

# Between Light and Darkness

**A lesson I have learned from Orpheus**  
**By Sivan Barzilay**

In recent months I have found myself walking between the light and darkness, on the seam line of the mysteries of life. People, both close and more distant, have passed away in circumstances that for some was a release from great suffering, while others caught me by surprise ... And death, as always, is as real as life itself. It is hard to escape or hide from it. It knocks on your door and stands in front of you; steady, terminal and clear. And you can do nothing but deal with it.

Through these days I encountered once again an ancient myth that over the course of history has been recounted repeatedly, as if it was trying to tell us something, teaching us about ourselves, and the simple truths of existence. The words of this myth, printed in black ink on white sheets, enchanted me for a few days and helped me understand something not only about Death, but mainly about Life.

It is the ancient myth about the hero Orpheus, son of the Muse Calliope. From the God Apollo, Orpheus received a musical instrument, a Lyre, a kind of great harp, and with time he grew up to become a master of song and music. Playing his Lyre, he mesmerized everyone that listened. The trees and stones tuned themselves to his music and animals fell silent when he played. The rivers diverted the direction of their flow and the waves of the sea became calm at the sound of his playing.

Orpheus wanted to marry the nymph Eurydice whom he loved intensely. But on their wedding day, Eurydice ran through a field and stepped on a venomous serpent that bit her and killed her on the spot. Orpheus received the sudden bitter message and fell into a deep mourning, refusing to be consoled. He stopped playing and stopped singing.

The days passed and his grief was so great that he decided to set off on a journey to convince Hades, the king of the underworld, to return his lost love.

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On the way to the underworld, he sang and played his Lyre. His singing was so beautiful that the earth itself, captured by the magic of his poetry, opened up and allowed him to descend into the underworld. There he met Kharon, the sailor who helped him cross the Styx River that separates the land of life from the land of death. Cerberus, the four-headed monster, captivated by the magic of his music, allowed him almost effortlessly, to enter the domain where no living human had ever before entered.



In the underworld he met Hades and Persephone and put forth his request- to take Eurydice back to the world of Life. Seeing his great love, they decided to extend him a one-off act of kindness. He was allowed to take his beloved back, but only on the condition that he go before her, and that he does not turn his head towards her until they were completely out of the underworld.

Orpheus agreed and began the journey. They walked quietly, Orpheus first and Eurydice behind him. Slowly Orpheus started getting suspicious. He called out to her but as per her promise to Hades she did not answer. His doubt grew and alas, towards the end of the journey, when they entered a hole through which they passed out, Orpheus who crossed through first, in the heat of the moment, looked back and extended his hand to his beloved. In that moment, she drifted back and disappeared saying "Goodbye!"

In the mythology, a language of symbols, there are no coincidences, and the fact that the name Orpheus means "darkness of the night" can teach us something about this movement between darkness and light.

Anne Wroe, in her article "Why the Mythological Muse Haunts Us," suggests that this movement can serve as a metaphor for the journey of the seed on Earth: from light into darkness, and back to light again. Emitted from a fruit into the darkness of the earth, the seed comes back to light by its own force.

The great cycles of Nature occur again and again, inspiring us, confusing us and more than all, teaching us. It touches one of the greatest dilemmas of the human condition: LIFE – DEATH. We come to this world, learn its ways, develop relationships, and collect memories. Then at some time, with no prior preparation, we must leave it all behind...

Life does not have bugs; it is neither bad nor good. It is just Life. And for those who look more closely, Life might share a great story.

A few years ago, I went to offer my condolences to a family that had suddenly lost the father of the family. The youngest son told me something that stayed with me... He said that up to that moment he had felt that life is great and perfect, but that losing his father was so painful that he suddenly felt that there was a "bug" in the system ... it couldn't be... How could it be that day after day people lose those that they love so much...

But Life does not have bugs; it is neither bad nor good. It is just Life. And for those who look more closely, Life might share a great story. A story about who we are: an eternal being that arrived into this world and fell in love with its own reflection. So much so that the being believes that the reflection is him. But every time he holds on to one reflection, it is taken from him... and like a man standing on the seashore he tries to catch the waves. He remains sad, frustrated, lacking any real answers.

Till one day, after learning to let go of all illusion, he might realize that by letting go of what he is not, he might find what he is.

The story of Orpheus is very old but it seems that even today, Orpheus walks among us, a wandering musician, reminding us of something... he taps gently on our shoulders, refusing to be forgotten and teaches us about a life of Mystery, Love, Loss and Wisodm. ★★★

**Bibliography:**

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/ann-wroes-orpheus-why-the-mythological-muse-haunts-us>

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