



This past winter, as the days were getting shorter, I was feeling cold, alone, frustrated, and detached. Mostly, though, I was feeling guilty that amidst the many blessings I've been given in this world, all I could see was darkness. Why couldn't I focus on the wonder that filled my life? Where was the light inside me that saw the light in the world? (And why did my internal dialogue sound like a Rebbe Nachman song?)

And then I came across a story about Adam, the first man, during the first winter solstice. As I read about Adam realizing that darkness was part of earth's natural rhythm, something inside me softened. If darkness is part of the natural "order of the world," maybe there was something I could learn from it. Maybe the darkness - and the cold, lonely frustration that came with it - also held deep wisdom.

I invite you to read these two texts and explore the following questions, either in meditation, in a journal, or in conversation with someone else.

**Hillel**  
International

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1

**Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 8a:**

The Sages taught, when Adam the first man saw that the day was progressively diminishing, as the days become shorter from the autumnal equinox until the winter solstice, he did not yet know that this is a normal phenomenon, and therefore he said: Woe is me; perhaps because I sinned the world is becoming dark around me and will ultimately return to the primordial state of chaos and disorder. And this is the death that was sentenced upon me from Heaven, as it is written: "And to dust shall you return" (Genesis 3:19). He arose and spent eight days in fasting and in prayer. Once he saw that the season of Tevet, i.e., the winter solstice, had arrived, and saw that the day was progressively lengthening after the solstice, he said: Clearly, the days become shorter and then longer, and this is the order of the world. He went and observed a festival for eight days. Upon the next year, he observed both these eight days on which he had fasted in the previous year, and these eight days of his celebration, as days of festivities.

2

**To Know the Dark, Wendell Berry**

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.  
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,  
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,  
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

**Journal Questions:**

- 1) Why might Adam have chosen to celebrate both a fast and a feast in the second year?
- 2) When have you felt a moment of overwhelming darkness? What did you learn in/from that moment?
- 3) If you were to write a letter of gratitude to darkness, what might you say?
- 4) What is one thing you can do today to take Wendell Berry's advice to "go dark" and "find that the dark, too, blooms and sings"?