



the Witching Hour

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Being a night person I often chose to work late through the evening and into the night. Summer on the Ozark Plateau is hot, humid and essentially semi-tropical, with exotics like passion flower, blue-tailed skink, tarantula and the poisonous copperhead. Typically I wore only a pair of cut-off shorts, and even after midnight during the warmest months I needed wear nothing more. With the sawdust paths between our residences, common kitchen and the industrial/business area I didn't even bother with sandals.

On many nights I'd be walking to my room in Fanshen and when I reached the Garden I'd suddenly be struck with how incredibly beautiful was all this. Many times over the years this happened, and it never ceased to amaze me. I always enjoyed this time. I would stop in the center of the Garden and just look and listen, after midnight yet before dawn, the witching hour!

Look up and there's the Milky Way, absolutely incredible, stretching from one dark horizon to the other, all those stars ... shining so clear in the night sky. I often thought, if there are sentient beings out there wanting to contact the most advanced culture on this planet, then my home, East Wind Community, is where they ought to set down their explorer's spacecraft. We would tell them about how we use a time economy in place of a monetary exchange system in our community. If they weren't like conquistador's terrorizing and enslaving the natives of the planets they "discover," we'd explain what we've experienced living in peace through sharing the land and

working in cooperation, before apologizing for having to introduce them to the possessive and competitive dominant culture of our planet.

On many nights the stars would be hidden by the bright moon, maybe waxing, maybe waning, sometimes with a halo, casting shadows all around. I wondered that most of the people of the Community who were early to bed and early to rise probably never experienced this hour awake, certainly not outdoors. I was alone and the whole community was mine; all of creation was mine to enjoy! Just me and my moon shadow, greeting all fellow creatures of the night and all friendly beings of the universe.

Illuminated by moonlight, the mist coming up from the creek valley is as a wispy tide. Occasionally its high water mark reaches as far as the Garden, a white sea of mist filling the valley all the way to the encircling ridge in the distance, soon to recede again with the rising sun. And that sound off in the distance, wild voices singing and dancing on some moonlit ridge! Coyote!!

Once I resolved to walk down into that white sea of moonlit mist, thinking to be as much one with the energies and mysteries of the night's darkness as I could. With long pants and sleeves, a stout walking stick and hiking boots, I set off down from the Garden through the pasture, over the fences and through the gates, walking quietly and carefully, stopping in the moon shadows of the trees to listen and look about, imagining myself becoming part of the night. So many noises all

around, even above me in these trees! What are all these creatures of the night? It's an adventure to walk through these fields and among these trees during the day, yet at night it's fantastic! Among the unknown I imagine all sorts of threatening beasts, conquering aliens and worse!

After twenty minutes or so of no artificial light my night vision is keener and I move on. There are small things scurrying around in the tall grass, and I hear a swoosh, then turn to see an owl as it flies amongst the trees, moonlight on its wings. I come out to where the ridge drops more steeply and affords a view of the Flood Plain, and it's like being underwater. With rays of moonlight piercing the slowly undulating mist above me, I peer through its faint luminescence to the dark outline of the ridge across the plain below. The far, dark ridge now looms higher than the ridge on which I stand. This is such a wonderland.

The distance is vast, looking across and up and down the Flood Plain. From where I am on this lower ridge I can hear the creek, water singing over rock, sending plumes of mist up into the night while the cooler air flows down past me off the ridge. I can feel and smell the moisture in the air as it fills my lungs, and I realize that as I draw breath here aspects of all the life on this land, of the foliage and flowers of all the rooted beings, and of the fur and feather of all of the mobile creatures large and small, enter my bloodstream and become part of my being, just as the minerals of the earth become my flesh and bones through the foods this land provides. The boundary between self and not-self becomes hard to rationalize, and I no longer see the point of view from where I started. I'm no longer on a quest to become like the night, as in this moment what I perceive around me is what I am.

Sounds travel far in the night, and many come to me as I stand here on the open ridge above the plain, yet the moisture in the air muffles these sounds as it veils my sight. Movement out on the plain; I can't tell for sure, yet its likely deer. The darkness of night causes one to focus on senses other than sight, and seemingly the energies of the wild feel more powerful now.



I wonder that if my body is part of this land, then what part of who I am, what energy housed in this body, is thinking these thoughts? As my physical being is part of this land, so then is my conscious being, rather than separate as we may think, similarly a part of the energy of this universe? What then is the nature of that bond between the physical and the spiritual aspects of my being, and how far from each other in life can the two extend in time and space?

I feel as though I know what it's like moving effortlessly up into and through the mist, free as a wisp, and what it's like looking down from above. I can see the deer and all of the Flood Plain, the creek water dancing between its states of liquid and vapor, and myself standing below on the ridge, walking stick in hand, dreaming the dark.... It is all a dynamic balance: politics and spirituality, physical and spiritual, possessiveness and sharing, competition and cooperation, freedom and responsibility, community and alienation. Never mind aliens, its my fellow people of this planet who've lost community with one another, along with communion with the wild, and the increasing natural stresses and human conflicts evidence these losses of balance.



The bane of the dominant culture is the loss of the essential balance between materialism and spirituality. Affirming and strengthening the connections of the many dynamics of opposites, in

the context of material spirituality, can result in a holistic culture. And in a similar way, the effort made to establish a particular balance of the various dynamics of opposites in one's own mind results in the differentiation of one's authentic self from the elemental nature of the spiritual universe. It is a force of self-knowledge, so limitlessly expansive yet deeply grounding, that is this awareness of being!

It's not a sound now that comes to me, it's a sensation of being part of the rhythm of this energy of the world and universe, generated by the dynamic relationship of the material and of the spiritual aspects of being. By-passing mere physical senses, the feeling comes from both within my being and from beyond it. Becoming familiar with this land and sky in all its cycles of days and seasons and years one can come to know its energies, feel its life force much as one feels one's own life, converse with its powers as one converses with one's inner voice, help to bring new life onto this land as its bounty nurtures all, and some day turn my body into this soil, and my spirit one with this energy. Or so I imagined that night. Events, however, were to send me away from my home, yet what I've come to know from my experience there, the person I am, is forever a part of that land and the Community that lives yet happily upon it.

Ephemerally transcendent while affirming of the immanence of spirit as was this experience, I only made one such expedition alone after midnight into the darkness beneath the sea of mist, in the eight years I lived at East Wind. I was usually content to enjoy my late night/early morning stop-overs in the Garden. In the early years there would be a whippoorwill singing from right on the roof of Reim! Singing so crisply and clearly, I can still hear the bird song overlaying the distant coyote yapping in the darkness before dawn.

I can also hear the refrigeration units humming over by Rock Bottom, and see the lines of pathlights leading off that way from where the path Ys in the Garden, leading also back again the

way I'd come, as well as onward to Reim. And look now beneath this pathlight at the intersection of the Y, as it shines down on the rocks and foliage and shuttered flowers. All the insects! Beetles and moths, with spiders on the hunt, and strange insects that evidently only come out at night.

Watching all of the insect versus arachnid dramas playing out on the rock stage, drawn by the circle of artificial light, at first I think of myself as their audience, yet then it comes to me again that all of life is intertwined; I am in theirs as they are in mine, from the smallest to the largest. And it also comes to me that as we can look but not see, and listen but not hear, so also can we be of a spiritual nature in a similar way as all other life and not be aware of that essential connection. More than just our physical senses that we learn to use and practice in all that we experience, we may also learn to feel the rhythms of the energies in the world, and to be aware of the dynamic nature of the material spirituality that is life.

I might then hear the owl in the trees of the east ravine, and look up to see a bat zooming low around the garden. Then gaze higher to be awestruck yet again by the stars above.... I drank long, deep and often of that beauty, its powers and truths, those darkest hours before dawn while the rest of the Community slept.



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