

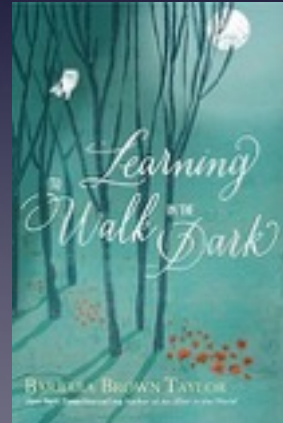
Spiritual Darkness Two Studies

ACTS
Fall 2014

St David's United Church
Calgary

Learning to Walk in the Dark

Session 4



- Opening
- Introductions
- Chapter Summaries
- Media
- Discussions
- Closing

Opening



Taylor leaves no stone unturned in this book, exploring and understanding the many aspects of "darkness." So, in chapter 5, she first mentions metaphors using the word darkness. It may not always be politically correct to use the word dark but I find I use it and so do many others; " That new TV series is too dark for me" or "Didn't you find her character too dark? Or "The book deals with a very dark subject." Taylor states "If the metaphors work, it is because those of us who can see rely so heavily on our sight."

(visual is small candle flickering)

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind



Understanding “darkness” as a metaphor gives larger meaning to it’s use.

Music has also had this dual nature, where human love and divine love are in close relation. Church music and popular music have always echoed each other.

Here is such a piece by Manitoba Celtic harpist Loreena Mckennitt - the haunting piece “The Dark Night of the Soul”



Property of Quinlan Road

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MclLF473XtA&feature=youtu.be>

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind



She then explores in some depth what it means to be blind, taking us first to a restaurant where you eat in total darkness. She refers to a book by a woman who's sight was restored and she often closes her eyes, comforted by the familiarity of her darkness, finding the new world of sight overwhelming. (I can't help hope she gains some comfortableness in the world of vision!)

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind



Some jovial blind facilitators.

Taylor then describes her experience in an Exhibit called "Dialogue in the Dark". It was conceived by a social entrepreneur who when designing a rehabilitation program a for blind colleague, found he needed to educate sighted people about what it's like to be blind. He found their reaction to the blind was often inappropriate and even cruel. In this experience, she describes accidentally bumps into a man. She writes "There was no body language for me to read, no visual data to help me form judgments about who he was or what he was like. This was unexpectedly refreshing, like being at a party when the lights go out. The normal rules of polite social interaction were suspended. Furthermore, he could not see me any better than I could see him, which meant that I was excused from his judgments of me as well."

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind



Jacques Lusseyran

Taylor goes on to describe the extraordinary story of Jacques Lusseyran, who had been blinded as a child. Soon after he had an extraordinary experience or awakening. Somehow he came to see the lightness ... beyond the darkness.

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind

- Ecc. 2:14 “The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness”
- Isaiah 9:2 “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”

Scripture often tends to the negative - they “have eyes but do not see”

In Job’s ancient story of terrible troubles, the word “darkness” occurs 36 times.

Ecc. 2:14 “The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness”

Isaiah 9:2 “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.”

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind

- Exodus 20:21 “The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.”
- John 1:5 “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
- 1 John 2:11 “But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.”

Scripture also tells of a spiritual light that transcends the normal light and dark.

It is the experience of the mystics. It is how Moses experienced G_d.

Exodus 20:21 “The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.”

And from John,

John 1:5 “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

1 John 2:11 “But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.”

Ch 5 The Eyes of the Blind

- Three Days
 - Jonah in the whale
 - Jesus in the tomb
 - the moon in transition
 - a metaphor for resurrection
 - cannot be immediate
 - a time alone to consider things
 - a return from darkness
 - the new replacing what was
 - a celebration

Concluding this chapter she makes reference to the three days of darkness by phases of the moon and the stories of 3 days of darkness in the Bible. She makes a significant statement here, I think by saying "I am not asking to become blind, but I've become a believer. There is a light that shines in the darkness, which is only visible there."

Ch 6 Entering the Stone



Caves have long been associated with spirituality by the seers of human society from our very beginnings. These are the tracings of some the oldest hands that ever drew in the dark

- on cave walls in Lascaux, France - 16,000 years ago.

Ch 6 Entering the Stone

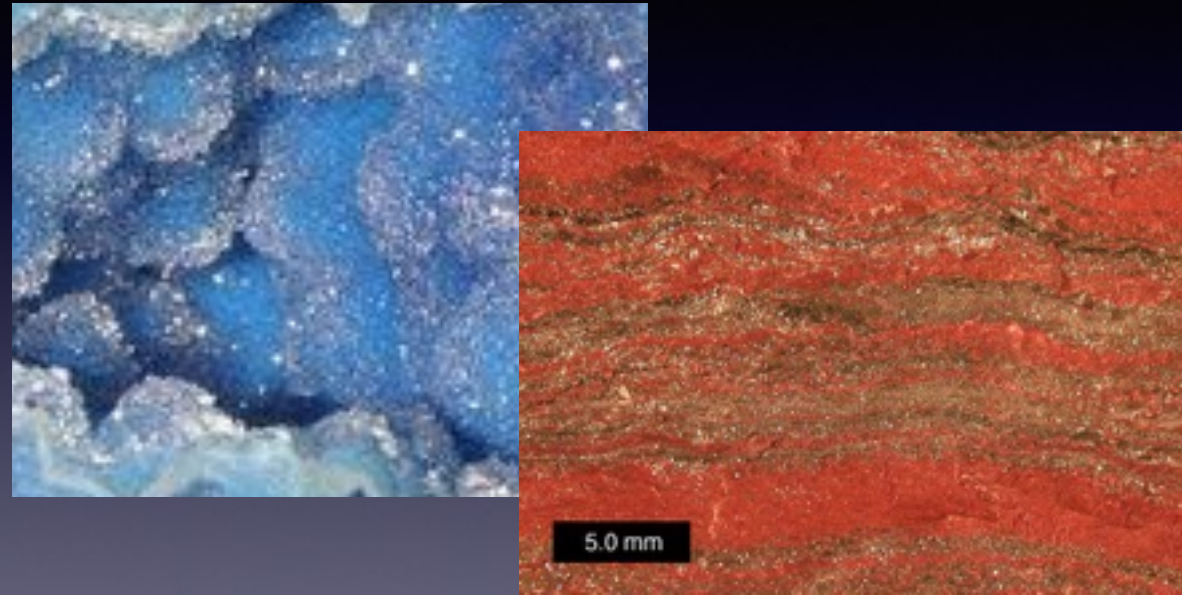


Chapter 6, for me really demonstrates Taylor's skill as a storyteller.

To further explore the realm of darkness in all its aspects, she takes us with her on her first "wild" caving experience. A Presbyterian minister and his wife, heard about her writing a book on darkness and invited her to explore one of the biggest caves in the United States situated in West Virginia.

I think if I had been asked to describe this same experience, I might say something like, boy it was dark, kind of scary, I think I saw a bat and I picked up what I thought was a shiny rock..... It was quite an experience but I'm glad I'm home now.

Ch 6 Entering the Stone



Underground mineral crystals

No, she definitely has a way with words. When describing how dependent she feels towards her caving guide when they leave the security of the show cave, she writes, "When the gate swings open, Marrion and I follow him through. Then he locks it behind us, leaving behind the level path, the handrail, and the electric lights. That is when I imprint on him like a ducking on a duck. Wither thou goest I will go." Or describing when they enter a large chamber, she writes "Since my headlamp is only good for a few feet in any direction, I cannot see that it is huge, but I can feel that it is huge. The energy of this room is spacious – both alive and vast – like a ballroom before a ball, already gearing up for what is about to happen inside it."

Ch 6 Entering the Stone



Taylor mentions that some very significant spiritual happenings occurred in caves. Jesus was born in a cave. Buddha meditated regularly in a cave. Muhammed first heard the angel Gabriel in a cave. Muhammed's cave today is a part of the annual Hajj or pilgrimage. Muslims are required to visit Mecca at least once in their lives and every year 2 million people spend a week there reflecting on their faith. Here is a short video of their recent visit to the Cave of Hira. In the first part of the clip you'll see the pilgrims circling the Kaaba (or cube) in the direction planets orbit the sun. The Kaaba predates Muhammed. Tradition says Abraham and his son Ishmael built the first one. Intriguingly it holds a black football sized meteorite encased in silver.



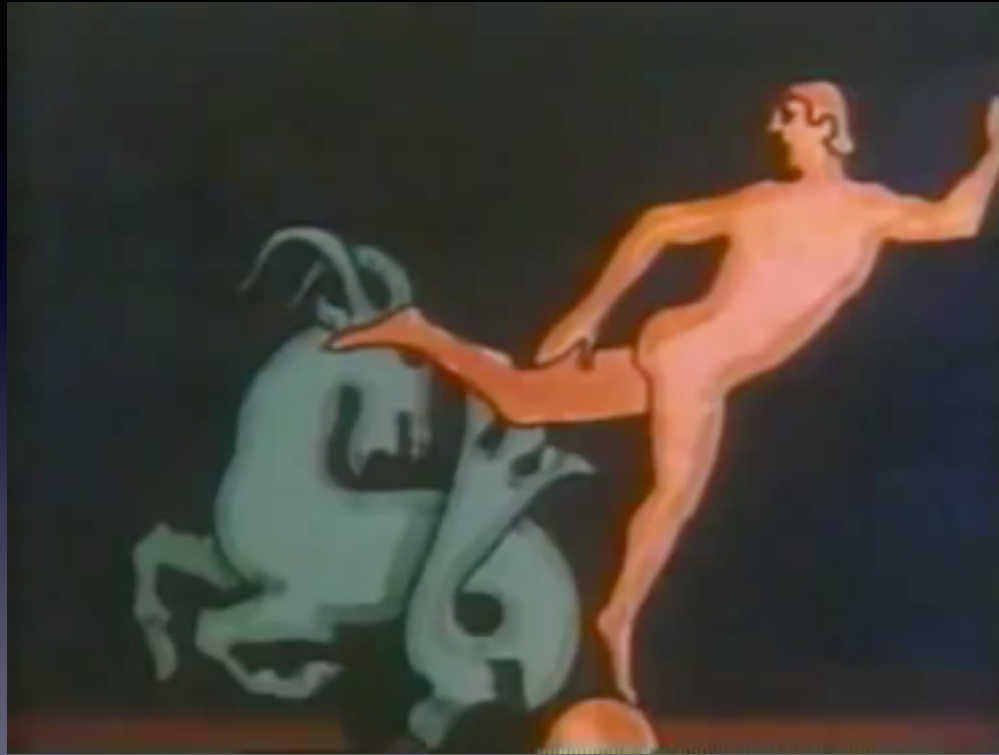
http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x15w9v4_pilgrims-in-mecca-visit-cave-of-hira_news

Ch 6 Entering the Stone



Perhaps the most famous story about caves is the one told by Socrates in Plato's "Republic". It is about how life is seen as if by captives underground. A philosopher is one who escapes to the sunlight and then tries to convince his friends of the "truth" of the grand reality outside the cave.

Here then is an excellent animation/summary of the "Cave Allegory" of Socrates. 8m



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQfRdl3GTw4>



Taylor uses metaphors skillfully... Throughout her book. On the last page of the chapter she writes, "When I entered the cave hoping for a glimpse of celestial brightness, it never occurred to me that it might be so small. But here it is, not much bigger than a mustard seed (she's talking about the tiny rock she found)– everything I need to remember how much my set ideas get in my way."

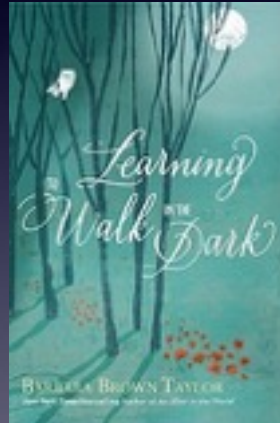
Do I don't know if anybody's ever been caving? Would they like to share the experience? Also are there any comments or opinions about this chapter or the last?
(visual is small candle flickering)

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the different sorts of “darkness” Taylor introduces to us.
2. Discuss "When I entered the cave hoping for a glimpse of celestial brightness, it never occurred to me that it might be so small. But here it is, not much bigger than a mustard seed (she's talking about the tiny rock she found)– everything I need to remember how much my set ideas get in my way."

Break

Learning to Walk in the Dark



Next Readings

7. The Dark Night of the Soul
 8. Working with Darkness
 9. Our Lady of the Underground
- EPILOGUE: Blessing the Day

Study Website

<http://dark.stdavidscalgary.net>

Closing