and Sacraliaic joints underneath you.
- Imagine yourself as a seed, dreaming the future into being. What future would you want for your daughters and granddaughters, your sons and grandsons? Your friends, your community, your family?
- Hold the vision or sensation as you relax still further, giving thanks for the roots that will feed that beautiful future.

We are living the result of human choices throughout millennia. We are not the pinnacle of human development; we are its result. Mother Earth will endure, changed, from our having been here. But if we would like to stay, we need to start making different choices. We need to start living the Yin back into the world. We need to respect the force of the feminine in ourselves, regardless of what pronouns we prefer. We need to start giving young people a reason to live. We need to model good boundaries, which includes boundaries around work and activity. And finally, we need to model feeding the Yin in ourselves. Yes. Spend some time doing nothing. I give you COMPLETE permission. And besides, it is the fastest way to undermine patriarchy. €



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