We usually associate darkness and shadows with fear: of the unknown, of being lost and never finding the way home again, of getting swallowed up, of entering territories beyond redemption, the “dark night of the soul,” not seeing or being unable to see clearly, in a fog or a haze, and so on.

But if we allowed ourselves to lean in to our shadows, we might come to quickly regard them as our ultimate companions, directors, and guides. They show us our failings in their rawest, most unadulterated forms, without blink or solace. They are direct and revealing, exposing trauma, anger, fear, uncertainty, and many other shortcomings that we need to address. And it’s not as if we can avoid them in any event, because they don’t allow us to run away for long, despite our best efforts.

For all of us with strong, deep and undeniable spiritual longings, these traumas and fears can certainly be impediments to our flow and alignment with the Universe or God. But they are also powerful invitations to process that which ails us.

Seen in this way, shadows are not always harsh, and can be gentle, like those arising with the sun in the morning, or those in the evening, when it sets. At night, they comfort us as they become softly illuminated by candles and intertwine with wafting incense. And they encourage us as we start seeing beyond our hard edges, and move into the unknown with grace, acceptance and faith.

continued on next page
Those spiritual shadows, then, even as they usher in the often necessary dark night of our souls, are also the ultimate harbingers of light. At the bottom of a well of darkness, they light up the top of the universe. If we let them, they can profoundly and astutely guide us through our discomfort and pain, helping us work through our losses and fears, and towards Love and Compassion. Into the bosom of however we might conceive our transcendent immanence.

The shadow is thus like compost to our spiritual flowering. It shows us what to process, and keeps pointing to what needs tending over and over again, as we slowly discern our way through heartbreak to growing insight and maturity.

And as our healing takes root, our shadows turn into fertilizers for our spiritual journey and ascendancy.

Like able spiritual companions, they mirror our progress, and continue to act as sentinels to our souls, always on the lookout for our relapses, and directing us to be honest on our paths.

And unlike most companions, and the things of this world, they never leave us, because we are them, beyond our arising. Our growing maturity, in fact, is a resolution into their essence, and a recognition that we are never separate. From them. Or anything. So much so that when we are gone, we are still truly here.

Our shadow remains forever. And it walks in our footsteps effortlessly and constantly. Why not embrace it? And move forward in its company with courage, determination, understanding and Love?
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May you be blessed by the peace of aloneness and the stillness of a summer night.

Christine S. Davis is a poet, academic, artist, and spiritual director. Christine publishes poetry on the blog, “Focail do a Chara,” which is Gaelic for “Words for a Friend.” Christine writes about end of life, social justice, and compassionate living, at the intersection of contemplative and arts-based methods of understanding. Contact Christine at Csdavis2@uncc.edu.
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formed deep inside the earth’ crust
he stands solid, unadorned,
a symbol of
strength.
The bounty of summer –
muted rust and deep
gold – crunches
underfoot. Naked
branches creak, crack,
in the cool wind.
Autumn – a time
to go within,
to see
oneness
with creation.
A time
he stands
his ground.

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Crossing long fields,
frozen in its saddle,
my shadow creeps by

(Matsuo Bashō)
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