

C H A P T E R O N E

THE STAR
IN MY HEART

WISDOM IS BRIGHT AND DOES NOT GROW DIM. BY
THOSE WHO LOVE HER SHE IS READILY SEEN, AND
FOUND BY THOSE WHO LOOK FOR HER.

— *Wisdom 6:12*

Sophia, to you I come:
you are the Wisdom of God
you are the Whirl of the Spirit
you are the Intimate Connection
you are the Star in my Heart

Sophia,
open my being to the radiance of your presence
to the guidance of your companionship

to the compassion of your indwelling
to the lighting of your blessed vision

Sophia,
trusted friend, beloved companion,
Sophia,
mercy-maker, truth-bearer, love-dweller,
Sophia,
all goodness resides within you.

Sophia,
take me by the hand
bless the frailty of my weak places
strengthen my ability to dwell in darkness
for it is there that your deepest secrets are revealed.

Sophia,
we walk together!

—Joyce Rupp

The stars have long been earth companions for me. Since I was a child I have looked at the night skies and loved what I saw there. Something about the stars radiates hope in my heart and draws me far beyond my little space of earth. An old family friend told me that one evening he and his wife had come to visit my mother and father after we children were all safely tucked into bed. Late in the evening they heard a rustle in the kitchen, and they

found me standing by the window. When they asked me why I wasn't in bed, I said very plainly in my three-year-old voice, "Oh, I just wanted to come down and look at the stars." Hearing this story made me wonder if my love of the stars was perhaps born at that very early age. It certainly confirmed my deep connection with these radiant friends of the universe.

As an adult I have kept my fondness for the stars and feel a special leap of delight when I pause in a wintry evening to see the strong and bold marks of Orion in the sky. Or on a summer's night, to walk along and gaze up at the community of light in the Pleiades. I feel that the stars bless me with their presence. There have been times in the midst of deep pain in my heart that I have walked under the night sky and cried out to God, "By the light of your stars, heal me." There is something extremely consoling about walking in great darkness and having the light of the stars to guide the way. After a walk under the stars, light eventually returns to my darkened spirit. The healing that I need comes in future days (or months!) through people, books, sacred moments, music, insights, all of which clarify my confusion and soften the pain in my heart.

I like to think of Sophia as a star in my heart, one whose light guides me and consoles me in my inner darkness, drawing me to a bondedness with a

greater truth than I presently know or understand. No matter how hard I fight to stay “in the light,” I will have some darkness in my life. This is as sure as the pattern of sunrise and sunset in the natural course of the day. My darkness comes from many sources, sometimes from the pain and struggle of changing ideas, relationships or work, or from my participation in the human condition of aging, accidents, and illness. It has also come from that silent journey when I have desired to be more united with the Divine who is the beloved one dwelling at the center of who I am. This calls for the risky journey into the depths of my self because, most often, the way to the Divine is one of going through the passage of darkness within, having only the glimmer of Sophia’s light to tend the way

The Divine is also discovered in my happy, joyous, light-filled times, but no matter how much light I carry within me, there will always be times of feeling lost, being confused, seeking direction. It is the way of the human heart. It is the way of going inward. It is the way of Sophia.

At times I have found it difficult to believe that darkness could be a source of growth. Darkness to a child, as well as to many adults, can be a scary, fearsome place where wild creatures wait to pounce and prey. But, in actuality, some kinds of darkness are truly our friends. The world of our mother’s

womb had no light: It is where we grew wonderfully and filled out our tiny limbs of life. Our earth would be quite lifeless, too, if we did not plant seeds deep within the lonely darkness of the soil so they could germinate and bring forth green shoots. I know, too, that we would soon die of an overheated planet if nightfall did not come to soothe the sun-filled land. Darkness is very essential for some aspects of growth and protection.

But there is also an unfriendly darkness, like human destructiveness or hate, a blackness that can maim and wound us mentally, emotionally, spiritually. It is the kind that will lead us to despair, where we end up hurting ourselves or others. It destroys our hope and our positive view of life. We do not grow in this kind of darkness. We turn in on self. We stop believing in our goodness and beauty and that of others.

How do I know what kind of darkness to stay in? It is not easy to know. Sometimes I just do not know. I always need someone to walk faithfully with me during these times of darkness. Sophia's light and guidance are present to me through my human companions. A spiritual guide or a counseling companion is a great blessing at such a time. If at all possible, I need to find these people and welcome them into my life. If I call on Sophia, she will lead me to these companions.

I will need to wait the darkness out, say it out, pray it out. Eventually, I will know what kind of darkness it is by the effects that it has on my life and on the lives of those around me. If it brings life (new hope, greater understanding, more courage, deeper trust . . .), the darkness is my friend. I believe that almost all of my darkness is life-giving if I have Sophia with me. Jessica Powers understood this when she wrote: "God sits on a chair of darkness in my soul."¹ Sophia is my Star to light up what seems to be an unbearable or impossible passage of life. I may not want to believe that darkness can be growthful because ache, loneliness, hurt, hollowness are not feelings that I enjoy. Yet, if I look back on my life, to those dark times, I can see that I have, or could have, grown deeper and wiser from my experience of the darkness.

I remember a passageway in my life, years ago, when I was far from home for the first time. I lived with people I did not know. I taught school in a place I did not like. I felt a tremendous loneliness like a black cloud over me day after day. I felt sad and empty all the time. I could not imagine how this darkness would be good for me. All I wanted to do was to run away from it. But I had accepted a teaching position, and I felt a responsibility to stay.

This experience ended up being one of the best things that ever happened to me. I call those years

of loneliness my “island years” because it was then that I learned to live with myself. After several months of intense sadness, something in me nudged me to go to the woods regularly to ponder life. At first when I went there, I felt only my loneliness. Eventually I began to learn from it. My loneliness was saying to me, “Spend time with yourself. Don’t run away.” I began to see how afraid I was of myself, how fearful I was to look inside. As I was drawn to go within, I discovered, to my great surprise, that there was goodness and beauty there. I learned, too, that I was not alone. I began sensing the companionship of God dwelling within me. I did not know Sophia then, but now I see that it was she who guided me during that dark time. It was she who led me through my fears and loneliness. It was Sophia who held my hand and drew me to her light within me.

There is a story told in the Christian scriptures of three astrologers who followed an immensely bright star (Matthew 2:1–12). They were so drawn by this star that they followed a hunch in their hearts that it would lead them to the Divine. So set were their hearts on this bright vision in the sky that they pursued it over great distances and through many struggles. Following the star meant that they had to do their traveling at night. They did not know where they would be led. They only knew that they had to follow. They lost sight of the star, and in great humility,

they had to rely on other starseekers to tell them where to locate the star again.

This star “filled their hearts with delight” (Matthew 2:10). They continued to follow it in the darkness of the night, journeying until finally they found themselves at the feet of the one whom they had long sought. Surely Sophia must have danced a radiant star dance on that night when these weary travelers finally reached the goal of their long journey.

This story is so like my own inner one. I feel drawn to seek the Divine. I go mostly in the night, not being sure of the direction, or of what this God will look like, or where the journey will take me. I lose my way. Then I find others who have seen the star. They show me and guide me. I find the way again. And one day I discover God as the beloved, the one for whom I have so yearned. This may be in the most unlikely of places, and perhaps just for a fleeting moment, but I know in that brief discovery that the journey has been worth it. My heart, like those seekers of long ago, is filled with delight. This discovery is usually a very brief experience. And so I continue on the journey of life with hope in my heart, seeking by the light of the star to have another glimpse of the beloved.

This is the way of those who choose to know Sophia and to pursue her secrets, the secrets of wisdom that lead to wholeness of life, to peace of heart.

I love the Star in my heart. She has taken my hand so often and has led me through the dark times. I believe that she is a companion through the darkness for all of us. She helps us to not be so afraid and to trust in our journey to the inner places which we have yet to visit. It is good for us to remember this truth in our dark times, for Sophia is "*bright and does not grow dim. By those who love her she is readily seen, and found by those who look for her*" (Wisdom 6:12).

Here are some of the wisdoms I am finding with Sophia's guidance:

- ☉ *Solitude* and *reflection* are essential for my inward journey, but I also need *others* to help me walk through the fearsome tunnels of darkness.
- ☉ In the seasons of my inner life, Sophia's presence can soften the anguish or isolation of the darkness, but she will not take it away from me. The darkness is necessary for my *growth*.
- ☉ My fears and anxieties can quietly, or noisily, tend to take over my decisions and my choices if there is no *awareness* of them, sapping me of my energy for life-giving experiences.
- ☉ If I stay in the *darkness* long enough, my eyes become more accustomed to the dark, and I

begin to see things of *beauty* and *freedom* that I never knew were present.

Meeting Sophia

1. Take time with the stars. Sit under them. Walk with them. Let yourself dance with them. Be with these friends of the universe and let them speak to you of the journey in your heart.
2. Reflect upon the Star in your heart.

Relax your body/mind/spirit. See yourself in a place of beauty somewhere away from the city. Use your senses to become a part of your environment. Notice how the air smells, what you hear. Sit down and feel the earth or sand or rock or . . . Be attentive to all that you can see around you.

Dusk slowly comes to the place where you are sitting. Be with the sunset, the fading hot, the darkness as it quietly descends upon you. See yourself sitting now in the darkness. Look up and see that the first star of the evening has come. Continue to look and see how the sky gradually fills with a brilliant, star-filled expanse. Everywhere you look there are stars sparkling and glowing.

Focus on one star. See it slowly fall from the sky. It glides toward you in a welcoming way. It comes closer. Quietly, tenderly, it falls into your heart. It does so with great ease and comfort. It does not burn or harm. It only glows with peaceful light. See the star shining there for you. Rest in peace with the star. Speak to the star. Let the star speak to you. Continue to be with the star until you are both silent again. Gradually return to the daylight.

Take some time to write or draw or paint your response to this meeting of the Star in your heart. You might also consider using clay to complete this experience of the Star within you. Let the clay speak of the Star falling into your heart.

3. Reflect on your own wisdoms regarding the Star in your heart. How have you experienced darkness? What do you know of Sophia's presence in your darkness? What do you believe about your life's journey of darkness and light? Write these discovered wisdoms in your journal.
4. Try drawing a mandala, a sacred circle. Fill it with symbols or words that describe the light and the dark within you. Let yourself enter into this sacred image. After this "entering in," write a prayer to Sophia.