

A LOOK AT THE DARK HALF OF THE MOON

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Most of the articles on the Western half of this site¹ in the deal with the full moons. These are the periods of the lunar month when the most light, physical and subjective, is shone upon our planet. Hence, in terms of spiritual practices, especially for meditation, they are the times when the greatest insights usually come and when we can more easily penetrate into the subjective realms. However, spirituality is not solely limited to the more lighted periods of the lunar month, and much good work can be done at other periods as well.² One of those times of the lunar month that it is particularly important, and of which it is beneficial to be to be cognizant, is the week that includes the new moon—commonly called the ‘dark half of the moon’. The dark half of the moon takes place when the moon moves between the earth and the sun, the period between the two crescent phases—or the two astrological semisquares between the sun and the moon—and it is thus the interval where there is very little in the way of reflected light from the sun that reaches us from the moon.

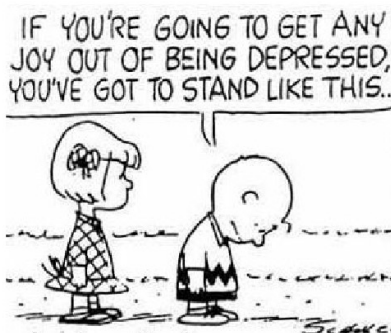
The dark half of the moon is actually quite an important period, especially with respect to meditative practices, and we will get to the particulars of why in due course. But before that, a little information about what the new moon physically represents might open a few doors for more insights into the dark phase of the moon. We have the following factors to consider with the new moon:

- The new moon is commonly seen as the first day of the lunar month in cultures that use a lunar calendar.
- The fact that the moon is between the earth and the sun at the dark half of the moon adds a greater gravitational influence toward the sun on the earth than is otherwise the case, and this has subjective and physical effects. We have the opposite effect at the full moons, with a gravitational pull in both directions.
- The extra gravitational pull exerted at the dark half of the moon has a more pronounced effect on the liquid elements in the Earth and in the bodies of all creatures on the planet, including humanity, due to the fact that it adds to the sun's normal gravitational pull.
- These more pronounced effects resulting in the changes in bodily water balance at the times of the dark half of the moon can and often do result in phenomena such as headaches, feelings of sluggishness, aches and pains in the joints and a general feeling of dis-ease in the body.
- The period from the waning crescent to the new moon represents the closing of the month, with the waxing crescent representing the opening of a new phase in the lunar cycle.
- The lunar phases have their correspondences in the seasons of the year. The time of the year when there is the least light on either hemisphere—winter, in other words, either northern or southern—is the period wherein people are the most likely to report feeling depressed, to feel hemmed in or to feel more inward (withdrawn), and this in large part has to do with the amount of light we get as much as it does with the colder weather. The dark half of the moon can thus be seen as a sort of 'winter' of each month, and due care should thus be taken to avoid a sense of depression or despondency. Also, the plant kingdom is very much in a state of hibernation during winter, especially in the colder areas of the world, for example.

With the preceding points in mind, we can begin to get a sense of why it is important to give attention to the new moon in spiritual. There are three main points that stand out:

- 1) There is increased gravitational pull at the new moon, with its attendant physical effects.
- 2) There is decreased light at the time of the new moon, with its attendant psychological effects
- 3) The new moon corresponds with an ebb in the activities associated with the moon, such as plant growth, hair growth, etc.. This applies to many other forms of outer activity.

All these points together serve to indicate why the new moon is not especially favored for clarity in meditation. We might naturally think from these points that the new moon would otherwise favor drawing one's consciousness inward, but such is not the case. With the tendency toward depression, feelings of physical uneasiness, along with the ebb of subjective life, the new moon does not favor subjective work, and it is in fact the time when there are more subjective interferences to inner, subjective work. We have an example of these latter ideas demonstrated for us astrologically. In astrology, aside from transits, the secondary progressions of the moon reflect the preceding points to a great degree, especially in the emotional realm. The dark half of the progressed lunar cycle is typically not the happiest of times for people. People often report feeling blocked as to what they would like to do, they often feel depressed at times throughout that period, or at a loss as to why they feel somewhat at odds with life in general.



We have the following quote to illustrate the preceding regarding depression:^{3,4}

II. *Depression or its polar opposite, hilarity.* When we touch on the subject of depression we are dealing with something so widespread that few escape its attacks. It is like a miasma, a fog which environs the [person] and makes it impossible [for one] to see clearly, walk surely, and cognise Reality. It is part of the great astral illusion

and, if this is grasped, it will become apparent why depression exists, for the cause of it is either astral or physical and incident to a world situation or a personal situation. We might therefore study depression in individuals and look at its causes. It is caused by:

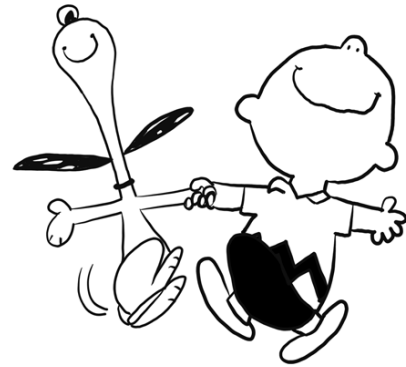
1. **The world glamour.** This sweeps an isolated unit, otherwise free from individual conditions producing depression, into the depths of a world reaction. This world glamour with its devitalising and depressing results has its roots in various factors which we have only the time to briefly indicate:

a. Astrological factors, either affecting the planetary chart and hence individuals, or primarily racial. These two factors are oft overlooked.

b. The path of the sun in the heavens. The southern path tends to a lowered vibratory influence [this applies solely to the northern hemisphere] and [in either hemisphere] aspirants should bear this in mind in autumn and the early winter months.

c. The dark half of the moon, the period towards the end of the waning moon, and the early new moon. This, as you well know, affects the meditation work.

d. Psychological factors and mass inhibitions due undoubtedly to forces external to the planet and to plans, obscure in their intent to ordinary humanity. These forces, playing upon the human race, affect the most sensitive; they in their turn affect their environment and gradually a momentum is established which sweeps through a race or a nation, through a period or a cycle of years, and produces conditions of profound depression and of mutual distrust. It causes a sad self-absorption and this we term a panic or a wave of unrest. The fact that the working out may be military, economic, social or political, that it may take the form of a war, of a religious inquisition, of financial stringency or international distrust is incidental. The causes lie back in the blue prints of the evolutionary process and are governed—even if unrealised—by the good Law.



Given the preceding, we may be apt to think of the day of the new moon and the entire period of the dark half of the moon as negative periods, but that would be a mistake. Instead, that time should be seen as part of a natural cycle, representing for us in human terms the ebb of meditative or internal focus, calling for us instead to put the outer world in order, to lay to rest those things that need to go by the wayside, to organize ourselves for renewed effort later in the lunar cycle—in other words, to finish up, consolidate and be ready for new efforts. The new moon in the progressed lunar cycle represents a fresh start, along with the gains made from the previous cycle. The progressed lunar cycle generally represents about twenty-nine years of life, roughly consistent with a cycle of transiting Saturn, and in tracking these two cycles through a person's life a fairly clear picture emerges as to the emotional and karmic cycles and obligations throughout life. In other words, the first twenty-nine years of life will find a reflection in the later such cycles, though with the foundation of past experience upon which to build.

During the progressed dark half of the moon, if one is feeling particularly beset by depression or lassitude, one's time is often best spent in reflecting over the preceding years since the previous progressed dark half, of putting one's emotional and mental life in order and thus seeing the best way to move forward when the moon leaves the dark phase of the cycle. Of course, the cycles of the planets overlap and intertwine and the planetary influences during one dark lunar phase will probably not be the same as the next or the previous such phase, but the emotional and mental trends of the dark half of the moon will still be present. We are given a glimpse as to the best course

of action during the dark half of the moon in the following quote, referring to a procedure in future esoteric schools, remembering that the year and the day have their ebb and flow corresponding to the lunar cycle:

[The student] writes during the ‘dark period’ of the year the themes and essays, the books and pamphlets that will embody the product of the assimilated information. The best of these books will be published yearly by the college, for the use of the public. In this way one serves one’s time and generation and educates the race in the higher knowledge. In exactly the same way one’s studies each month will be so arranged that the harder part (dealing with the higher mind) will be undertaken during the part of the month which is called the bright half [or the full moon period], whilst **the work of the dark half will be more given over to the things concerning lower mind and to an effort to hold the gain of the earlier weeks.**⁵



In that last sentence we get a clear picture of the best use of the period of the dark half of the moon. This method is followed in Buddhist monasteries, with the day of the new moon being given over to renewal of one’s vows and the taking of precepts. It is a day devoted to Shakyamuni and is known as such. As for precepts, it is a day when one abstains from any non-virtuous action, and it is seen as a special purification practice. Such a practice is seen as “the Buddha’s skillful method for purifying our negative karma.”⁶ The full moon, on the other hand, is known as Amitabha Day and is given over to Medicine Buddha (healing, shown left⁷) practice. Amitabha is the buddha of infinite light and life. Of special interest to astrologers and Theosophically-based students, the full moon day is also a special day for the practice of the Kalachakra Tantra. But why would the new moon in particular be associated with practices of purification? This relates to one of the more esoteric aspects of the moon, in particular with the lunar *pitris*, or ancestors. In Hinduism, the day of the new moon is called *Amavasya*. It is set aside for the worship of forefathers, or ancestors

in other words. In modern practice it is a day that is set aside to honor one’s relatives who have passed on, especially one’s parents, grandparents great-grandparents, etc. The word for ‘forefather’ in Sanskrit is *pitra*, which in the *Secret Doctrine*⁸ is associated with the lunar lords, or *pitris*—the progenitors of the human race, to keep things simple. We have the following passage:

The word *Pitri* does mean, no doubt, the ancestor; but that which is invoked is the *lunar wisdom* esoterically and not the “Lunar ancestor.” It is this Wisdom that was invoked by Qu-ta-my, the Chaldean, in *the Nabathean Agriculture*, who wrote down “the revelations of the Moon.” But there is *the other side* to this. If most of the Brahmanical religious ceremonies are connected with the full moon so do **the dark ceremonies of the sorcerers take place at the new moon and its last quarter**. For similarly when the lost human being, or sorcerer, attains the consummation of his depraved career, all the evil Karma, and the evil inspiration, comes down upon him as a dark incubus of iniquity from “the *dark side* of the moon,” which is a *terra incognita* to Science, but a well

explored land to the Adept. The Sorcerer, the Dugpa, who always performs his hellish rites on the day of the new moon, when the benignant [benevolent] influence of the Pitris is at its lowest ebb, crystallizes some of the Satanic energy of his predecessors in evil, and turns it to his own vile ends; while **the Brahman, on the other hand, pursues a corresponding benevolent course with the energy bequeathed him by his Pitris...Therefore, this is the true Spiritualism** of which the heart and soul have been entirely missed by the modern Spiritualists. When the day of the full revelation comes, it will be seen that the so-called “superstitions” of Brahmanism and the ancient Pagans in general were merely natural and psychical sciences, veiled from the profane eyes of the ignorant multitudes, for fear of desecration and abuse, by allegorical and symbolical disguises that modern science has failed to discover.⁹

Thus, we see how the lunar cycle works out, or any other planetary cycle for that matter, and the best types of activities in which to engage during the various parts of those cycles. During the dark part of the cycle the focus is upon putting ideas into tangible forms. For esoteric work, that means putting pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, if you will—putting one’s mind in order and passing on one’s insights to others. In other words, in whatever walk of life one has chosen, the time of the full moon is the period wherein subjective contacts are most easily made, ideas are most easily accessed and intuition more naturally flows, whereas the period of the new moon is the time best spent in outer activity, namely for making the insights garnered at the full moon accessible for others and concrete in some manner through outer activity. The following quote goes on to flesh out these points:

Each day will be likewise divided into set times, the earlier hours being those in which the more abstract and occult data will be given, the latter part of the day being given over to a more practical type of work...The basis of all occult growth is meditation, or those periods of silent gestation in which the soul grows in the silence. Therefore, during the day there will be...three periods of meditation—at sunrise, at midday, and at sunset...¹⁰

In addition:

An appreciation of the above thoughts should build in the aspirant a realisation of the value of one’s meditation work, whilst the idea of a cyclic response to soul impulse lies back of the activities of a morning meditation, a noonday recollection, and an evening review. A larger ebb and flow is also indicated in the two aspects of the full moon and the new moon. Let this be borne in mind.¹¹

And to finally close out this line of thought, or perhaps to open further avenues from the same:

There are crisis points at times of superlative tension in the meditative work of all...ashrams. At the times of the new moon and of the full moon, all members of all the ashrams meditate deeply in an invocative and evocative manner; their meditation, therefore, falls into two parts: the first part is evocative of inspiration from the nirmanakayas¹² with whom they deliberately get in touch; the second part is invocative of the New Group of World Servers and enables them responsively to come under hierarchical impression...¹³

The full moon involves the contact with the nirmanakayas, which is inward and subjective, whereas with the new moon we see the action of precipitation in some way—an outer manifestation or effort, and it is the latter in which the New Group of World Servers has a particular role to play. However, this outward focus still entails maintaining one’s inner contact with the higher Self and thus with one’s subjective group. One of the primary roles of this New Group is to offset whatever

darkness they encounter in the thoughts of humanity and bring light into human affairs. We can perhaps see from the discussion thus far that this group has a distinct role to play in the precipitation of divine purpose and universal love in the ‘real world’ of everyday physical existence, and the days of the new moon have a particular relation to this group.

A final point to be made in relation to the dark half of the moon is that the 29th day of the lunar month in Vajrayana Buddhism (tantric Buddhism) in particular is dedicated to the dharmapalas—the wrathful protectors of the dharma, or divine law. The most common of these protectors is Mahakala, however there are more than a dozen main ones, such as Palden Lhamo (shown right¹⁴), and each of the Tantras has their own special protectors. The main bastion of Vajrayana Buddhism in the past was Tibet, although Tibetan Buddhists have spread about the world now. Tibet before the introduction



of Buddhism was full of sorcerers, and it would come as no surprise that ‘Tibetan Buddhism’ would have such a day dedicated to protector practices, given the preceding quote. We in the West would likely dismiss such a day as non-essential or as simple superstition, but given that we have largely lost touch with the cycles of the moon and its not-so-subtle influence at times, I maintain that it would be of benefit to examine the days of the dark half of the moon more fully.

In effect, the protector practices begin with the 25th day of the lunar cycle in Vajrayana practice, as it is a day that is given over to dominating and destructive acts.¹⁵ The 25th day is devoted to the mother tantras¹⁶—what we might call the ‘Fierce Ladies’ in Vajrayana, although ‘fierce lady’ on the whole refers to kundalini, or *gtum mo* (Tibetan). All such tantras are wrathful practices, and as such they represent an expression of skillful means. Mother tantras represent the wisdom aspect of the path, whereas the father tantras represent the method aspect. In Eastern occultism, the father tantras are the yang aspect, and the mother tantras are the yin aspect. The mother tantras thus cultivate and safeguard the *essence* of the path to enlightenment. What is alluded to here is that from the 25th day of the lunar cycle one should aim to safeguard the essence of what has been learned or accessed in the earlier periods of the lunar cycle. Conversely, the aim in the waxing half of the lunar cycle is devoted to the methods of spiritual attainment and the safeguarding of those methods, which leads to revelation at the full moon if we are successful at our efforts.

How do we safeguard, in the latter quarter of the lunar cycle, the essence of what we have accessed or attained in the earlier phases of the lunar cycle? We could actually engage in one or more of the mother tantras, or we can take other approaches, and these are very effective. If we are not inclined to Buddhist or Hindu tantric practices, another method is to record our insights so they are not forgotten or corrupted as we go about our outer lives, as alluded to in one of the preceding quotes. Another method is to recount the workings of our mind throughout the cycle, whether that cycle be a day, a month or a year, and therein to ensure that we keep our mind focused upon the long-term goal and the tasks at hand instead of getting lost in or distracted by intrusive emotions and extraneous thoughts that really have no bearing on the essential purpose of our lives. What does it matter if we feel depressed, for instance? Do we let that shut us down, or do we move through it? What is the source of the depression? Is it from within us or elsewhere? What is the anger that underlies that depression—the anger that we are suppressing? What is it that intrudes upon our happiness? As we peel away the layers of those thoughts and emotions we eventually see that they have no basis in fact—that they are empty of any inherent existence in and of themselves. In this way we access and draw upon the ‘Fierce Ladies’, without even realizing it. The essence of the Mother is insuperable bliss and all of the mother tantras are involved in the direct realization of this supreme bliss—the Bliss that realizes Emptiness, or Clear Light.

Whatever path we have embraced in this life, whether it is religious, pagan, atheistic, Buddhist or what have you, the cycle of the moon affects us, physically and subjectively. We might dismiss its effects in our lives and go about our business, but to do so only introduces stresses that we are better off without. Dismissing the cycles of life are like trying to go without sleep—we can do so for a time, and wreck our health in the process, but eventually we succumb. On the other hand, if we see the opportunity represented in these cycles, then we can enter into cooperative grace with our inner nature and the greater collective rhythms of which we are a part. The dark half of the moon represents such an opportunity. And in rediscovering our own natural rhythms within these cycles, we release creative potentials that we probably had not realized were there. The dark half of the moon is a time of reflection and of putting things in order—the main thing being our own mind. Instead of its approach being seen in a negative light, may we instead come to see it simply as another interval on the path to greater realization.

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¹ This article is from <http://malvinartley.com>

² http://malvinartley.com/greater_picture.htm

³ Bailey, Alice A., *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 307

⁴ Charlie Brown comics by Charles Schultz

⁵ Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*, p. 326

⁶ <http://kadampa.org/buddhism/taking-precepts>

⁷ <http://www.dipankarabuddha.com/Medicine-Buddha>

⁸ Blavatsky, Helena, *The Secret Doctrine*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, IL.

⁹ Helena Blavatsky, *Collected Writings, Vol XII*, p.204

¹⁰ Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*, pp. 326–327

¹¹ Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic*, p. 64

¹² The nirmanakaya is one of the three bodies of a buddha. These are the so-called ‘body, speech and mind’, or *trikaya*, of a fully realized (enlightened) being, or buddha, not to be confused with the historical figure, but who was himself such a being.¹² The nirmanakaya (created body, manifesting in space and time), sambhogakaya (bliss body) and dharmakaya (truth body), refer to the body, speech and mind, respectively.

¹³ Bailey, *Discipleship in the New Age*, p. 217

¹⁴ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palden_Lhamo_2.jpg

¹⁵ Artley, Malvin, *The Full Moons: Topical Letters in Esoteric Astrology*, p. 352, E-book edition. A full discussion of this topic is given in the same work, starting on p. 352.

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anuttarayoga_Tantra Mother tantras in Tibetan are *ma rgyud*, the father tantras being *pha rgyud*. The referenced article gives a thumbnail account.