

THE DARK NIGHT, BOOK ONE LESSON 1

READ: The Dark Night Prologue, and Book One, chapters 1 through 10 from The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross Rodriguez-Kavanaugh edition

REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:

- 1. In John's poem, what do the first two stanzas proclaim in regard to spiritual purgation?**
- 2. Of what do the other two stanzas speak?**
- 3. From what vantage point is the poet reciting this poem?**
- 4. What does the "dark night" (purgative contemplation) passively cause in the soul?**
- 5. What are the three enemies the soul was protected against in the safety of this night?**
- 6. What did the night of purifying contemplation do to all the inordinate movements of the passions and appetites of sense?**
- 7. Why is this contemplation called a *passive* purification?**
- 8. In regard to prayer, what is the difference between beginners and proficient?**
- 9. List the seven vices common to beginners in the spiritual journey; give an example of each:**

a) _____

b) _____

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c) _____

e) _____

f) _____

g) _____

10. What happens to the senses in the one dark night, or purgation? And what happens to the spirit in the other dark night, or purgation? Which is the most common?

11. What inclination does dark and dry (to the senses) contemplation cause?

12. What must be reformed in order to enter the night of the senses?

13. What is the name(s) we use to describe what happens in prayer during this night?

14. What are two other possible causes for aridity (dryness) in prayer?

15. What are the signs John gives for knowing that the dryness is the result of this purgation, rather than of the other possible causes?

16. What can become an obstacle in this contemplation?

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17. What is the difference (in prayer) between those who are called to walk the path of contemplation and those who are not?

18. What fears do people sometimes have during the long aridity of contemplation? And what can happen to them if there is no one to understand them?

19. How should they feel? What attitudes should they assume?

REFLECT: Meditate/Journal for awhile on each of the following questions:

What has been my own reaction to times of aridity (dryness) in prayer - when I could think no good thought, and experienced nothing of God's presence, love or sweetness? Did I persevere in spite of this, or was I a "difficult child to wean"?

Which of the vices mentioned by St. John of the Cross have I discovered in myself? What can I do about them, if they still exist?

REPLY: How can I be sure the dryness I experience is not due to newly committed sins and imperfections? And how can I know that it is not from laxity and tepidity? How can I know it is not caused purely by melancholia or some other "bad humor" (depression)?

How does John compare the behavior in prayer of a person in the dark night with that of someone acting as a model for a portrait?

THE DARK NIGHT, BOOKS ONE AND TWO LESSON 2

READ: The Dark Night, Book One, chapters 11 - 14, and Book Two, chapters. 1 - 3
REPLY: As you read, answer these questions briefly:

- 1. In the beginning of the dark night, before an enkindling of love occurs, what does one usually experience?**

- 2. What happens to the sensory appetites (desires) when this enkindling occurs?**

- 3. What happens to one's ability to meditate?**

- 4. What does a person learn about self in this night of the senses? And about God?**

- 5. To what does this lead?**

- 6. What causes the passions (joy, fear, hope, sorrow) to lose their strength in this night? And to what benefit does this lead?**

- 7. What happens in the memory?**

- 8. How does the night purify our intentions in serving God? To what virtue does this lead?**

- 9. What does David say about the benefits of this night?**

- 10. What other benefits are mentioned in chapter 13, section 10?**

- 11. How would you summarize "my house being now all stilled"?**

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12. What are some of the burdensome trials of those who are to enter into the more oppressive night of the spirit? And what is the purpose of these trials?

13. In regard to the kind, intensity and length of these temptations and trials, upon what (in each soul) does all this depend?

14. How does God's action differ in those who are very weak? And why?

15. Is the purgation of the senses complete before one enters the night of the spirit? Why, or why not?

16. Why does John say that proficient sometimes experience physical effects such as raptures, transports, infirmities, stomach problems, injuries and fatigue of spirit?

17. What does he say about the perfect in regard to all these phenomena?

18. Speaking of the imperfections of proficient, John mentions the kind he calls *habitual*. What does he mean by this?

19. In the imaginative and spiritual visions received by these proficient, what harm can come to the soul?

20. When does one lose all this kind of spiritual communication and walk in the pure and dark faith which is required for union with God?

REFLECT: Is any of this material directed to me personally at this time in my journey? What then, can I learn from it, to help me on my way?

Has the study of John's writings made me more aware of my spiritual strengths and weaknesses? Have I learned any safeguards?

Am I willing to suffer in order to move closer to God?

THE DARK NIGHT, BOOK TWO LESSON 4

READ: The Dark Night, Book Two Chapters 15 through 25

REPLY: Answer the questions below as briefly as you can:

- 1. Why does John say that when you see your appetites (desires) darkened, your inclinations dry and constrained, and your faculties (intellectual) incapacitated for any interior exercise you should not be afflicted, but rather consider it a grace?**

- 2. What does John say about the benefits of suffering in this night?**

- 3. Why is the interior, mystical wisdom gained in this dark contemplation called secret, and why can't it be adequately described?**

- 4. What traits do communications which are truly from God have?**

- 5. Of what does the state of perfection consist?**

- 6. Why is there no diabolical interference when a soul receives substantial touches of divine union?**

- 7. What is the purpose of these touches?**

- 8. What are the prerequisites for reaching this perfect union?**

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Can you put these ten steps on the “mystical ladder of love” in their proper order, one to ten? (Put numbers on the left side of each step.)

- The person searches for God unceasingly.**
- The soul burns gently in God, in perfect union.**
- One has an impatient desire and longing for God.**
- The soul changes the color of its past life, and loses its appetite for all things.**
- One is impelled to lay hold of the Beloved without letting him go.**
- One is prompted to the perfection of works, filled with fervor.**
- One possesses the vision of God and does not enter purgatory upon death.**
- The invigorated soul runs swiftly toward God and experiences many touches in him.**
- One has an ardent boldness and daring with God.**
- One seeks nothing but to give God pleasure, in a spirit of suffering.**

Match these three “garments of protection” with the virtues they symbolize:
(crisscross lines)

white tunic

hope

red toga

faith

green coat of mail

charity

REFLECT: Meditate on the following questions and jot down a little of what you found:

What new awareness have I gained since reading the Dark Night? What will this mean to me in my prayer life?

Where do I find myself on the “mystical ladder of love”? Who can help me climb it?