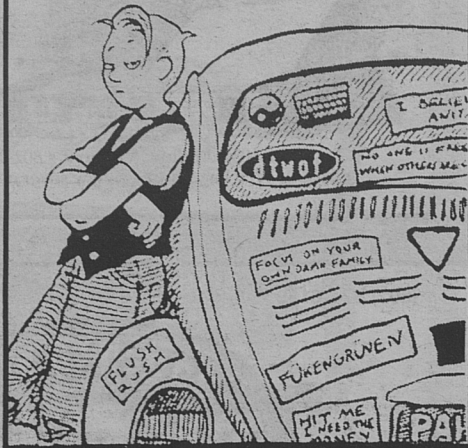


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BY REV. CHRISTINE LESLIE

Since moving to Vermont I have enjoyed, for the most part, what the seasons have to offer here. For instance, during our first winter, Martha and I found the snow fun to ski in and invigorating to shovel. Once spring arrived in June, summer was lovely and a lot longer and warmer than the "one day in July" we had been counseled to expect. The fall foliage was beyond anything I have ever even seen, much less imagined, in terms of magnitude of beauty and brilliance of hues.

What has come as a surprise to us is just how dark it gets in the middle of the afternoon now that the clocks have been turned back an hour! Never having lived this far north before neither Martha or I have ever experienced such a dramatic loss of light as we are experiencing now. You can bet that we now have a new found appreciation for the light that does pour into our kitchen and dining area through sliding glass doors this time of year! Needless to say napping on the carpet in the sun pouring through those sliding glass doors on Sunday afternoons, with a variety of household critters, is a favorite in our home.

Our need for light seems to be built into our bodies. Like leaves that need light in order to do their photosynthesis thing, our bodies also need a certain amount of light to feel upbeat and well. I believe this is true for our souls as well. Our spirits are so intertwined with our bodies, at least while we are here, that they are essentially one and the same. What seems to be good for the body is good for the soul and vice versa. I believe this is true whether or not we consciously understand and accept this notion. The upshot of all this is that we create rituals, beliefs, stories, and practices, just to

name a few activities, to help us meet our need for light, literally and figuratively speaking, in our lives.

For instance, isn't it interesting that Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights that commemorates the rededication of the Temple in 165 BC by Judas Maccabeus, occurs in December? And isn't it interesting that around 350 AD early Christian church leaders in Rome decided to formalize the celebration of Christ's birth at the same time as the winter

people won't feel insecure around you. We are born to manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." As we go deeper into this time of darkening days and brace ourselves for the Festival of Commercial & Religious

And isn't it interesting that our culture, based in the northern hemisphere of the earth, has put so much stock (literally and figuratively speaking) in the delivery of toys to children in December by a fanciful, grandfatherly elf when playing outside is at a minimum?

solstice celebrations paid homage to Mithra, the popular ancient Persian god of light and truth and opponent of darkness and evil? And isn't it interesting that our culture, based in the northern hemisphere of the earth, has put so much stock (literally and figuratively speaking) in the delivery of toys to children in December by a fanciful, grandfatherly elf when playing outside is at a minimum?

Our need for light, literally and figuratively speaking, is very real. To live without it can create negative consequences for us. This explains why light has been used by so many spiritual traditions and spiritual people as a metaphor for that which is sacred and holy in our lives and for that which brings hope and renewed life. It's why Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for 25 years for opposing apartheid in South Africa, could say the following in his 1994 Presidential Inaugural Speech:

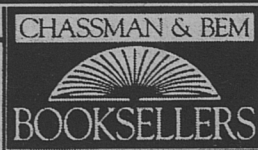
"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other

Frenzy we call "the holidays," I hope the wisdom of Nelson Mandela sheds some light on the path we walk in the days and months to come. Most of all, I hope during this holiday season and the new year ahead we can "manifest the glory of God" more and more each day in our own ways because light matters a lot, literally and figuratively speaking, and so does faith in ourselves, each other, and our understanding of The Holy. Please remember: Our playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around us. Peace and blessings to you and yours.

Rev. Christine Leslie, the first, openly ordained lesbian in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is co-founder and director of Triangle Ministries, A Center For Lesbian and Gay Spiritual Growth near Burlington, VT. Rev. Leslie is available for counseling, commitment services, workshop and retreats, and specializes in the integration of spiritual development with sexual-identity formation. She can be reached at 802-860-7106 or by email revcs@aol.com. Visit the TM web page at <http://members.aol.com/revcs>

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