

The Narrow Path to God

When I go for my daily walk on the Schuylkill River Trail in Philadelphia, I always take the path towards the art museum, towards the cliff behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art, so that I can appreciate beauty. This is the most objectively beautiful view in the city of Philadelphia: a beautiful art museum, beautiful architecture, Greek-inspired temples, a river that is ever flowing, and a horizon with a tree canopy.

But why do I go this way? Firstly, when I'm walking on the path, there's only one option—onwards and upwards. And when I arrive upwards, to the cliff, I'm at an elevated space. And when you're at these elevated spaces, you connect with God. Why? Because you have a Panopticon view of your surroundings. You see from a perspective that is from above, looking below. It's like you become an eagle in flight, and the eagle flies above you, and you see with clarity, with pinpoint accuracy, from a third-person's perspective, from the bird's-eye view.

Mercury and the Narrow Path

What's interesting about the particular location I visit is that there's a sculpture of Mercury with his wings, standing atop the gazebo that is just nearby the cliff. And so it is as if when I'm at this location, Mercury travels all of my thoughts and prayers, carrying me effortlessly upward toward God.

It's the spot in the city where I know I can always find Jacob's ladder, but it requires you to be on the narrow path. For when you're walking along this path, if you turn left, you'll fall into the river and drown to death. If you turn right, you could get hit by a train and die. And so there's this elimination of the choices—whether or not to go left and right—that provides me with freedom. I simply move onwards and upwards.

The Endless March

The greatest thing about this path is that it is endless. It extends all throughout the state of Pennsylvania. I could continue marching on this path for as long as I wish. This trail extends all the way to Valley Forge National Historic Park, where George Washington and his troops were stationed during the Revolutionary War.

If I just walk five miles up the river, I'll wind up in the Wissahickon, in the forest where I grew up playing as a young boy, building teepees with sticks, bridges with stones, exploring the unknown all on my own. I can find myself returning to the Garden of Eden, to paradise.

Now the trail just opened up a new extension alongside the river that points towards Gray's Ferry. The issue with this new path is that there is an end. I hardly walk this new path because of the endpoint. I don't like knowing that there will be an end to the march. I like knowing that I can march endlessly. While a new path can be enticing, repetition and consistency upon a similar and narrow path will lead to mastery.

Street Photography and Mastery

It's the same thing with street photography. I've been following the same route pretty much every single day, walking from Rittenhouse Square to Washington Square for nearly three years now. And throughout my time, walking with repetition for nearly three years straight, I've become a master of my domain.

I can recognize the patterns in nature and human behavior. I study the light and where it falls at which time of the day during which seasons. I understand when people move in and out from their office buildings and bus stops, and which locations I must position myself at optimal times to receive God's grace through the photographs I make.

The patterns that exist in nature and human behavior are something I'm very intrigued by. There's something profound about a city, and the world generally, that becomes like a living organism.

The City as a Living Organism

The paths and roads that we walk upon are like the veins within our bodies that carry the blood and nutrients toward our heart. The office buildings, the homes, the structures that we dwell in are like the cells containing the information our body needs.

The light is the source that brings our life, providing plants the ability to undergo photosynthesis and grow. Humans are like trees, with our roots planted deeply within hell, a foundation built upon suffering. But like the trees, we extend our limbs, growing taller so that we can reach towards the light.

Some trees will die and fall, and have an end, where there will be no light. The trees that had a stronger foundation outcompeted those other trees, and so they stand tall and firm, basking in the light.

Life as Suffering

And so what I've realized is, life isn't all love and light. Life is suffering. And the more you endure, the more hardened you become. The stronger your foundation, the more God will reveal His light and allow it to shine through you.