

## Light is the Essence of All Things

When the sun shines, do the rays of light ever stop moving, or do they flow continuously, infinitely? If we are all made from stardust, a product of the chaos of cosmic soup, and light itself, does this make us infinite beings?

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### We Are Infinite

Maybe we are finite flesh creatures—bound by gravity, destined to die, to bleed, and to feel pain, joy, anger, lust, and greed—but we are also infinite in a cosmic sense. Even if life is the ultimate hardcore video game where you never respawn, your body will eventually decompose, nourishing the soil, the worms, trees, bees, and natural things that exist in **infinite cycles of death and rebirth**. Our flame may flicker out at the end of our life, but perhaps our light shines on forever.

### You Are the Light of the Earth

When Jesus said, “*you are the light of the earth*,” I think about this metaphorically. I believe we all carry our own inner light. Through the actions and interactions we take in everyday life—acts of kindness, creativity, and love—we leave an everlasting and infinite impact on the world around us.

### The Power of Light

I watched the movie *Oppenheimer* in theaters with two friends, and I still remember the scene where they split the atom for the first time. The screen went silent, and light completely filled the frame.

$$E=mc^2$$

It's fascinating to think about how light can emerge from the smallest bit of matter—from a single atom—and produce a nuclear explosion of energy. That flash of light, born from splitting the tiniest particle, symbolizes the incredible power hidden in the fabric of the universe.

## Let There Be Light

I toured the Masonic Temple in Philadelphia with a friend, just across from City Hall, and was intrigued by their use of the phrase "*Fiat Lux*"—*let there be light*.

In the Bible's introduction, in Genesis, the story of creation begins in a void of darkness until God says, "*Let there be light*." This divine force that brings order to chaos connects the physical, spiritual, and infinite essence of life through the power of light.

While on the tour, I noticed a beautiful stained glass window in the temple, depicting Moses at the burning bush, where God reveals himself as "*I AM WHO I AM*." The most puzzling aspect of this story is that the bush was on fire but not consumed. This reminds me that God's light is not here to destroy but to guide—a call to action that drove Moses to free the Israelites. From an artistic perspective, the way light is filtered through stained glass is sublime.

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## Luminus Obscura

The essence of photography lies in light itself, its primary substance, and its telos—the act of drawing or creating with light.

*The word "photography" originates from the Greek words:*

1. "*Phōs*" (φῶς): *Meaning light.*
2. "*Graphē*" (γραφή): *Meaning drawing or writing.*

The other day, while waiting for the bus, I started making macro photos of the texture on the glass at the bus stop window. As my camera tried to focus using the macro function, I noticed how the light from passing cars reflected off the glass and emanated through my lens. This obscured light transcended reality—a happy accident—showing me something beyond the surface. Watching the light dance on the LCD screen of my camera, I realized again: light is the essence of all things.

### **Photography Transcends Reality**

The act of making a photograph feels Godlike. When I move my body through the world, recognizing patterns in nature—the way light shines and casts upon surfaces—and in human behavior—the way people’s feet dance on the concrete—I immerse myself in the moment. Through the click of a shutter, I affirm life, abstracting and extracting from reality itself.

This is why I believe photography transcends reality. I’m not necessarily making a photograph of what I saw, but of what the camera sees. The camera absorbs the rays of the sun, channels light through its lens, and fills its sensor with illumination. I’m not trying to document what life *is* but what it *could be* through the lens of a camera.

### **Light is Out of Our Control**

One reason I prefer natural light over flash is its unpredictability. I don’t need to carry light to illuminate a scene; instead, I embrace the spontaneity of light as it changes with the time of day and the way it casts across alleyways and streets.

I recall a time when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia, photographing children playing on an empty frame against a mural. The scene was beautiful, the colors vibrant. I couldn’t predict the outcome of the photograph, though. One boy flipped, another stood still, and as one turned his face, the light cast perfectly across his eye, leaving half his face in shadow. These moments are fleeting and beyond control. But through patience and observation, we sense the possibility of a

photograph, knowing that light is the final element that ties everything together. Without strong light, a photograph may fall flat. Light inspires me to keep trying, to embrace its uncontrollable beauty as I continue to chase it.

## Shape and Form

This past year, I read Plato's *Republic* and found the allegory of the cave a powerful metaphor for perception, especially in photography. In the allegory, prisoners are chained in a cave, facing a blank wall. Behind them burns a fire, and between the fire and the prisoners is a walkway where objects are paraded. These objects cast shadows on the wall, and the prisoners perceive these shadows as reality, unaware of the true forms that create them.

The prisoners know reality only through the shapes of shadows. The objects—the eternal forms—represent unchanging reality beyond mere perception. I find this an apt metaphor for photography.

*Is a photograph the truth?*

Like the shadows in the cave, a photograph is a two-dimensional abstraction of a three-dimensional world. It is shaped by choices in framing, light, and perspective. **Perhaps, after all, a photograph is a convincing lie.**

The camera is like the cave, limiting what can be seen. But the photographer, like the escaped prisoner, steps outside the cave to perceive the true forms of reality—the essence, emotion, and truth behind what is visible.

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## An Instant Sketch of Light

To me, a high-contrast, black-and-white photograph feels like a return to the first cave paintings. Like those early drawings, photography allows us to create an instant sketch of life itself. A photograph is an instant sketch of light.

## Light is Constant

Light is one of the few constants in the universe. The measurement of a meter is defined by the distance light travels in a fraction of a second. Just as light defines physical space, it freezes time in a photograph. The images I make are not just reflections of the world but acts of creation—moments where my perspective and emotions **create a new world in a fraction of a second.**

If light is constant and I am impermanent, I must wield light as my medium and affirm life through photographs that can live on eternally.

Maybe I cannot live forever, but at least I can make a photograph.