

Finding the light

By [Patrick Prag](#)

August 1, 2014

I slid off the trail and let my backpack fall from my shoulder to the duff below. For the first time in 15 weeks, my soul felt like it was loose, not lassoed by its feet and dragged behind its own horse.

I had been so wrapped up in graduate school and work that I had lost touch with my sense of feeling alive, of being connected to anything besides production. Mostly I had lost a sense of connection with the ground of being—that sense that the universe actually has a plan, even if we humans are not listening to it; that sense that I am connected to something larger than myself.

Above the tree line in Colorado's alpine terrain, I saw intense beauty. It was a tangible reminder of all that is alive and organized in harmony, all that invites one to quietly listen and marvel. To realize for a moment that we are part of this system, the definition of beauty. Even the geometry of the tiniest pink and white asters, no larger than a baby's tiny pinky nail, shout that they are not a trivial accident.

I found a comma-shaped log to sit on, slid onto it like you might onto a horse you're not sure of. It was New England gray, the grain exaggerated by years of wear. Each line was now a story twisted and deep and wide, telling the secrets of the forest, each a lifetime that we miss when we are in a hurry.

From where I sat there was a natural long corridor in the trees, and the sun was now low on the horizon. I hoped that if I waited patiently I might get treated to some interesting happening with the light. I thought back to my younger days in the [Range of Light](#). I remembered the stories about Ansel Adams humping his odd and bulky camera all over the Yosemite waiting for his light to appear.

I was married in Yosemite, and somehow my daughter got a hold of the vows I wrote for Pam and spoke to her on an August morning in the Ahwahnee Meadow. Hillary wanted to know if she could use the vows in her upcoming wedding. I reacted strongly and coldly to her request. "No, those are for your mother," I replied curtly, and I tried to leave it at that.

Walking gave me time to unravel what was bothering me about my daughter's wedding plans. I dearly love Hillary and Stephanie. They are working hard at planning a beautiful ceremony that incorporates their surprise and joy that God has brought them together. I have no issue with women marrying women. It makes sense that God would manifest his love through two humans willing to do the hard work of emotional accountability that true relationship demands. If you think a woman and a woman is "un-biblical" then explain the mystery of the Trinity: two dudes and a Ghost; they seem to make it work.

But I wanted them to hammer out their own theology around marriage, not to try and fill an old wineskin with new wine. In this world of sound bites, blogs, and coffee in the sanctuary, it's all too easy to let someone else do our work. When we hit a pothole or go off a cliff spiritually, someone else's theology is going to be impotent.

The light began to filter through the pines. Light in aspens and pines has its own music: each side of the leaf plays a different cord, but together they are as complicated and simple as it gets.

Perhaps this light is special because it moves above the glaciers and the cool, rocky passes. It picks up their truth and honesty and breathes it in deeply. Then it skips down above the treeless shoulder of the mountain I just descended, filled with wild yellow daisies and pink paintbrush. Perhaps this gives the light an extra lightness and joy before passing through pine.

In any case, by the time it got to me it was as holy a reflection of life as can be.

This is the kind of peace and truth that I wish for Hillary: a holiness that comes to us through the intensity and complexity of life. We breathe it in and see where the light has traveled to get us all to where we are.

A poet friend told me recently that her dad got angry about plates or napkins or some such nonsense leading up to her wedding day. I told her I hate when dads do that, get angry or controlling when they are anxious. I think I'll scale back my theological expectations. Hillary and Stephanie will find their light. That's as complicated and simple as it gets.