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Red and Green Lights

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Red and Green Lights

In the Christmas Season, colored lights are in abundance as decorations. But on city street intersections, traffic lights run red and green all through the year, not in celebration of God becoming one with us in our humanity, but as a preventive to keep us from running into one another. Red and green mean "stop" and "go" for vehicles and pedestrians on our streets and roads. Colors have different meanings in particular contexts.

Colors used in decorations appeal to our emotions, as do the familiar Christmas lights about us. Colors that give us symbolic information, such as traffic lights, primarily address our intellects. But thoughts and feelings are both in some measure affected by whatever we perceive, as one person might be disappointed in seeing decorations for Christmas following so closely upon Thanksgiving, and another person takes joy in going down a long street and finding green lights at every intersection.

Not every culture or nation uses colored lights for the same purposes, just as not all people see Christmas as having to do with a religious belief that God has come among us as one of us. But we do well to take note of the traffic rules in any place where we want to walk across a busy street or drive a car. And we can do ourselves a favor by reflecting on the religious and cultural origins of the Holiday Season. We have an opportunity to enhance our personal journeys by noting the green lights that encourage us to keep moving, and the red ones that warn us to pause, so as to avoid a crash.

The spirit of this time of year is often identified with a green light for giving: gifts to family and friends, donations to those in need, and kindness and appreciation to all the people we encounter. But this same spirit of giving also shows us a red light: to stop and reflect so that not all of our giving involves material items that cost us more than we can afford of time, money, and energy or that poorly convey our good intentions. We can recognize the affirmation of green lights for honest expressions that come from our hearts, and the contrary indication of red lights for automatic responses that arise from compulsions and unexamined expectations.

Colors often affect our feelings, and can influence our patterns of thought if we are unaware. While most drivers prefer to meet with green lights at intersections, we can be grateful, if we reflect a bit, that the red lights facing the other directions provide safe passage for us who have the green lights. And when it is our turn to stop, we have at least two choices: We can accept the orderliness of "taking turns" that allows all of us on the roads to move with safety on our various paths, or we could focus on the momentary inconvenience of not being able to proceed.

Our awareness of the small impact of colors upon us exemplifies a process that is critically important for taking responsibility for our lives. No matter what happens in the world about us or within us, the Spirit of all life, including Christmas, inspires us every day with the equivalent of red lights and green lights for "stop" and for "go."