



What Light Touches

A Prompt for Contemplation by Susan Patrice

As we enter the season of light, it is good to remember that the fundamental nature of light has eluded scientists for centuries. While we can see what light illuminates and explore light's actions and deeds, light itself remains invisible. Shine light into a dark chamber, and it is only made known by what it touches. Much like our ancient ancestors, we are still in the dark standing before light's mystery.

To Begin A Winter Practice

Slowing to winter's pace, we can use photography to look with curiosity into the seen and unseen areas of our daily lives. The poet and photographer Louisa Abbot offers these questions for reflection and image-making:

What does light reveal? What do shadows hide? What do shadows reveal?
What does light hide?

In the days leading up to Winter Solstice, with camera in hand, use these questions as a prompt for noticing and responding to light and shadow in all of its forms.

Through this simple act of noticing and responding, we build a bridge between opposites -- light and dark, spirit and matter, the human and more-than-human world - - while forging an embodied experience of creative faith in what matters. For many of us who are dedicated to the care of the earth, what matters to us is Matter herself. For some of us, our love of the natural world inspires both the lightness of love as well as the darkness of grief for what we have lost and continue to lose.

My Celtic ancestors would have attended light's mystery at the Winter Solstice. With rituals that marked the longest night of the year, we would have prayed and celebrated the return of the sun. The awareness of light's return in winter was felt at a deeper level than the rebirth of the sun in spring with all its hopeful radiance and promise of new life. The light of Winter Solstice is altogether different, born of shadows that teach us how even -- and especially -- in our darkest night, light will come to meet us.

As a contemplative photographer, I can't think of a time more worthy of celebration and reflection than Winter Solstice. Photography at its best lives at the mysterious edges of dark and light. Through the practice of seeing and opening we learn to love the ordinary world with all of its imperfections as well as its extraordinary beauty.

During these dark and slow months, winter invites us to take courage in what we share in common with the mystery of light. Light is made known by what it touches. Maybe we, too, make ourselves known by what we touch. Our gifts, including our gifts of seeing and responding, are our radiance. Light shared gives form and shape to our being. Quantum physics teaches us that relationship establishes being. Through photography we can see evidence of the ways in which inner light matters as much as the world's outer light. Sometimes, it takes the slow dark winter for us to remember and faithfully find our light again.

Poet Benjamin Culter in his poem *An Invitation to Light*, reminds us: Let us tie each frayed photon / into a new far reaching braid / Light needs such quiet gentle work.

Look for Seeing Beauty Awe Walks and word on upcoming opportunities for practice with Photographer Susan Patrice to resume in the new year. Keep checking [Adult & Continuing Education Classes and sign up for our monthly e-newsletter](#).

For information, email adulthoodeducation@ncarboretum.org

May the light of this season touch you with its slow important work,
and may you in turn touch others with your unique light.