

When his young disciples asked the Buddha, “What is Light?”, he asked his disciples the question rephrased, “What is Light to you? Light can be physical, metaphorical, spiritual, symbolic, scientific, hypothetical. It all depends on your perspective. How would you answer that question? For me there is no one answer or right answer. Light for me is both scientific and spiritual, at times essential and at times undesirable (especially when I’m sleeping), it is a source of warmth and also a force that burns, an energy enabling growth, and one that brings destruction, and a symbol of hope for days to come even in times of despair. Light that is most meaningful to me can come from any source.

So Where do I find this light when I need it? I take a look around.

Literally I find it

In the warmth of the sun on a cool morning as I head to that 8 AM class

In the blinding two feet of winter snow and the adrenaline, slides, and oddly shaped snow-people I make

I find light emotionally

In those professors who care about my wellbeing, who do not classify my questions as stupid or smart, and who give me extensions when I need them.

In the health counselors and chaplaincy at Tufts who remind me that life is a journey where you stumble and fall. And that’s ok. Talk helps.

In class peers who are struggling through problem sets, code, papers, reports and who come together with dedicated teaching assistants to get results and have fun while doing it

In the college transition advisors, ACE Fellows, writing and subject tutors, time management counselors, academic advisors who are there to support me as I switch between 9 majors in a single year.

In the group of 6 at Tufts, student organizations, and spiritual spaces on campus where I always feel welcomed, even if I do not identify in a certain way.

In the close friends who care about me wholeheartedly. In the 4 am chats we have, our hugs, our parties, our disagreements. In the times we move towards discomfort and not away from it. In the moments that make me feel loved

Even In the Tufts strangers who stroll with me to classes, while in that brief moment we acknowledge our common bond as members of the Tufts community, and our mutual dread of walking up the hill

In these walks it’s occurred to me that the dichotomy between walking up and down the hill in the physical geography of the Tufts campus can be a metaphor for intangible light of the inner landscape. It is so much easier to go downhill, to fall into pessimism and alienation. Whereas

the labor of treading back uphill can feel as if I'm carrying the weight of the entire universe with me. With each step I take, that exam tomorrow is looming on one hand but wait, I've got that paper due tomorrow too, my club meetings at 9, practice tomorrow morning at the gym— aagh have I been eating my meals on time? Sleeping? But I've only got two hands!

Breathe. No, I'm fine. I'm treading uphill. There is a light at the top of the hill, and I am almost there. So let me fight through the pain and this hardship. After all, no pain no gain right?

My reflections on the Buddha's teachings of light have led me to think differently, of welcoming the struggles as a vital part of the journey. Sure, there is light on top of the hill. But the journey to the light is just as important as the destination. Ofcourse, there are a whole cadre of people willing to guide me with their light along the way But in order to have a meaningful journey to the top, I must also recognize the light within myself.

I must keep that light alive. stop in my tracks to check in with the pace of my breath, the fluttering of my heart,. To stop and remind myself that sleeping, eating, laughing, doodling, dancing, playing, breathing, and building wholehearted connections with myself and others are just as equal measures of success as are my grades. To fully embrace and nurture the warmth and joy at the top of the hill, to find long term success, I need to embrace and appreciate others, and even before that, I need to embrace and appreciate myself.

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