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January 16, 2021

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Over my 82 years, I have had many experiences of darkness coming and darkness going away. So when I try to comprehend theologians who teach and mystics who experience non-dualism, who say darkness and light are one, I am mystified.

Recently, posted in our Provincial House's "Daily News" channel, were the names of three sisters with COVID-19 who are "diminishing" right now. That is, for them, death is imminent. In just a couple of weeks, the nursing home wing went from no COVID-19 at all during this entire pandemic to 8 to 12 to 27 to 47. With nine deaths already and maybe more coming, the outside world's darkness has stormed into my world with darkness that seems the deepest I have ever known.

But in this darkness is there also light? Am I so formed by night following day following night and so much cultural dualism — so stuck in dualism — that I am unable to believe that dark and light are one?

"Lord, I accept, or at least I want to."

A few years back, during one Advent week, I had cataract surgery. I was unaware that I was living in semi-darkness until after the surgery. But when the Christmas tree lights went on, I saw anew: the white lights, the red balls and the silver tinsel were so bright! Cataracts, growing over time, had dimmed my vision, blurred my seeing. Ever so slowly darkness had slipped in. I did not see it, so to speak, until the cataracts were removed. In my new light, I saw the darkness, i.e., light came after darkness, not within it.

A few years earlier, another deeper darkness grew in me ever so slowly. The darkness of depression starts with only slight, unnoticed shadows around one's being. My depression, intensified by anger, stayed unnoticed even as it grew darker and darker. One day, sharing tea with a friend at a McDonald's in Hoboken, I lowered my head to the table and could not raise it. A few days later, when my body slipped to the floor in a psychologist's office, I could not stand.

The wise doctor said, "Sister, this will end, but not tomorrow." Unlike the instant cure of darkened vision that cataract surgery brings, the cure for a darkened spirit was a two-year furlough from teaching and five years of first daily, then weekly, then monthly therapy. But I learned, as many do, that my darkest days yielded new light, light that changed the second half of my life for the better. Again, after the darkness

came light.

How many times have dark times led me to new, life-giving light? So are darkness and light one? It did not seem so.

"Lord, I accept, or at least, I want to."

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Today, darkness is everywhere: the ever-growing pandemic, the depths of inequality, the effects of Earth's mistreatment; endless war. Will this darkness finally end and light prevail? My inclination is to work and pray to end the nation's, indeed the whole world's, current chaotic painful darkness. But was the world ever filled with only light, the light of peace and justice that I long for, the light of the kingdom of God?

No, for Jesus taught that the kingdom is here and the kingdom is not yet here. Is that how light and darkness are one, even while my dualism keeps them separate? I recognize that within the depths of this time's profound darkness there are new lights: the light of greater awareness of global oneness, as every corner of Earth shares the suffering of COVID-19; the light of greater awareness of the depth and breadth of human inequality, of economic and racial injustice; the light of greater awareness of ever more destruction of Mother Earth and all her gifts.

Should I pray that starting in 2021 the world will embrace the power of love, thus enabling these dim lights to grow stronger? Am I experiencing now that darkness and light are made one by love? Am I believing that in the deepest darkness is also blinding light? That if I choose to bring love to dark days and to bright days, to bring love to days when my soul feels smothered in darkness and days when my soul glows, that I will see darkness and light as one?

Yes. Right now, when my home with my sisters is smothered in the spread of COVID-19 among us, smothered in the deaths of dear sisters one after another, I marvel how, though separated as we are by quarantine and 6-foot spaces and masks, in this darkness the light of love rises among us, love among us grows and glows.

Non-dualism is the belief that all is one. Love is what makes all things one. Thus, the psalmist's song:

"If I asked darkness to cover me

And light to become night around me,

That darkness would not be dark to you,

Night would be as light as day."

—Psalm 139

A version of this story appeared in the **Feb 5-18, 2021** print issue under the headline: In this darkness, can there also be light?.