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From Our Students

TOM NATALINI

Susquehanna University, Class of 2015



I have always known what is essential for Life. I do not mean life as in something you possess, something that is yours, but life as an energy. Life as flow, organic and ever-growing, otherwise known as inner freedom, Tao, Dharma, Spirit, or “the force.” You know it when you feel it, whether in the glimmer of a child’s eye or in the wisdom of an elder’s grin. I have come to know this Life through my religious journey. And every journey is made of both beginnings and endings...

The church service ended and everyone came to greet us. I weaned myself off my coloring book and beamed up at the congregants who smiled back. That last hymn may have stalled my creative project, but at least I got to sing with the world. I just wanted to be a part of that great harmony. Pastor greeted me with, “He is risen,” and I looked at him vexingly. My mom whispered, “He is risen Indeed!,” and I answered with enthusiasm. He smiled. It was time for my service at home. No time to articulate a sermon; the food was prepared. My invocation rung stridently as I tapped imprecisely on the keys of my piano. But my grandparents grinned gleefully. This wasn’t even Easter feast, just another Sunday.

My class ended and I decided to take the long way home. Why did the foreigner cross the road? To get to the other side. I was in India, after all. History class was too human-centric. What about the world beyond us? I

had thoughts of Moksha and Samadhi—thoughts of that epic Hindu variety. I looked at the trees and the birds of the lake. I watched the flowers blossom and the sun grow the green of their leaves. Light was Life, inextinguishable, vital. It refreshed me. Last time, I feared the stare of looming peacocks, perched on top of the boulders surrounding an underbelly of brush. This time I was not afraid. The birds and I were one. I laid down on a boulder rising from the high grass. It was infused with the warmth of the sun—it gave me strength, and I sat to meditate. My breathing moved, my mind stopped. Life for Life. I saw my body, and it was the rock.

I was raised Lutheran, went to a Mennonite high school, then back to a Lutheran college. I was a churchgoer, a practicing Christian, a doubting philosopher, a potential Jewish convert, a perceived Buddhist, an assumed Sadhu. I prayed, I meditated. I sang hymns and I chanted mantras. I believed, I doubted. I followed Christ, I bowed before Buddha.

But now I sit, now I sing, now I know. To my Life, I owe my faith; in encouraging growth, the movement of Life which is power. My hope is to ever nurture the imagination, the mind that lets go: freedom. And my love, the great mediator of Life, is to be stillness, peace, presence. Today I stand as neither a Christian, nor a Jew, nor a Buddhist. Not a seeker, nor a “none.” I am patient.