

LIGHT: The Ephemeral, the Ethereal and Beyond

Vellachi Ganesan

Spectrum Engineers, UT, USA | University of Utah, UT, USA

vag@spectrum-engineers.com

"I sense Light as the giver of all presences, and material as spent Light." – Louis Kahn

Why does light have such a mysterious ability to imbue a place with presence? The masters of architecture, from ancient times to contemporary lives, have all written anthologies about light in architecture. Through personal experiences, we all know that when a slice of the sun touches material, it enlivens it. An omni-presence manifestation of Nature herself, light has the ability to envelop and embrace us with the essential energy of being, of aliveness. Nature is the root of all spirit, and spirit cannot be found void of Nature.

Louis Kahn also says "Light comes to you because actually, it is not divided; it is simply that which desires to be manifest, coming together with that which has become manifest. The movement meets at a point which may be called your singularity"

The idea of light as singularity, as undividedness, resonates with me on so many levels. Light is singular in a sense that it is universal. Cultures across geographies have worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars and our connection to light can be seen manifested in every one of these cultures, through spiritual texts, rituals, festivals celebrated, religious architectural spaces, language and literature, calendars. Though the characteristics of these expressions of light may vary from place to place, the primary and primal connection remains singular to *all* human beings.

Another aspect of singularity, of non-dividedness, of non-duality, is that of collective consciousness. We live in a world that *is* largely divided. The ideas of "us and them" pervade many societies globally, and become the basis for conflict and divergence. We live in a world of highly individualized consciousness. We identify with our immediate communities, with our ways of spirituality, with our cultures, with our gender and sexual orientation, with our nationality. The conversations that surround us today often call for us to connect to a larger identity, of being human, of being part of this earth, of nature and cosmos. Light, in its sublime ways, has the ability to help us realize this larger, deeper identity.

We are reflections of light. We see ourselves as light. In many languages, we see concepts of light as being- when we say one glows, or when one smiles sunshine (Icelandic), or when one's eyes light up, we understand that our ancestral imagination is that light lives within us. And when we are ripe and full of life, that inner light shines out to the surface of our physical bodies and into the world around us. We also see concepts of light as intelligence, with the way we speak of bright and brilliant scholars. We also see light as having arrived at great wisdom, as having transcended spiritually through concepts of enlightenment. We have inherited these integral concepts of seeing ourselves as reflections of light from ancient and ancestral wisdom.

"We know today that man, essentially, is a being of light" – Prof Fritz-Albert Popp

In more recent history, in 1974, Prof Fritz-Albert Popp, German biophysicist invented the biphoton theory, which has proven that our body emits light emissions known as biphotons, which are

emanated by all living things. Current medical research builds on these theories and the healing properties of light are presently being studied as a cure for a number of diseases. Not only does this research further validate the notion that we are all made of light, physically and spiritually but also is perhaps why we feel so restored and energized in the presence of natural light.

“In the future, healing will be effected more and more by various types of light rays.”
– Paramahansa Yogananda

So far as I've been presenting, I'm sure that many of you have had images played in your mind about light experiences that have been deeply evocative and meaningful to you. Many of those experiences are possibly that of daylight. Now, I'd like to ask you to shift that mental imagery to include starlight, moonlight and even the aurora borealis. The reason that I ask that, is because, we are at a point in architectural history where it is widely accepted that the role of daylight in buildings is crucial. This however, is not the case with nightlight. Historically, night time has been the era of magic and mystery, with direct connection to the entire cosmos. With star-studded night skies like a sea of glittering diamonds, and the full moon emanating soft light, the night has qualities of light that are different from the day. Unlike the day time, this is the only time we truly have visual access to the entire cosmos. Immense vastness is a crucial experience, for it is only that we can expand ourselves to the vastness that we are. We can inhabit spaces of great magnitude, and understand ourselves as part of this collective consciousness that we are.

Living in cities that are increasingly light polluted by night, 80% of the global population lives under sky glow. 99% of those living in the US and Europe cannot experience a natural night.¹ Electric light, which is what I work with primarily, has enabled human beings to do so much more after dark – including generating economic prosperity, creating dynamic social rhythms and cultures and offering new, unique experiences. I don't discount the value that it brings to our society. However, we have lost the balance. We have overlit our cities to a point that we have lost our connection to night almost entirely.

There are many organizations, including the International Dark Sky Organization which is based close to here in Tucson, AZ, working hard to protect the resource of the night sky. More than protecting the dark sky, we need to realize and validate the night sky in our built environment as an integral design consideration, similar to daylight. How can we think in such a way that we invite and include the night sky as part of our buildings and urban landscapes? Connection to the cosmos, is a connection to self, to inner silence and inner spirituality. We need to revive the connection to the night to revive the connection to part of ourselves which has become dormant. It is especially fitting that we are speaking of the night sky as an integral part to human spirituality here in Arizona, which has the most protective regulation toward the night sky and truly home to the stars. I cannot wait to go on the site walk and rejuvenate myself with uninterrupted views home.

¹ 1 International Dark Sky Association (www.darksky.org/light-pollution)