

Traver sings darkness

Tues. evening first night. Wed. second night. Thurs day third night. Fri. fourth night, Sat. fifth night. Sunday sixth night. Monday morning into the light.

As an avid autodidact explorer of consciousness upon hearing of Andrew Durham's darkness conjecture, I knew that this was for me. I just completed 5 days in the darkness retreat in Pajaj Cap and will try and write about my experiences during the week.

I had stopped drinking coffee to detox 2 days before starting, but got a headache on day two, when I was going into the dark – I did manage to get to San Pedro and pick up the veggie stock and buy a cup to drink from and drink my last smoothie of the week. Andrew is big on raw food diet, but I have not had good experiences with that type of diet and managed to convince him to make veggie and rice/pasta dishes for me and then fruit in the morning.

I arrived at about 5:00 and saw the room for the first time. It really has the feel of India – serious space to meditate.

Andrew is living in a porter's lodge. A couple had bought land, built the porter's lodge to live in while they built their own house. They had a conflict with the electric company and everything ground to a halt. Now they've gone off to Mexico and Andrew is taking care of the place. In what was the garage he has created the space for the Darkroom, It is totally devoid of light although one can hear sounds. The area is very quiet so this is not a problem (from my experience).

The room has a bed, a chair and a long bench to put your clothes and things on. There is a water container, a washtub (with hot water at mid day) and a hammock, a mat to do yoga on and a mulch toilet. I am not keen on mulch toilets but this one was marvelous- a smooth wooden seat, a decent lid and he has constructed an ingenious ventilation system that gets air coming in by the bed (nice fresh air while one sleeps) and a ventilation opening behind the toilet so the air goes out that way...i.e. no smell at all. Just the nice smell of the wood shavings one uses for compost toilets.

There is a little wooden "box" which opens from inside the room and from the outside as well. Andrew slides the food in from his side and then calls you. He closes his door and then one can open the little door/hatch and get the bowl out without light coming in. I ate fresh fruit in the morning and a warm meal in the late afternoon early evening. I had paper to write notes for him, if there was anything I needed and I could call him as well, as he has living quarters above the room.

I unpacked and we had a meal upstairs and talked things through before I went to bed for my first night. It was quite amazing to sleep in the total dark and in such a quiet place. I slept amazingly well and deeply. I remember day one as being a day of total rest; I meditated and slept, meditated and slept, ate and slept and got sort of accustomed to the room and moving around in the dark. The hardest was to dispense toothpaste on the toothbrush – by day 4 I got it right. This was also the day of "mind emptying" As I sat in the dark I could hear people's conversations, useless thoughts, rubbish really, the accumulation of nonsense that had filled my mind – I just observed it and let it go by – by the end of the day I felt much clearer and all the voices had ceased.

Andrew was supposed to go to Panajachel (about 1 hour by boat) but the winds were blowing quite a bit so he put off the excursion until the next day.

Day two (Thursday) Andrew said he would go to Panajachel and get the hammock sewn and pick up food. I felt a bit odd having him go off, but one can leave any time one wants – except that I had decided I was going to stay in the room and go through whatever turned up. I think this day was a real challenge for me. I had fruit in the morning and there were bananas to eat, at some point I lost all sense of time and then the monkey mind hops in and the worry starts... what if Andrew gets stranded in Pana because the winds are too strong?? (it was very gusty –and when it is bad the boats just stop until it quiets down – but the last boat gets in at 19:00) I felt it was late and freaking out a bit. Then I heard the main portal open and waited to hear Andrew call that he was back- - but no (Andrew was being considerate and trying not to disturb me). So in my mind if it wasn't Andrew then WHO WAS IT? And I freaked out some more. At this point the reddish light which I had been observing became very bright and felt consoling. I quieted down and at that point Andrew came down to say that he was back.

I have to backtrack a bit because at some time during the “day” I had decided to see if I could observe the aura of my hand in the dark. This I could not do, but the attempt seemed to spark off another way of seeing. There was a red light behind my right shoulder – enough light to see things – but it was not lighting the room I was in; I was seeing another space or other spaces. It turned out that it didn't matter if my eyes were closed or shut I saw the same. Some of it seemed to be cave-like with rock walls and “rock-like objects” lying on the “ground” I put these words into quotation marks because I really don't know what it was. The space was often curved or rounded; in the reddish light some of it was almost terracotta in color. There was, at times, a bright white light, which was similar to moonlight, where you can distinguish things, but not the details and there is a strange magical quality.

I observed all this and yet there wasn't any emotion attached... maybe just wonder. The only time I got a feeling from the light was when I was getting really worried and then it seemed consoling – but this is only a subjective response. These two light phenomena continued throughout the retreat – sometimes in the morning it wasn't there, but started up after I had done my morning yoga, bathing and breakfast. The white light came from the side and sometimes from above, the red light only from the side behind me. Throughout the entire time this other world I was seeing had the same overall sensation to it – the scenes changed, yet had the same consistency. Sometimes there were “walls” or large planes with very uniform textures unlike organic matter and yet not mechanically organized.

The second day three portals appeared: One to the east like a tunnel going down, one going down facing west and one above. I was too chicken to attempt to go down or up – simply observed. Later on the one above would sometimes enlarge and I would see “night sky” and what could look like landscapes. While lying in bed I would sometimes see intricate patterns on the surfaces of the planes – one evening they looked like Assyrian stone carvings.

I discovered that white objects in our reality could be seen in the red light, although at times white would look red. When Andrew came back from Panajachel with the hammock I could “see” it, yet my impression was that it was red - it was white in our reality. My duvet and blanket were white and I could at times see them faintly, but confused by the fact that there were large blobs of white around the “space” and often

merged with the duvet color. One morning I awoke and it seemed like the bed had light white cloth surrounding it, hanging from the ceiling – almost veil-like or like a mosquito-netting.

It turned out that Andrew had been a little delayed and yet it was only 4:30 when he got back (I thought it was evening). And thus I asked him to let me know when he left and when he returned (he would go shopping during the daytime). That night I had a type of lucid dream. I awoke, lying on my stomach and looked up to see a bright piece of material stretching out forward (actually where the wall was at the head of the bed) the colors were vibrant pink and orange in a mixture between a 70's pattern and Mexican design. I decided to see if I could see my hands – but no go. I turned onto my side and looked to the left and there was more “fabric” in the same pattern. This “seeing” was different than the daily “seeing” it had a strange “synthetic” quality to it – this is the wrong word, but at the moment I can't find a better one.

Day three (Friday) was a day of deep rest after the freaking out bit the day before. I realized how tiring emotions are – especially the negative, fear based ones... and how easily I still fall for the mind game of fear.

This day my meditations increased to 4 times: kriya yoga in the early morning. Vipassana around mid day, kriya yoga in the afternoon and Vipassana before evening (I gauged time by the arrival of food and knowing that a full Kriya Yoga and mantra takes me at least an hour and twenty minutes) . Unlike my daily meditation routine which needs discipline from my part to instigate, in the darkroom there was a lightness to doing it – a naturalness – At times the white light would shine from above during meditation.

I found it the most perfect environment for meditation and sent daily gratitude and greetings to Purushotamananda: a yogi who lived by the Ganges near Rishikesh and meditated in a cave which is said to have “housed” yogis for thousands of years. I had a great teaching by him in the cave – he had been dead for several years but was truly present in that space!

The hammock was pure joy. I lay in it for hours; the air current from the ventilation system streamed by my left side, so rocking slightly in the hammock with the cool air streaming felt like I was on a boat sailing on a calm sea. Unlike the noisy rubbish thoughts that were in my mind on the first day, lying in the hammock, images would arise from deep within my being, scenes from the past, people I had known, places I had been. I let this flow and followed some trains of association. One person kept coming to mind and I have since written to her – wondering why she came through so clearly.

I did some inner forgiveness work on situations from the past which arose. I also continued a process instigated before the retreat with Pascal's psycho-kinesiology – dealing with some issues about my mother. I love the beautiful simplicity and deeply effective Ho'opono'ono forgiveness gift.

At one point I found myself reciting the Tibetan “Om Mane Padre Om” mantra which arose spontaneously and continued for some time and then receded.

My appetite had a tendency to swing from day to day: one day with little hunger, the next day hungry in the afternoon, day three – not so hungry etc. Unlike during fasts I had no wild desires for certain foods or miss my coffee. The fruit was delicious when I ate it. When I was hungry, food tasted great, but it didn't have the importance as before. I was happy to discover that Andrew is a good cook! The tiny bananas here in Guatemala are divine and the watermelon was amazing.

There was one night I couldn't sleep – extremely restless and then the mind kicked in with the fear garbage again – what if there was an earthquake and I was stuck in this room in the dark? Now I was really not stuck in the room at all because I could just go out, but there wasn't an electric light. So after much rumination - I kept thinking I should try and sleep in the hammock, so I crawled into it, with my flashlight in my pocket and slept a little but mostly tossed and turned. Finally the universe decided "enough" and the hammock slowly dropped me onto the floor – I got up and went to bed. That night I had nightmares and woke up feeling tired and a bit out of balance – but the darkness is wonderful – it relaxes you and gives one the opportunity to rest and restore oneself. There wasn't too much light phenomena going on – as if I should just rest and not do anything but that. Eventually I felt restored and made my bed (which is not easy in the dark) and bathed, washed my hair (I did this several times during my stay and found it fairly easy and refreshing) I sponge bathed daily and on the third day sat in the tub and scrubbed myself feeling like myself three years old when I would spend endless hours in a metal tub playing with water.

It was a true gift to not think about the future, in the darkness I was very much in the present moment, which is where it all happens.

My last day was peaceful and quiet – space to prepare for leaving. I had time to meditate and give my prayer of thanks to all who had taken care of me, to Andrew who had made it possible and to the space for nurturing me during the process.

At 5:00 Andrew came to get me. I went through the three doors out to a beautiful starry sky above me and the cool morning air. We walked up the mountain to a gorgeous spot where we could sit and watch the sun rise over Lake Atitlán. It was amazing beyond words.

Venus was in the sky directly in front of me. The sun lit the volcanoes from behind, the birds started singing and flying about. I was overwhelmed – felt like I was seeing everything for the first time. Andrew went down to get some more sleep and I had some time on my own to enjoy the beauty of the day. The sky was now the bluest I have ever seen and a bunch of bright yellow birds were busy in a tree near by; the first boat to Panajachel sailed past on the lake below. When the sun had risen completely over the mountains I went downstairs and packed my bag.

It was a great gift to have had these days in the dark: To discover the softness and spaciousness of darkness; to have had the opportunity to see another dimension/world. The opportunity for the organism to rest so deeply is a unique experience. To feel the soft embrace of darkness – is so beautiful, for all this I am so grateful.