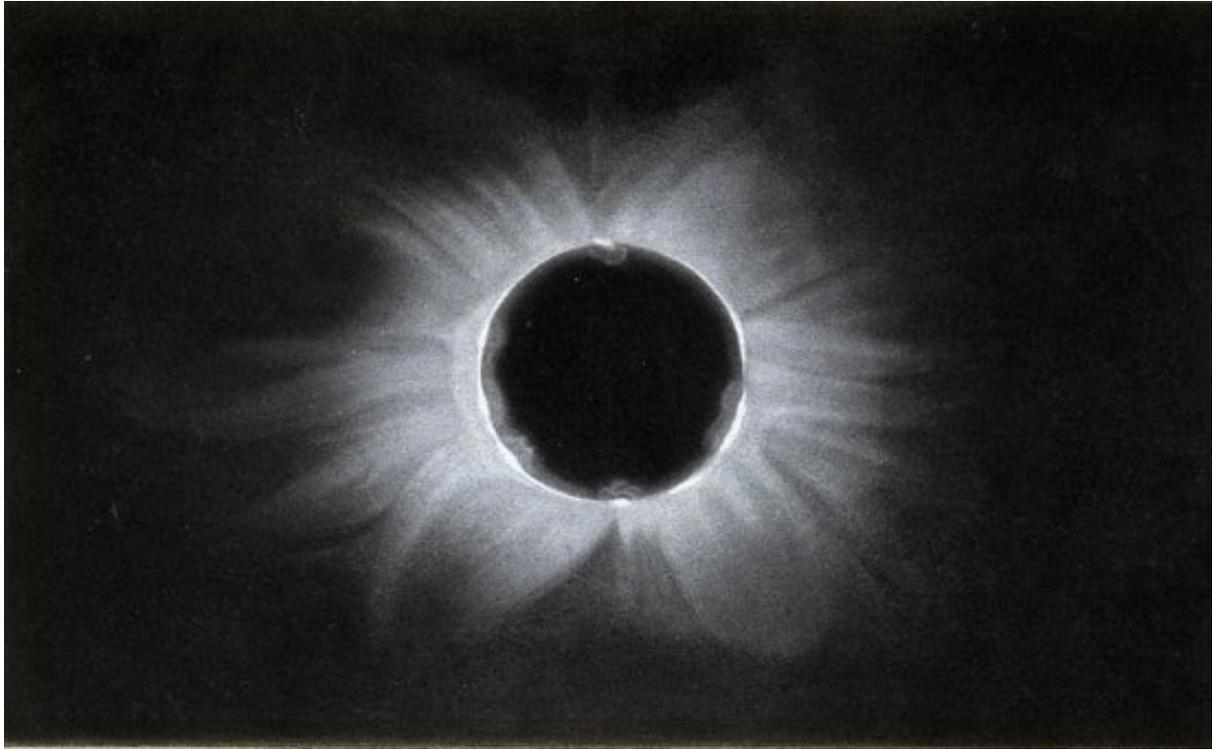


The Fullness of the Void'

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Solar Eclipse 1871

The ancient alchemical precept, 'As above, so below',² describes ordinary waking consciousness as representing only a minute fraction of an infinitely larger, 'spiritual' universe, from which material reality arises. Thus, in the alchemical worldview, just as there is a physical sun, so there is a spiritual sun, illuminating the mind with understanding. Alchemists depicted this sun as the *sol niger*, the black sun, suggestive of inner mysteries, in contrast to the sunlight of the day, associated with rational thought.³

In the natural world, a full solar eclipse creates a seemingly 'black sun' that radiates a halo of light, a paradoxical display of darkness and light, a union of the opposites. Alchemically speaking, the alignment of the earth, sun and moon mirrors a profound alignment of the body, soul and spirit.

Before I knew about the alchemical teachings on the *sol niger*, I had the following lucid dream, portraying an encounter with the black sun:

With lucidity, I bow my head and the dreamscape and my dreambody give way to luminous darkness. Strong winds carry me at an incredible speed. Staying with this movement takes a good deal of energy. To keep my focus, I repeat a sacred song. Off in the distance, I see what looks like a black sun! The sun becomes ever-larger upon approach. Eventually, I find myself set down before this immense, living sun.

Its wavy rays are outlined in a thin band of reddish-orange. As the rays break off, moving into the blackness, new ones appear. The beauty and power fills me with wonder. I perceive the sun's profound presence to be Divine and ask, "Why a black sun? Why this way?" The answer: "So you won't be annihilated."

Suddenly, a ray strikes me in my heart, filling me with bliss. I cry out with joy, aware of this light's beauty and truth. The ray's power moves through me making me cry out with longing, "Give me the ability to love and heal!" The sun then dissolves into deep red, as I awake.

In this dream, it felt as if my ego, along with all of its drives and defences, had been eclipsed so that I could share in the innermost longing of a greater reality.

Sufiism teaches that black light, perceived by the organ of inner sight, the heart,⁴ heralds a deep awareness of the Divine or 'supra-consciousness'.⁵ The black light illuminates the teachings of many mystical traditions across the world. To understand its nature as revealed in what I call Lucid Surrender™, and the spiritual importance the black light holds for humanity today, I will draw on the alchemical model of Carl Jung's analytical psychology and the teachings of wisdom traditions.

The Empty-Centre

Jung drew parallels between the development of the human psyche, as it came to be understood in the early 20th century, and alchemy. He de-codified many richly illustrated alchemical emblems to show how they not only portray the secrets of physical alchemy but also psychological stages of development, evident in waking consciousness *and* dreams.

The alchemical process manifests on two levels, known alchemically as the Lesser and the Greater Wisdom. The first refers to knowledge of the earthly world, the second to knowledge of the spiritual. Jung brought both forms of knowing together in his alchemical studies on psychological and spiritual development. This led him to outline a process he called 'Individuation' by means of which a person matures in body, psyche (or soul) and spirit. In

formulating this concept, Jung drew on the alchemical stages. Here, we will focus on the first of these four stages called *nigredo* in Latin or *the darkening*.

In Jung's model, working through 'dark' or challenging times, when external forces beyond our control shatter our sense of who we are, compels us to acknowledge our self-limiting beliefs in order to creatively develop previously unrecognised qualities in ourselves. This marks the first stage of the therapeutic process, likened to the *nigredo* in which the alchemist breaks down the elements prior to their transformation, a vital step that precedes the generation of all new forms.

Jung associated the darkness of *nigredo* with the 'shadow side' of our unconscious, the negative traits we project onto others (and our dreams), rather than seeing them as part of ourselves. Rooted in our instinctual nature, this shadow side, when unacknowledged, can erupt from the unconscious with destructive force,⁶ fixating in the form of a projection on anything perceived as a threat, whether an individual, a community, nation, or even darkness itself.

During crises, like the pandemic and times of social upheaval, we are especially vulnerable to shadow projections, both in terms of casting our 'shadow' on others or carrying the shadow put on us by others. Yet, when we recognise our own shadow as part of ourselves, admitting our fallibilities, fears and prejudices and taking responsibility for our actions, instead of blaming others, we can withdraw our projections.

When we are clear about what is 'ours', it also becomes possible to disengage from the projections of others, instead returning the problem to its owner. This withdrawal of projections, both our own and from others, while it can be a painstaking process, frees up the energies caught in the negative dynamic and allows for an outflow of creative life change.

An alchemical emblem from the 16th century work *The Splendor Solis*, shown here, depicts the *sol niger* of *nigredo*, which has a heavy darkness, associated with ‘shadow’ attributes: fearfulness, depression and death. Fittingly, Sufis call this oppressive darkness ‘captive light’, an apt description for how our shadow projections can entrap us, keeping us from seeing the light in the darkness.



Jung taught that by making the darkness in ourselves conscious, we become liberated from the ego’s domination. This involves a confrontation with what he referred to as the ‘empty-centre’ within each of us.⁷ He writes, ‘Emptiness in this sense doesn’t mean ‘absence’ or ‘vacancy,’ but something unknowable which is endowed with highest intensity.’ He explains that the term ‘centre’ could be described more generally as ‘God’ or, more specifically, as the ‘God-image’ or as the supreme archetype of the Self,⁸ noting that archetypes can only point the way to the ‘empty-centre’ – they help us to name and conceptualise. Yet the ‘empty-centre’ can never be fully known.⁹

In Jung’s view, the more we become conscious of our own shadow, the more whole we become, and the closer we move towards the centre. Often, we rush to fill the ‘emptiness’ of the centre with a culture-bound God-image. Or, we may project our shadow onto the centre, not only our existential fears but also painful feelings like loneliness and despair.

That is why learning to ‘sit with’ difficult feelings in waking life, owning them and working through them therapeutically helps prepare us for an experience of the ‘empty-centre’ in both waking life and dreams. (In one of my early lucid dreams, the entire dreamscape gave way to an experience of ‘the empty-centre’ which appeared as a void, silent and still, causing me, mistakenly, to fear that I had died.)

After many lucid dreams, I began to understand that when I withdrew my projections, and thereby surrendered to the Greater Wisdom of spiritual

insight and love, I could move beyond the archetype of the *sol niger*, into the black light that fills and illuminates the 'empty-centre', learning over time to become at one with this infinite, radiant darkness.

Whereas Jung applied the alchemical model to understanding psycho-spiritual development expressed through dream imagery, I have found that similar stages can also be *consciously* initiated in a lucid dream with powerful therapeutic effect. For example, in the following dream, as I withdraw my projections, I transcend my personal psychology, and this opens the doors to the Greater Wisdom:

A man with whom I had an affair during a lonely time in my first marriage wants to embrace me. I resist, for we have ended our relationship, but then, bowing my head, I give in to an overwhelming desire.

Suddenly, I recall bowing my head in the Sufi meditation on the word 'Mabud', Arabic for 'lover', and that the word refers to the Beloved aspect of the Divine. With this, I realise I dream and that I long for the Divine.

The entire dreamscape gives way to black light, filled with an exquisite music. I have no 'thoughts' as I take in the profound quality of the black light. Then, my hands become illuminated with energy of Spirit. I awake.

Subsequently, I discovered that black light, when freed of all projections, pulses with an all-encompassing, soulful intelligence from which living light forms arise, alive with the beauty, intelligence and dynamism of spirit. The forms that this light takes depends on the individual soul-longing of the dreamer and the workings of the spirit throughout their lifetime.

In my own experience, revelatory light forms have imparted qualities of mind, soul and spirit, fulfilling my soul's desire to be known, to be loved and to love. At the same time, I experience the desire of spirit for the same, revealed in the fullness of the void.

Fullness in Emptiness

I would like to share two more encounters with black light, looking at what may follow the cessation of more familiar dream imagery when Lucid Surrender takes place.

We might begin by asking ourselves what we habitually project onto the colour black in waking life. We can do this by considering our projections into

the darkness of night. For example, if you had to walk down an unfamiliar city street at night, how would you feel? Safe or under threat? If the latter, what perceived threats might you fear the darkness hides? How does this fear change your experience? If you met a stranger in the darkness, especially if that person was of a different gender, culture or colour to you, how would you feel then?

Similarly, in a lucid dream, if we project our shadow into the darkness of the black light – whether fear, confusion, disappointment, emptiness, loneliness, despair, shame, guilt or anger – we experience the darkness as overpowering. Worse still, the disappearance of the dream narrative, along with our dreambody, can feel like a terrifying annihilation.

The Hindu goddess Kali, known as ‘the black goddess’ and ‘the Destroyer’, traditionally represents this aspect of darkness. Yet, she is also called ‘the Transformer’ because she liberates her followers from the constraints of the ego, for she returns all to its primordial unity. In the *Mahanirvana Tantra* it is written:

Just as all colors disappear in black,
So all names and forms disappear in her.

In lucidity, if I project my fears into the darkness, the black light assumes strong ‘Kali’ attributes. At such moments, I fear the unknown. However, if I am able to calm my fears by drawing on divine grace through breath, prayer and song, then the way opens to Lucid Surrender.

An excerpt from a dream of mine illustrates what may be experienced on the black light when the withdrawal of projections feels difficult:

I walk in a field as the wind pulls at me. I resist the wind even as it suddenly blows the very dreamscape away. I become lucid as the black light and winds carry me down into a darkness that I perceive as evil. Ghostly beings of ashen white appear, wailing and gnashing their teeth like in the biblical descriptions of hell. My heart goes out to them. I fear being taken to the very bowels of hell. So I begin to pray. Then, I recognise the wind as the spirit and wonder if the ghost like beings are from the hell my own mind has made. I continue to pray as I surrender to the black light.

In this dream, I am eventually able to see the hellish shadow as a projection of my own mind. My prayerful attitude helps me to draw on the grace needed to move beyond these mental constructs.

To deepen lucidity, the dreamer must not only withdraw their projections from the darkness but also restrain the ego's desire to control the experience. Instead, the aim is to surrender one's personal will to the 'Highest Will'¹⁰ – to yield to the Greater Wisdom¹¹ – a yielding known in the Taoist tradition as 'practicing eternity'.¹²

We see this process in the following lucid dream as I surrender deeply to the revelation of the black light:

I walk on a city street past a parking lot full of rubble, and think, "That's like my mind, and that's not how I want my mind to be." Instantly, I become lucid and the dreamscape falls away. I am lifted up by strong winds at a tremendous speed into the spaciousness of the black light. To stay focused, I sing a sacred song.

Then, my awareness is suspended in a luminous black space through which a delicate, yet forceful wind blows. The invigorating wind fills me with a refined desire. I wait trustingly. I have the feeling that this vastness, in which I rest, makes love to me, as though my consciousness has become the strings of the Aeolian harp that send vibrations into my being. Gently, this leads to a 'cosmic' ecstasy much finer than an earthly orgasm. I wonder at how these vibrations move all of Creation and how Creation springs from a great love and joy and a desire for being.

The winds sweep my being up onto a powerful current. For once, I don't feel afraid, just curious, unconcerned about 'getting back'. Waking, I think: "The universe can make love to you!" That awareness has continued thereafter to enliven me, body and soul.

This Lucid Surrender dream and many more such dreams reveal that after projections have been withdrawn and the dreamer yields to the black light – a new and subtle, transpersonal reality emerges, beyond the reach of the ego, one that speaks to the human soul.

To conclude with the dream I reported earlier, of hellish projections:

Once I realise that the hell before me is a creation of my own mind, winds carry me to a still place where interlaced cubes of bluish light extend out infinitely in a double-helix spiral before

me on the black light. As I stand contemplating the light form, I sense each cube represents a very basic building block of life as well as every individual human life – all intertwined.

I know myself to be part of this chain of linked cubes of light. In that moment, I experience both the expansiveness of my awareness and the exhaustion of my actual earthly body. It seems strange to me that both are true and that this beautiful light form should require my limited, exhausted self in order to be known. It feels a wonder and very humbling as well as inspiring. Then, I awake.

Lucid Surrender requires that we enter the black light with trust. There, we find unbounded Beingness. We encounter the spacious and sentient, ‘naked awareness’ known to Tibetan Buddhists,¹³ the Being, Consciousness, Bliss referred to as *Sat Chit Ananda* in the Vedas, the ‘Limitless Infinite’ of the Tao that gives birth to ‘the ten thousand things’.¹⁴

Christian mysticism distinguishes between the darkness associated with the ‘fallen’ state of matter, the Lesser Wisdom, and the darkness that reveals the Greater Wisdom. The early Christian mystic, Dionysius the Aeropagite, tells us: ‘thou wilt be carried on high, to the super-essential ray of the Divine darkness, when thou hast cast all away and is free from all.’¹⁵

Over time, I have learned to trust the luminous darkness as the spaciousness where Spirit abides and to enter the black light with a humble mind and heart, withdrawing my projections and yielding to the Highest Will. I have learned to wait patiently as sacred living lights appear, illumined intelligences of goodness, beauty and truth, divine emanations of that ‘infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.’¹⁶

¹ The full version of this text can be found as a chapter in my next book *The Spiritual Alchemy of Lucid Surrender: An Advanced Guide on the [Path to Lucidity](#)*, publication spring 2021. This version of the text was originally presented at the IASD’s ‘Many Worlds of Lucid Dreaming Conference’, October 3 to November 14, 2020.

² Robert Steele and Dorothea Waley Singer, ‘The Emerald Table’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 21, No. 3 (January 1928): 485–501, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2101974/?page=1>

³ Stanton Marlan, *The Black Sun: The Alchemy and Art of Darkness* (Texas A & M University Press).

⁴ For more on this interpretation see Henry Corbin's *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism* (Omega Publications: New Lebanon, New York), 116.

⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁶ Jung, *Collected Works*, vol. 9ii, paras. 13–19.

⁷ 'Letter to Pastor Bennett' June 13th, 1955 in *C. G. Jung's Letters: Volume 2, 1951-1961*, selected and edited by Gerhard Adler in collaboration with Aniela Jaffé. Translated by R. F. C Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), 257–264.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Roberto Assagioli, founder of Psychosynthesis, describes the 'highest will' which gives us the capacity to act with compassion towards ourselves, others and all of creation in his book *The Act of Will* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1973), 106–122.

¹¹ For more on this topic, see the chapters on nightmares and lucid dreaming in my book [The Hidden Lives of Dreams](#) (London: Bonnier Books UK, 2020).

¹² See Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, beautifully translated by Stephen Mitchell (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), no. 52.

¹³ See Tenzin Rinpoche Wangyal's *Awakening the Luminous Mind: Tibetan Meditation for Inner Peace and Joy*. Marcy Vaughn ed. Hay House, Inc.: London, 2012).

¹⁴ Referred to as *Wuji*.

¹⁵ Anthony Uyl, ed., *The Collected Works of Dionysius the Aeropagite* trans. Rev. John Parker (Ontario, Canada: Solace Games, 2015,) 52. ¹⁵

¹⁶ This idea appears in a medieval teaching, most likely from Rabbinical sources, that describes 'God' as a being whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere.

Melinda Powell, psychotherapist and author of [The Hidden Lives of Dreams](#) (2020), co-founded the [Dream Research Institute](#), UK. Melinda's personal exploration of lucidity has led her to develop and teach 'Lucid Surrender'.™ Her work brings together the art and science of dreaming, including lucid dreaming, for therapeutic benefit and psycho-spiritual development, both *within* dreams and waking life. See www.pathtolucidity.com

