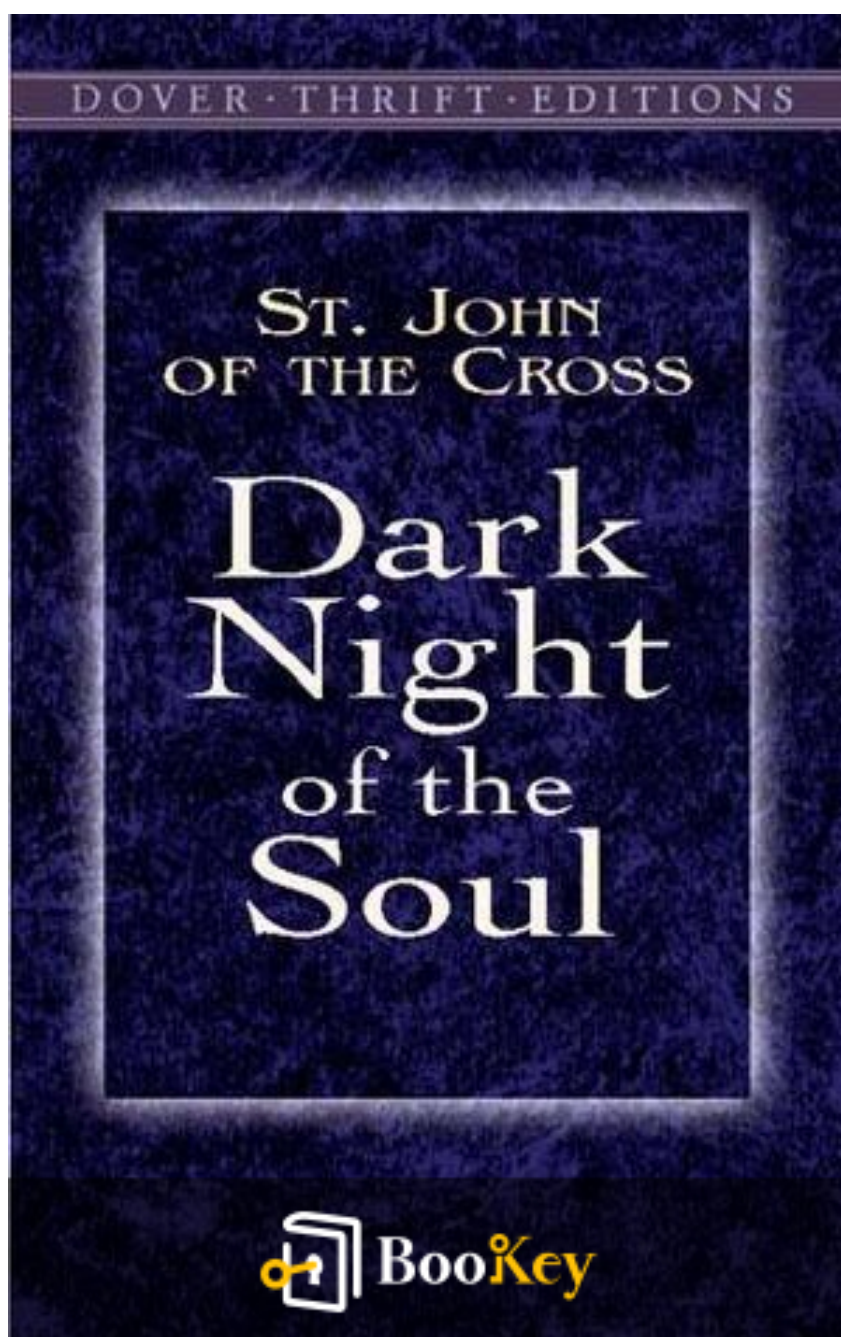


Dark Night Of The Soul PDF (Limited Copy)

John of the Cross



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Dark Night Of The Soul Summary

"A Journey Through Spiritual Transformation and Divine Union"

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About the book

Dive deep into the profound spiritual journey of transformation with John of the Cross's seminal work, ****Dark Night of the Soul****. In this timeless classic, the mystic poet eloquently guides souls through a transcendental voyage, navigating through the anguish and obscurity that serves as preludes to the divine light of spiritual awakening. Witness the sacred odyssey where suffering and darkness shuffle hand-in-hand, reshaping the spirit into a vessel fit for divine grace. Beyond the shadows, readers will discover how the night promises a dawn of enlightenment, where inner turmoil morphs into peace and the soul ascends toward unity with the infinite. It's a compelling invitation to explore the depths and heights of spiritual struggle and renewal—a journey that reflects the ultimate testament to faith's resilience in the face of adversity.

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About the author

John of the Cross, born Juan de Yepes y Álvarez in 1542 in Fontiveros, Spain, was a pivotal figure of the Counter-Reformation and a co-founder of the Discalced Carmelites, a Catholic mendicant order. As a revered Spanish mystic, poet, and theologian, John of the Cross played a vital role in the reform of the Carmelite Order alongside Teresa of Ávila. His life was marked by personal austerity, deep spirituality, and profound contemplation, all of which deeply influenced his writings. John is celebrated for his exceptional works on the mystical union between the soul and God, with "Dark Night of the Soul" standing as a testament to his insights into the spiritual journey and purification process. Despite facing opposition and imprisonment for his reformist endeavors, he remained steadfast in his faith, leaving behind a legacy that continues to illuminate the spiritual path for seekers. Canonized in 1726, he is honored as a Doctor of the Church for his contributions to mystic theology.

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Chapter 38: Completes the explanation of the second stanza.

Chapter 39: Wherein is expounded the third stanza.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Sets down the first line and begins to treat of the imperfections of beginners.

Chapter I: The Journey from Spiritual Beginnings to Divine Union

In this chapter, the text explores the spiritual evolution of the soul as it transitions from the initial phase of spiritual awakening, known as the state of "beginners," to becoming "progressives" on the contemplative path. This journey ultimately aims to reach the state of "the perfect," where the soul achieves complete union with the Divine. The "dark night" is an essential phase in this progression—a period where the soul is purified and strengthened for this union.

The chapter opens by examining the characteristics and imperfections of beginners, those who engage in meditation and spiritual practices.

Understanding these imperfections helps individuals recognize their current spiritual state, encouraging them to embrace the dark night as a necessary phase for growth and deepening of virtues.

When a soul initially turns to God, it often experiences a nurturing phase, likened to a tender child being cared for by a loving mother. Just as a mother gradually stops coddling her child to encourage independence, God provides spiritual consolation and delight initially, fostering a deep, fervent love for

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the divine. This is akin to spiritual "milk," offering sweetness and ease in prayer, sacramental use, and other divine activities.

However, despite the zeal and joy beginners find in these practices, they are often spiritually weak and imperfect. Their enthusiasm is driven by the pleasure derived from these activities rather than a deep-rooted strength gained through virtue. Their actions reflect their spiritual immaturity, akin to children attempting tasks beyond their current capability.

To illustrate these imperfections, the text proposes analyzing them through the lens of the seven capital sins. This approach reveals how these beginners are as undeveloped in spiritual maturity as children are in worldly matters.

Ultimately, the dark night—discussed more thoroughly in later sections—serves as a crucial transformative period. It cleanses the soul, helping individuals shed these imperfections and prepare themselves for the profound experience of divine love. Thus, what initially appears as a challenge is, in fact, a blessing facilitating growth and purification.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Dark Night as a Phase of Transformation

Critical Interpretation: During periods of 'dark night,' when you feel spiritually challenged and tested, it's crucial to embrace and understand this phase not as despair, but as a necessary purification for spiritual maturity. The discomfort and struggle you experience are transforming your soul, preparing it for a closer union with the Divine. Much like a caterpillar breaking its cocoon to become a butterfly, these trials are pivotal milestones where imperfections are stripped away, paving the path toward ultimate divine love and enlightenment. This perspective inspires resilience and strength, empowering you to see trials as significant steps on your transformational journey.

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Chapter 2 Summary: Of certain spiritual imperfections which beginners have with respect to the habit of pride.

In Chapter II, the focus is on the spiritual imperfections that beginners in the spiritual journey often face, particularly concerning pride. Although beginners feel motivated and diligent in their spiritual practices, these good feelings can unintentionally lead to a subtle and secret pride. This pride manifests as satisfaction with their spiritual works and a desire to discuss or teach spiritual matters to gain admiration from others. This behavior echoes the biblical Pharisee who, filled with arrogance, boasted about his virtues while demeaning others (as in St. Luke xviii, 11-12).

Such beginners often misinterpret their increased fervor as genuine spiritual growth, but the text warns that this may be a ploy by the devil to inflate their pride. These individuals may go so far in their delusion as to consider themselves superior to others, quick to criticize others' perceived lack of devotion while ignoring their own significant faults—a behavior akin to ignoring "the beam" in one's own eye while noticing the "mote" in another's (as referenced in St. Matthew vii, 3). Consequently, their boasting and subtle bragging about their spirituality may even extend to orchestrated displays of devotion that are designed to be noticed by others.

A common tendency among these beginners is a preference for confessors who affirm and praise them rather than those who challenge them to grow



spiritually. If critiqued or not praised to their liking, they may suspect their confessors and quickly seek someone more agreeable. This leads to superficial confessions driven by a desire to maintain the appearance of righteousness rather than genuine repentance. Some might underplay their sins to appear more virtuous or, conversely, overreact to their faults as if they were already saints, resulting in impatience and anger at themselves.

These spiritual imperfections can escalate into more severe issues if not addressed. However, the chapter highlights those progressing towards true spiritual maturity do so through humility. They are less satisfied with their deeds because they recognize the vastness of God's grace and their limited response, leading them to see others as better and cultivating a holy envy. Such individuals understate their virtues, dismissing praise, and are more eager to learn than to teach. Unlike those consumed by pride, they are content to serve God quietly and are more concerned with their faults than with the acknowledgment of their virtues.

The chapter concludes by acknowledging that these genuinely humble souls, though rare, are deeply pleasing to God. They embody qualities such as simplicity, genuineness, and a willingness to learn. Noteworthy is their desire to help others and their openness to guidance, showing a love for God and neighbor that surpasses mere appearances. To cleanse the soul of prideful imperfections, God may lead them into a "dark night," a spiritual process designed to purify and guide them towards deeper maturity and



closeness to God.

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Chapter 3 Summary: Of some imperfections which some of these souls are apt to have, with respect to the second capital sin, which is avarice, in the spiritual sense.

In this chapter, the author explores the spiritual imperfections linked to avarice among those embarking on their spiritual journeys. This avarice is not materialistic but rather a craving for spiritual experiences and knowledge. Many beginners on this path find themselves restless and dissatisfied with the spiritual progress and comforts provided to them by God. They anxiously seek out spiritual counsel, precepts, and literature, devoting their time to these pursuits instead of focusing on personal growth through self-denial and nurturing an inner poverty of spirit.

Such individuals often accumulate religious items like images, rosaries, and other devotional objects, changing and exchanging them frequently based on aesthetics or perceived spiritual value. This attachment reflects a misplaced affection and curiosity, opposing the ideal of spiritual poverty. True devotion, the author argues, should emanate from the heart, pursuing only the spiritual essence these objects signify. External attachments must be relinquished to attain true spiritual perfection.

The chapter illustrates examples of genuine spiritual simplicity through anecdotes of individuals who used humble devotional items without concern for their material value. These persons focused on their relationship with



God, symbolizing an authentic spiritual life free from superficial attachments. Those advancing well spiritually do not cling to tangible instruments or seek excessive knowledge, choosing instead to concentrate solely on pleasing God, which guides their generosity toward giving away their possessions for the sake of others and divine love.

The author acknowledges that while individuals must strive to purify themselves from these imperfections, ultimate cleansing and readiness for divine union require God's intervention. This process involves a profound and transformative spiritual purification, referred to as the "dark night," where God purges the soul of imperfections beyond its own capability to overcome. This purgation is essential for the soul to achieve the divine perfection of love and union with God.

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Chapter 4: Of other imperfections which these beginners are apt to have with respect to the third sin, which is luxury.

In the complex journey of spiritual growth, numerous imperfections often challenge beginners, particularly concerning the deadly sin of luxury. The text outlines several imperfections that are intrinsically tied to spiritual experiences, which are sometimes confused with sensual desires. These spiritual imperfections are not about moral lapses into luxury; rather, they stem from spiritual phenomena themselves. As an individual engages in prayer or spiritual practices, one might experience involuntary, impure sensations in the sensual part of the soul. These sensations are often misunderstood as they can occur even during sincere moments of devotion, such as prayer or receiving sacraments.

The causes for these imperfections fall into three main categories:

1. Human Nature and Spiritual Pleasure: When individuals experience spiritual pleasure, the entire being may respond. While the spirit rejoices in divine connection, the senses might inadvertently seek pleasure through the closest available means, sometimes resulting in sensual feelings. Human nature, integrating both spirit and senses, experiences any divine reception according to each part's capacity.



2. Influence of the Devil: The devil attempts to disturb the soul's peace, especially during prayer, by inciting impure thoughts. It's a tactic meant to discourage spiritual exercises by instilling fear and discomfort. This struggle can mistakenly lead some to abandon prayer, thinking impurity springs more from these activities, which, in reality, result from heightened spiritual attacks during such times.

3. Fear and Anxiety: Simply fearing or being anxious about these impure thoughts can bring them to mind, further unsettling the soul without any voluntary complicity on the part of the individual.

Some individuals, described as having tender or frail natures, are particularly susceptible to these challenges. Spiritual consolations can trigger an intensified response from their senses, leading to confusion and the mistaken belief that they are committing the sin of luxury. This can also happen with other strong emotions like anger or grief.

Moreover, certain spiritual friendships can, at times, emerge more from sensual affection than from true spirituality. Genuine spiritual friendships should enhance one's love for God, whereas misguided ones might result in a waning of divine love and an uneasy conscience. The reciprocal relationship between spiritual and sensual love clarifies that when one love increases, the other diminishes, given their inherent opposition.



A transformative phase known as the "dark night" purifies these imperfections. This process, though initially unsettling, ultimately fortifies the sense of divine love by eradicating selfish attachments, aligning the soul more closely with the Spirit of God. This purging experience clarifies true from false loves, reinforcing the former and eliminating the latter, thereby refining the soul's journey toward divine unity.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Of the imperfections into which beginners fall with respect to the sin of wrath.

Chapter V: The Imperfections of Beginners Concerning the Sin of Wrath

In the early stages of spiritual development, beginners often encounter imperfections related to the sin of wrath, largely due to their intense desire for spiritual consolations. This concupiscence, or strong desire, leaves individuals highly susceptible to irritability when these consolations fade. Much like a child deprived of a comforting presence, they find themselves embittered, struggling to cope with the absence of spiritual sweetness. Although this natural vexation does not amount to sin if it is not indulged, it is still an imperfection that needs to be cleansed through the trials and purgation of the 'dark night'—a metaphorical period of spiritual dryness and purification.

Moreover, some individuals exhibit a different form of spiritual wrath by becoming agitated at the sins of others. This results in a monitoring behavior, characterized by an uneasy zeal to judge and correct, often angrily, setting themselves up as judges of virtue. This attitude is contrary to the essence of spiritual meekness, which values humility and patience over judgment.



Others express wrath inwardly, becoming impatient and frustrated with their own imperfections. They seek rapid spiritual advancement, yearning to achieve sainthood overnight. They make grand resolutions, but lack humility and patience, they often fall harder each time they attempt to rise. This impatience prevents them from waiting for spiritual gifts that God wishes to bestow in His time. Again, this impatience contrasts sharply with the spiritual meekness that must develop through encountering the 'dark night.'

Interestingly, some individuals take a more passive approach, being overly patient with their spiritual progress. While patience is a virtue, an excess that stifles growth is not desirable. Here too, balance achieved through spiritual trials aids in rectifying these tendencies.

As such, whether dealing with irritability, judgment, impatience, or excessive patience, spiritual beginners must navigate the challenges of wrath by embracing the purgative trials of spiritual dryness, allowing them to attain humility, balance, and spiritual growth.



Chapter 6 Summary: Of imperfections with respect to spiritual gluttony.

Chapter VI describes the imperfections associated with the sin of spiritual gluttony, highlighting the pitfalls encountered by spiritual beginners. This chapter explores the challenges faced by individuals who, attracted by the initial sweetness and pleasure of spiritual exercises, prioritize these experiences over pursuing true spiritual purity and discretion, which God values throughout spiritual development.

Many fall into the trap of spiritual excesses, beyond the moderation needed to cultivate virtues. This leads to extremes, such as undertaking intense penance or fasting without proper guidance, mistaking physical hardship for spiritual advancement. Such actions, done in defiance of obedience, result in spiritual gluttony and pride, demonstrating that these individuals grow in vice rather than virtue because they follow their own will.

A particularly concerning issue is their reliance on pleasing personal desires, convincing themselves that they serve God, which, when challenged, leads them to become disgruntled and distant from their spiritual advisors. Emotional immaturity resembles that of children, where they insist on satisfying their desires, sometimes even manipulating their confessors to receive the Eucharist more frequently. This behavior reflects an unchecked yearning for sensory satisfaction from spiritual practices, leading to



carelessness and undervaluing the sacrament's deeper, invisible graces.

The fault is further reflected in their approach to prayer, where they erroneously equate successful prayer with experiencing tangible emotional responses or consolations. Failing to achieve this, they grow discouraged, abandoning practices that lack immediate satisfaction. Seeking spiritual exhilaration rather than patient devotion, humility, and trust in God leads them to dissipate energy on superficial spiritual acts rather than substance.

This obsession with spiritual pleasures creates a reluctance to embrace the challenges of the spiritual path, characterized by self-denial and humility—the hardships that define the road of the Cross. To rectify these imperfections, it becomes necessary for them to undergo a ‘dark night’—a period of spiritual purification through trials and aridities suggested by Saint John of the Cross—removing immaturities and aligning closer to God's will.

Ultimately, the chapter stresses that true spiritual progress lies not in the accumulation of spiritual experiences or pleasures but in the ability to deny oneself these comforts, embracing humility, reverence, and the arduous journey of the Cross. Spiritual growth achieves its genuine fruition when grounded in obedience, allowing God to shape and direct the soul's journey.

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Chapter 7 Summary: Of imperfections with respect to spiritual envy and sloth.

Chapter VII explores the spiritual pitfalls of envy and sloth that can afflict beginners on their spiritual journey. These imperfections are prevalent among those who have recently embarked on a path of spiritual growth. The text first addresses spiritual envy, explaining that many beginners struggle with feelings of displeasure when they witness the spiritual progress or virtues of others. This jealousy stems from a desire to be praised and recognized, as they often devalue others' achievements simply because they are not being similarly acknowledged. This behavior contrasts sharply with the Christian concept of charity, as outlined by Saint Paul, which is characterized by rejoicing in the goodness of others. Although such envy is problematic, the text suggests that a 'holy envy' can exist—where one experiences a sense of spiritual inadequacy yet finds joy in others' spiritual accomplishments.

Similarly, spiritual sloth is another common affliction for beginners. Those affected often experience a resistance to engaging in spiritual activities, preferring the comforts and pleasures that their personal desires dictate. This aversion to spiritual exercises occurs because these individuals are accustomed to deriving sweetness and satisfaction from their spiritual practices. When these pleasures are absent, they might abandon their spiritual duties or continue them with little enthusiasm, thus neglecting the



path of spiritual perfection, which requires self-denial for the sake of God's will.

The chapter further explains that many beginners wish God's plans would align with their desires, equating their satisfaction with divine approval. This self-centered approach contradicts the teachings of the Gospel that encourage losing one's personal will to gain it in a divine sense.

Consequently, beginners often find themselves troubled by directives that are not aligned with their wishes, and they lack the fortitude to endure the rigors of spiritual growth, shying away from the spiritual challenges represented by the Cross.

The discussion then leads to the solution for these imperfections: a spiritual phase called the "dark night." This phase, initiated by God, weans individuals off the 'sweetnesses and pleasures' they have been accustomed to by subjecting them to spiritual dryness and inner darkness. This purgative process is essential, as true progress toward spiritual maturity and virtue can only occur when God intervenes to transform the soul through passive means. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of explaining this transformation, and seeks divine guidance to shed light on this challenging journey.

This chapter serves as a reminder that spiritual growth often requires overcoming deep-seated imperfections and aligning one's will with divine

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purpose through the trials of the dark night.

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Chapter 8: Wherein is expounded the first line of the first stanza, and a beginning is made of the explanation of this dark night.

Chapter VIII delves into the concept of the "dark night," a metaphorical term representing periods of spiritual contemplation and transformation that purify a person's soul. This transformation occurs in two stages, reflecting the dual nature of humans: the sensual and the spiritual. The first stage, known as the "night of sense," is a purification process that focuses on subduing the soul's physical desires, while the "night of the spirit" deals with deeper spiritual purification, preparing the soul for divine union with God. The latter is rare and reserved for those with more profound spiritual practice.

Initially, the "night of sense" is introduced as a commonly experienced but challenging phase. For novices, it is a period marked by the bitterness of transitioning from worldly love to divine love. These individuals, having practiced virtue and prayer, experience a newfound detachment from worldly pleasures, gaining some spiritual fortitude in God. However, as they indulge in spiritual exercises with great joy, a sudden shift occurs—God withdraws the familiarity of His presence, plunging their spiritual clarity into darkness. This leaves them unable to find delight in meditation or spiritual practices that once brought them joy, akin to being weaned from the comforts of early spiritual experiences.



This transformation is often perplexing, as it feels counterintuitive; everything feels wrong when, in reality, God is encouraging them to mature spiritually. For those who are more focused and detached from worldly distractions, this spiritual "night" tends to arrive sooner, marking a necessary progression in their journey toward spiritual enlightenment.

The chapter also notes that although this process is common, the experience of these spiritual dry spells is often documented in divine scriptures, particularly in the Psalms and the writings of the Prophets. However, the reality of this purgation is better understood through personal experience rather than solely through scripture.

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Chapter 9 Summary: Of the signs by which it will be known that the spiritual person is walking along the way of this night and purgation of sense.

Chapter IX Summary

This chapter explores the signs that indicate a spiritual person is progressing through the "dark night" or purgation of the senses, a concept deeply rooted in Christian mysticism. The dark night refers to a phase in spiritual development characterized by a sense of dryness or aridity in one's spiritual life. This can often be confused with the effects of sin, imperfections, or even physical or mental illness. The text provides three key signs to help distinguish true spiritual growth from these other states.

Firstly, the absence of pleasure or consolation in divine matters coupled with an absence of such satisfaction in worldly things is significant. When God leads a soul through this spiritual night, He draws it away from all sensual pleasures. If the soul's dryness is due to sins, it would likely crave other, non-spiritual pleasures. If the dryness stems from melancholy or another physical disposition, the soul's dissatisfaction affects the physical nature, not just the spiritual.

Secondly, a soul undergoing spiritual purgation often remains focused on

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God, troubled by a lack of sweetness in spiritual matters, yet persistent in seeking God. Unlike spiritual lukewarmness, which is marked by indifference, this purgative aridity generates a fervent desire for God, even though it brings feelings of guilt about not serving God well.

Thirdly, those experiencing this purgation become unable to meditate or engage in spiritual reflection as they used to. God begins communicating with them in a different manner, moving beyond sensory experiences to a form of pure spirit contemplation. This transformation leads to a period where traditional meditation feels empty, but this arises from God lifting the soul towards a more profound form of spiritual understanding.

The experience is likened to the biblical story of the Israelites receiving manna from heaven during their journey through the wilderness. Though this manna contained all sweetness, their familiarity with Egyptian food made them yearn for past comforts. Similarly, souls in purgation miss former pleasures while being gradually prepared for deeper spiritual nourishment.

As these souls progress, they are advised to embrace solitude and stillness, allowing God to work quietly within them. The need to disengage from both internal and external actions is emphasized, as succumbing to the temptation of self-directed spiritual activity can hinder the divine work occurring within. This journey, though initially challenging due to its strangeness to the soul, ultimately leads to a transformative peace that paves the way to an



intimate union with the divine.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Embrace solitude and stillness

Critical Interpretation: In the journey through the dark night of the soul, you are encouraged to welcome solitude and stillness. This key point invites you to relinquish the urge to seek activity and distraction, allowing the divine to quietly work within your being. Instead of fearing the silence, understand it as essential for nurturing a deeper connection with the divine essence. As you let go of self-directed spiritual efforts and embrace this stillness, you create a fertile ground for transformative peace, paving a way toward an intimate union with the divine. By internalizing this principle, you can find tranquility and profound growth even when faced with life's dilemmas and existential uncertainties.

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Chapter 10 Summary: Of the way in which these souls are to conduct themselves in this dark night.

In Chapter X, the focus is on guiding souls navigating the challenging transition known as the "dark night of sense." This phase involves a profound shift orchestrated by God, moving the soul from a reliance on sensory experiences and active meditation to a deeper state of passive contemplation. During this time, individuals often experience dryness or aridity in their spiritual practice, leading them to mistakenly believe they are spiritually lost or abandoned by God. This misconception arises from the absence of the familiar comforts and consolations they once found in their spiritual exercises.

As these spiritual individuals attempt to revert to their previous methods of meditation and reasoning, they face internal resistance and a lack of satisfaction. Their efforts become counterproductive, like chasing after something they've let go only to capture it again. Instead of making progress, they find themselves in a loop, failing to capitalize on the new spiritual terrain they are entering.

Without proper guidance, such souls may retreat or become discouraged, feeling that their struggles stem from personal failure or sin. However, the text reassures them that these struggles are part of a divine transition from meditation to contemplation, which involves an absence of mental constructs



and reason. In this context, it is important for the souls to avoid forced efforts to reason or meditate. They should allow themselves to rest in peace and quietness, trusting in God, who leads them through this transformative path toward love.

Souls are encouraged to develop patience and perseverance in prayer, refraining from creating mental or emotional disturbances. Even if they feel they are doing nothing or are tempted by scruples suggesting their time is wasted, they should maintain their peaceful state. By allowing God to work within them without interference, they open themselves to receive the blessings of divine contemplation—a secret, loving infusion from God that kindles love within.

The metaphor of a painter is used to illustrate how unnecessary movements (efforts to engage faculties actively) can disrupt the divine work taking place within the soul. By ceasing these efforts and surrendering to the process, the soul can more fully embrace the transformative experience of divine love that infuses it through this contemplative state.

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Chapter 11 Summary: Wherein are expounded the three lines of the stanza.

Chapter XI delves into the transformative experience of spiritual love and the soul's purification through what is termed the "dark night." Initially, this profound love for God is not immediately felt because of the soul's impurities or lack of self-awareness. However, as one's spiritual journey progresses, a deep yearning for God can emerge, akin to what King David described in the Psalms. This yearning represents a shift from worldly desires to spiritual ones and manifests as an intense, living thirst for God.

The chapter emphasizes that this awakening of love does not simply replace the initial feelings of spiritual dryness and emptiness. Instead, during these phases of desolation, the soul is filled with a habitual care, a longing to serve God coupled with a fear of falling short. This struggle, although painful, is a pleasing sacrifice to God and serves as a preparation for the eventual enkindling of divine love within the spirit.

The narrative highlights the soul's journey through the "dark night of the senses," a period meant to purge and align the baser instincts with the spirit's higher aims. Though this path may appear daunting and adverse at first, it ultimately leads the soul to significant spiritual benefits and virtues, transforming what feels like suffering into liberation from the constraints of the lower self.



The chapter also introduces the concept of the "narrow way" to eternal life, described by Jesus in the Book of Matthew. This challenging path begins with the night of the senses, which strips the soul of its reliance on sensory perception and strengthens its faith. This faith, blind to all sense, prepares the soul for the more demanding "night of the spirit," which further purifies and unites it with God.

Overall, the chapter underscores the idea that the journey through these spiritual nights, while arduous, yields greater freedom and joy as the soul transitions from earthly attachments towards divine union. The text seeks to illuminate how this cleansing process—through patience, perseverance, and divine love—leads to ultimate spiritual fulfillment.

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Chapter 12: Of the benefits which this night causes in the soul.

Chapter XII focuses on the transformative effects of a spiritual night, or period of aridity, for the soul. This spiritually desolate time feels like a deprivation of blessings, but ultimately guides the soul to spiritual maturity and greater self-awareness. Much like the Biblical figure Abraham celebrated the weaning of his son Isaac, Heaven rejoices when a soul progresses from spiritual infancy, characterized by reliance on spiritual consolations, to maturity, where it subsists on the more substantial, albeit challenging, nourishment of divine contemplation.

The Night and Its Benefits

This dark night starts a process where the soul comes to a profound realization of its own misery and lowliness. During times of spiritual prosperity, when the soul experiences much consolation and support from God, it is often unaware of its own poverty and limitations. Analogous to the Israelites who were told by God to strip off their festival garments in the wilderness to recognize their true state, the soul undergoes a humbling process stripped of joyful spiritual experiences. In this raw state, it recognizes its own nothingness and inability to achieve anything of itself, marking the first and principal benefit of this dark night.



Respect and Discernment

Another key benefit is the development of a deeper respect in communion with God. Previously, the soul's fervent desires and spiritual satisfactions may have unintentionally led to imprudent boldness in its approach to God. The narrative of Moses at the burning bush illustrates this concept well—he was instructed to remove his shoes as a sign of humility before God. Similarly, Job's profound encounter with God occurred only after experiencing utter desolation and suffering, stripped of worldly and spiritual comforts.

Enlightenment through Aridity

A further benefit arises from this period of dryness and detachment. Even as it quenches the soul's sensory desires and attachments, God grants greater understanding and knowledge of Himself. The emptiness enables the soul to be free from distractions, allowing it to be supernaturally taught by God's wisdom. The prophet Isaiah and David both highlight how true divine knowledge comes not from spiritual delights or meditations but from aridity and apparent absence of God's presence.

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Humility and Love

The night also fosters spiritual humility, counteracting pride that may have developed during spiritual abundance. The soul, in recognizing its own

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Chapter 13 Summary: Of other benefits which this night of sense causes in the soul.

Chapter XIII explores the profound changes that occur in the soul during a period often described as the "night of sense," a phase of spiritual development characterized by aridity and darkness. This stage serves to purify the soul of its imperfections related to spiritual avarice, where once it sought pleasure and satisfaction in spiritual exercises, it now finds little sweetness. This lack of gratification humbles the soul, fostering a humility and readiness to act purely for God's sake rather than personal gain.

Through this experience, the soul is liberated from spiritual luxury, as it no longer succumbs to the impure pleasures that once overflowed from the spirit to the senses. The soul becomes detached from spiritual gluttony, wherein its excessive desires previously led to numerous imperfections. In this night, God curbs the soul's concupiscence, prompting it to lose the strength of its passions and become barren like a field no longer nourished by desires for sensory pleasures. This spiritual sobriety results in tranquility and peace as the soul is not disturbed by desires.

A significant outcome of this aridity is the habitual remembrance of God. The soul, now purified, remains vigilant against backsliding spiritually, relishing a cleanness and purity that it lacked due to its prior desires. This purification allows the soul to practice various virtues, including patience,



longsuffering, charity, fortitude, and others, without the motivation of pleasure but purely for God's love.

Additionally, the soul sheds the imperfections associated with spiritual sins like wrath, envy, and sloth. In this state of deprivation, it becomes meek and humble, no longer angered by its faults or those of others, nor displeased with God's pace in its sanctification process. Envy transforms into a virtuous desire to emulate others, and sloth becomes a non-vicious, understood fatigue due to the absence of pleasure God withdraws.

The arid contemplation affords the soul unexpected moments of divine sweetness and spiritual insight, more meaningful than what it previously enjoyed, although initially less perceptible. As the soul is purged of sensory desires, it gains spiritual liberty and enjoys the fruits of the Holy Spirit, free from worldly, fleshly warfare.

Ultimately, this purgation allows the soul to act out of pure devotion to God, unrestricted by its former need for spiritual consolation. It develops a holy fear that enhances virtues, suppresses concupiscence, and ends its own satisfaction-seeking behavior. With the external pleasures dried up, the soul's yearning to serve God grows, providing a sacrifice pleasing to Him, as described by David.

In conclusion, through this night of aridity, the soul detaches from the

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desires and affections once seen as obstacles, breaking free from the bondage of its adversaries—devil, world, and flesh. The soul experiences a newfound spiritual liberty, expressed poignantly in the poetry "Oh, happy chance!—I went forth without being observed," stepping forth into a rhythm of spiritual rest and peace, as encapsulated in the line, "My house being now at rest."

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Chapter 14 Summary: Expounds this last line of the first stanza.

In Chapter XIV, the narrative delves into the spiritual journey of the soul after it has conquered its sensual desires. This process is the beginning of a transformative path referred to as the "night of sense." Once these carnal desires are mortified, the soul embarks on the "way of the spirit," also known as the path of illumination or infused contemplation. During this phase, God directly nourishes and refreshes the soul without the need for meditation or active participation by the soul itself. This journey leads some individuals towards the Divine union with God, though such souls are few.

As the soul proceeds through the night of sense, it undergoes significant trials and temptations. These include formidable temptations of the flesh, represented by Satan, that challenge one's senses and imagination more severely than death itself. The soul may also encounter a spirit of blasphemy, persistently introducing intolerable blasphemous thoughts into the soul's path. Another troubling presence is the "spirit of giddiness" (*Spiritus vertiginis*), which tests the soul by inducing scruples and confusion, creating a state of perplexity where clarity seems unreachable.

These spiritual afflictions serve to chastize and prepare the soul for greater wisdom and Divine union. They compel the soul to exercise resilience, purging it of its attachments to worldly comforts, thereby humiliating it



before granting it exaltation. As Ecclesiasticus and Jeremias testify, the untested soul remains unaware of wisdom's true depth, necessitating these trials for spiritual growth.

The length of this purgation varies. God dictates it based on the imperfections each soul must cleanse and the degree of union it is destined for. Some endure intense purification swiftly if they possess inherent strength, while others may experience gentle and prolonged trials due to their frailty. Throughout, God provides solace to prevent their fall, balancing periods of temptation with consolations.

Those destined for the ultimate union of love remain longest in this state of aridity and temptation. However, these trials lay the groundwork for eventual communion with God. As the chapter concludes, the text signals the transition into discussing the subsequent phase of this spiritual journey: the "second night."



Chapter 15 Summary: Which begins to treat of the dark nights of the spirit and says at what time it begins.

Chapter I introduces the concept of the "dark nights of the spirit," a crucial stage in the spiritual journey toward Divine union. This phase comes after the soul has moved through the initial purgation known as the "night of sense," characterized by spiritual dryness and trials. However, before entering the night of the spirit, the soul often spends an extended period, even years, advancing from the stage of beginners to proficient.

In this interim stage, the soul enjoys greater freedom and satisfaction in spiritual matters compared to the restrictive nature of the earlier purgation. This newfound state offers serene contemplation and spiritual sweetness without the previous labor of meditation. Nevertheless, this stage is not entirely devoid of challenges, as the purgation is incomplete without addressing the spirit, the principal part of the soul. As a result, the soul still encounters occasional dryness, darkness, and peril, serving as precursors to the impending night of the spirit.

During these periods, the soul undergoes smaller cycles of purgation, resembling brief nights and dawns, which God uses to prepare certain souls not destined for the highest levels of Divine love. These are akin to the biblical metaphor from the Psalms, where God's contemplation is sent like morsels, offering a taste of the full night of contemplation that will lead to



Divine union.

The chapter further explains that the sweet, interior pleasure experienced by those advancing in their spiritual journey is now more abundant than before. This joy, felt more keenly due to the sense's purification, occasionally overwhelms the sensual part of the soul, leading to spiritual fatigue and physical weaknesses. These manifestations, such as raptures and trances, occur because the soul's senses are not yet wholly spiritualized and free from the body's limitations.

The chapter concludes by highlighting the necessity for these souls to undergo the night of the spirit. In this phase, they will shed imperfections and fully prepare for the intense spiritual union with God, free from the bodily disturbances that afflict those still wrestling with their sensual nature.

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Chapter 16: Describes other imperfections which belong to these proficient.

In Chapter II, the focus shifts to the imperfections that affect those who are advancing spiritually, referred to as "proficients." These imperfections are categorized into two types: habitual and actual.

Habitual imperfections are deep-seated flaws ingrained in one's spirit that remain even after the initial purgation of the senses, which is merely the beginning of spiritual purification. These imperfections are like roots that stubbornly persist, and unless they're resolved through a more profound purification process known as the "purgation of the spirit," the spirit cannot achieve the pure unity with the Divine it seeks. Despite progress in their spiritual journey, these proficient individuals retain the habitual stains of their past, often without realizing it. The analogy is drawn between fresh stains and those that are deep-rooted and longstanding; the latter requiring more potent cleansing to achieve spiritual purity.

Proficients are also described as carrying a "hebetudo mentis," a dullness of mind and spirit, as well as the coarseness that results from human sin. This spiritual distraction and attachment to external stimuli need to be refined through the challenges faced in the "night of the spirit"—a metaphor for intense spiritual trials. This phase is necessary for enlightenment and recollection so that one may progress beyond being merely proficient to



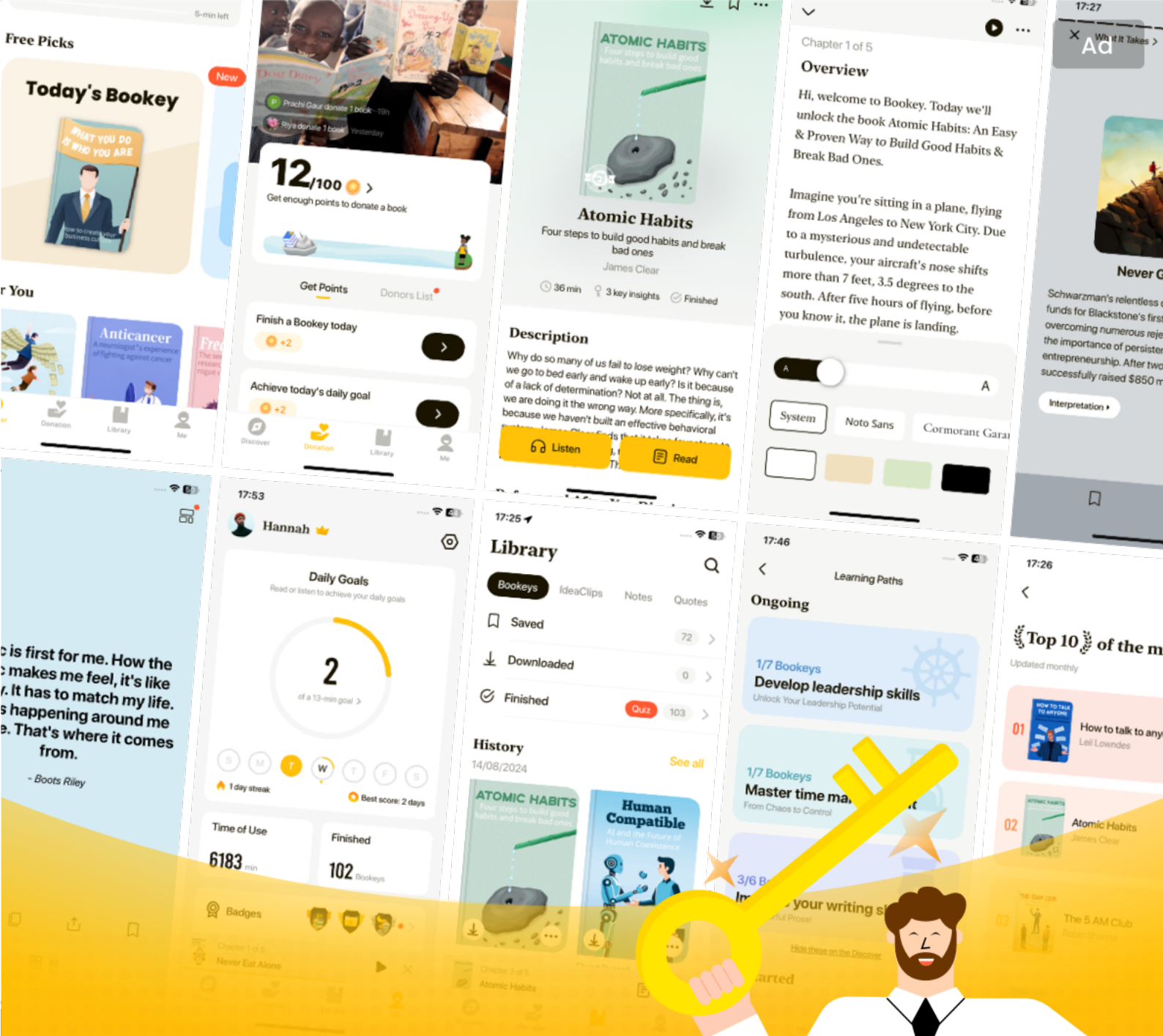
achieving a perfect union through love.

Actual imperfections are those that manifest in varied forms among individuals. Some are more vulnerable to spiritual distractions and deceptions due to a superficial grasp of spirituality, relying heavily on

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Chapter 17 Summary: Annotation for that which follows.

In this chapter, we delve into the transformative process experienced by the souls who are on a spiritual journey. These souls, referred to as "proficients," have reached a stage where they have spent considerable time indulging their senses with spiritual pleasures. This phase is necessary for aligning the sensual part of the soul with the spirit, creating a unified entity that functions with a singular purpose. This unity prepares the soul for a subsequent, more intense purification process known as the "night of the spirit."

This purification is essential because both the spiritual and sensual dimensions of the soul must undergo a thorough cleansing to achieve true spiritual unity. Only once the spirit begins its purification can the imperfections of the sensual part be addressed effectively. Hence, the initial phase, often termed as the "night of sense," serves more as a discipline or correction rather than complete purification. The imperfections in the sensual aspect are deeply rooted in the spirit, and true cleansing begins when the spirit itself is purged.

In this subsequent transformative phase, both components of the soul are concurrently purified. This sequence makes it crucial for the soul to have previously experienced the corrections and tranquility that follow the initial phase. Such experiences equip the soul with the necessary strength and



resilience required to endure a severe and demanding purification. This strength is essential because, without the previous phase's nurturing communion with God, the soul might lack the fortitude to withstand the rigorous cleansing process.

These proficient souls, although progressing, are still in the early stages of development. They still perceive and interact with God in a childlike manner due to the unrefined nature of their spiritual "gold." They have not yet attained the perfection that comes with the soul's union with God. When this ultimate state of union is achieved, their actions and spiritual capacities will transcend human limitations, becoming truly Divine. To facilitate this transformation, God removes the "old man," characterized by unrefined spiritual faculties and feelings, by stripping the soul of sensory and spiritual gratifications.

This divine intervention leads to a period of spiritual aridity and affliction, yet it is necessary for the soul's evolution. During this time, the soul is deprived of previous spiritual consolations to prepare it for a higher union borne out of love. This process involves a profound and often disorienting form of contemplation, which the soul describes in its expressions. This contemplation, although previously associated with the initial sensory purification, is fundamentally linked to this more profound purification of the spirit, marking it as a crucial stage in the soul's spiritual journey.



Chapter 18 Summary: Sets down the first stanza and the exposition thereof.

In Chapter IV, the narrative delves into the first stanza of a profound poetic piece, exploring its deeper meanings tied to spiritual purification and divine contemplation. This journey is metaphorically depicted as a "dark night," where the soul, fervently yearning for divine love, sets out alone, unnoticed, as its worldly 'house'—representing personal desires and distractions—lies in repose. The protagonist is driven by an intense longing for spiritual awakening, embarking on a transformative quest away from earthly constraints.

The exposition frames this spiritual journey as an experience of purgation, detachment, and poverty of spirit. These concepts are intricately connected, representing the soul's effort to transcend its limited understanding and emotional attachments. In this state, the soul feels a profound emptiness and darkness, characterized by a lack of reliance on its natural faculties: reason, will, and memory. Despite this darkness, the soul is propelled by an insatiable yearning for God, which gradually purifies and refines these faculties.

This process is described as a 'happy chance,' a fortuitous moment when the soul's faculties—senses, desires, and emotions—are subdued and aligned towards divine love. As the soul detaches from human limitations and



comprehensions, it steps into a realm of divine operation and understanding. This transformation allows the soul's understanding to transcend human logic, accessing divine wisdom. In unison, the will aligns with divine love, acting with new strength imparted by the Holy Spirit, while the memory shifts toward eternal, heavenly truths.

Thus, through this 'dark night' and purgation, the soul's energies and affections are wholly renewed, resulting in a divine temper and delight. The line "On a dark night" symbolizes this profound journey—a passage from human entanglements to divine union, unveiling a transformative path marked by love and purification.

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Chapter 19 Summary: Sets down the first line and begins to explain how this dark contemplation is not only night for the soul but is also grief and torment.

Chapter V of this mystical text discusses the profound and often distressing experience of the "dark night of the soul." This concept describes a period of spiritual purification and transformation, guided by what is termed "infused contemplation" or "mystical theology." Essentially, it is an inflow of divine wisdom into the soul that purges it from its imperfections, both natural and spiritual. In contemplative spirituality, this is seen as a movement toward the perfection of love and eventual union with God.

The chapter delves into why this divine wisdom feels like a dark night for the soul, a state marked by grief and torment. The primary reason is that God's wisdom transcends the soul's capabilities, creating a sense of overwhelming darkness. Much like how intense light can blind a weak eye, the grandeur of divine wisdom can obscure and overwhelm a soul that is not yet fully enlightened. This is why mystics, such as Saint Dionysius, refer to this divine input as a "ray of darkness," highlighting the paradox of an enlightening wisdom that nonetheless darkens the unenlightened soul.

Moreover, the chapter explains that the soul experiences much pain due to its own impurity when faced with this pure and luminous divine wisdom. The soul, much like human eyes, finds bright, intense light painful if they



are weak or dimmed. Feelings of unworthiness and misery surface, causing deep anguish, as the soul feels opposed to God. Biblical references, such as Job's trials and the Psalms, are used to illustrate these themes, emphasizing the mental torment of perceiving oneself as distant from divine grace.

The text further explores the soul's suffering due to its ingrained weaknesses when this divine force feels like an oppressive weight. This spiritual pressure can become so intense that the soul yearns for release, even through death, as experienced by the prophet Job. The chapter describes the paradox that although God's touch is gentle and merciful, intended to aid rather than punish, the soul's impurities transform this divine interaction into something seemingly harsh and burdensome.

Thus, the "dark night" is presented as a profound spiritual process where the soul's weaknesses and impurities clash with the divine light, leading to deep spiritual pain but ultimately pushing the soul towards eventual purification and closer union with God.

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Chapter 20: Of other kinds of pain that the soul suffers in this night.

In Chapter VI, we explore the profound sufferings that a soul endures during a transformative spiritual state known as the "Dark Night." This chapter delves into the intricate dynamics between the divine and the human as they intersect within the soul. The divine element is represented by purgative contemplation, a process aimed at renewing the soul to make it divine. This mystical purification strips the soul of its entrenched affections and attachments, leading to an experience akin to a spiritual death, reminiscent of Jonah's ordeal engulfed by a sea creature.

The soul, in this phase of purification, suffers from feelings of intense desolation and abandonment by God. It believes, quite mistakenly, that it has been cast off into darkness, void of divine presence, experiencing profound anguish, as described by King David, who lamented feeling abandoned and overwhelmed by affliction. This perception of being forsaken by God constitutes one of the greatest sources of the soul's turmoil.

As it undergoes this transformative journey, the soul also perceives itself to be ostracized by all creation, including its closest companions. This sense of abandonment is mirrored in the biblical narrative of Jonah, who, both physically and spiritually, felt swallowed by the abyss. Jonah's experiences echo the soul's journey through despair towards the hope of eventual



salvation and divine encounter.

Furthermore, this chapter discusses the intrinsic realization of utter poverty and wretchedness within the soul. In experiencing the divine's majesty, the soul becomes acutely aware of its imperfections and emptiness. This deep

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Chapter 21 Summary: Continues the same matter and considers other afflictions and constraints of the will.

Chapter VII delves into the profound challenges faced by the will during the spiritual journey known as the "dark night." This phase is marked by immense afflictions where the soul, upon entering this night, is haunted by sudden reminders of its current miseries and the uncertainty of finding relief. These sufferings are compounded by memories of past prosperity, especially for souls that have previously experienced divine consolations and rendered service to God. This sense of loss can be likened to the lamentations of the biblical figure Job, who experienced extreme despair, feeling broken and targeted by divine trials.

Further illustrating this plight, the prophet Jeremias bemoans his own spiritual desolation, highlighting the pervasive darkness and feeling of divine abandonment. Such experiences capture the essence of the soul's suffering during this purgative phase. Though this night promises eventual profound blessings and divine union, the soul endures great uncertainty and anguish, believing its trials to be unending. This is akin to David's lament, feeling perpetually trapped in darkness, with the specter of affliction ever-present.

Despite guidance from spiritual directors, the afflicted soul struggles to find solace, often perceiving that such advice signifies a misunderstanding of its



profound spiritual misery. The soul is left feeling imprisoned, unable to perceive any form of divine or human aid, until it is humbled and purified enough to align with the Spirit of God.

This purgation process is neither brief nor mild; it can span years, alternating between moments of harsh purgation and periods of relief characterized by illumination and loving interaction with God. These interludes provide a glimpse of the spiritual health being cultivated, though they might mislead the soul into believing that it has fully overcome its trials. Such perceptions are short-lived, as underlying impurities pull the soul back into deeper, more intense purgations, leaving it again under the weight of its miseries.

This dynamic reflects the experience of souls in purgatory, who, despite having faith, hope, and love, feel disconnected from God's love due to the prevailing sense of desolation. Even while capable of immense love for God, the soul cannot shake the notion that it is unworthy of divine love, burdened by its perceived wretchedness.

In sum, this chapter illustrates the intense purification the soul undergoes through the dark night, a necessary precursor to entering into deeper union with the divine, despite the soul's lingering fears and uncertainties.



Chapter 22 Summary: Of other pains which afflict the soul in this state.

Chapter VIII delves into the profound spiritual challenges that the soul experiences during a phase known as the "dark night." This spiritual condition is characterized by an overwhelming sense of desolation and an inability to connect with God. The soul finds itself unable to pray or focus on divine matters, feeling as if its prayers cannot reach God due to the spiritual barrier, a metaphorical cloud, between them. This state is compared to the lamentations of the prophet Jeremiah, who felt as though God had enclosed him with barriers, preventing communication.

During this dark night, the soul undergoes a thorough purgation and is stripped of its usual faculties, such as understanding, affection, and memory. These faculties are rendered ineffective, and the soul is plunged into periods of forgetfulness and distraction, losing awareness of its own actions or thoughts. In this process, as noted by King David, the soul reaches a state of annihilation, a complete absence of knowledge, to prepare it for divine union through a higher, more obscure form of contemplation.

The paradoxical nature of this spiritual darkness is emphasized: the purer and brighter the divine light interacting with the soul, the more it seems to obscure and nullify the soul's natural capacities. This concept is illustrated through the allegory of sunlight in a room. A ray of light, when pure and



unobstructed by particles, remains invisible and seems to diminish rather than enhance visibility. Similarly, the luminous divine light overwhelms the soul's natural perception, leading it to feel as though it is in the deepest darkness, despite being illuminated by divine presence.

Despite this perceived darkness, the soul receives a more profound spiritual enlightenment. The divine light heightens the soul's sensitivity and understanding when encountering spiritual truths or imperfections, analogous to how an object introduced into a ray of light becomes visible. Thus, even though the soul feels empty and devoid of specific understanding, it is being prepared for a deeper comprehension of divine mysteries. As Apostle Paul suggests, the soul, when spiritually refined through such poverty and emptiness, perceives all things more clearly and possesses everything while having nothing.

In sum, Chapter VIII explores the transformative pain of spiritual desolation as a vital process for achieving divine union. By undergoing this purification, the soul advances in understanding and spiritual insight, becoming capable of embracing profound divine truths.

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Chapter 23 Summary: How, although this night brings darkness to the spirit, it does so in order to illumine it and give it light.

In Chapter IX, the discussion centers on the paradoxical nature of the spiritual journey often referred to as the "dark night." This journey is characterized by an apparent darkness that initially brings about a sense of loss, misery, and emptiness. However, this darkness serves a profound purpose: it is designed to elevate the spirit by stripping away natural affections and attachments, enabling it to achieve a state of divine freedom and illumination.

The chapter makes a comparison to the elemental states in nature; just as elements have no distinct color, odor, or taste to combine with everything, the spirit must be stripped of all specific attachments to become one with Divine Wisdom. This purification allows the soul to experience the divine sweetness that transcends natural experiences and is unattainable otherwise. This notion is illustrated with the metaphor of the Israelites who could not appreciate the manna, divine bread in the desert, because they longed for the earthly pleasures of Egypt.

The requirement for detachment is paramount because divine affections are vastly different from natural ones. The chapter notes that achieving divine love and understanding exceeds natural human capacities, necessitating a

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profound purgation—a detachment from natural faculties to prepare the understanding for divine illumination. This dark night is described as a trial by fire, comparable to the trials faced by the Biblical figure Job, referenced with his sufferings symbolizing the soul's necessary purification.

Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on the transformative process whereby the soul becomes attuned to divine peace and knowledge, vastly superior to any natural comprehension. The soul's former peace, tied to imperfections, is dismantled, echoing Jeremiah's lamentation of lost peace to reach a state of profound divine tranquility.

Throughout this dark night, the soul undergoes intense trials, feeling alienated and afflicted, yet this suffering is a precursor to a spiritual rebirth imbued with immense divine blessings. The ultimate aim is to lead the soul to a perfect state of union with God, rendering human faculties insufficient without complete transformation, turning former peace into spiritual grandeur.

Thus, the chapter concludes by emphasizing that the initial torment results from the soul's unpreparedness for divine light, not from the nature of the Divine itself. The purification process is a necessary prelude to the ultimate spiritual enlightenment and the treasures awaiting in the divine realm, aligning with Isaiah's and Philippians' poetic descriptions of divine peace and understanding surpassing all comprehension.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Detachment from Natural Attachments

Critical Interpretation: Consider this: the path to spiritual enlightenment, often shrouded in darkness and adversity, is essential for growth. Imagine yourself as a vessel, burdened with past attachments and personal desires, making you too heavy to rise to the heavens. As Chapter 23 suggests, embracing these trials purifies your soul, stripping away all that is transient and earthly. This can inspire you to find liberation in letting go, shedding layers of worldly distractions to uncover your true self anchored in divine wisdom. Like the Israelites in the desert failing to grasp the purity of manna, we too must look beyond our cravings for what once was, to recognize the purer joy that awaits us. By embracing this process, you open yourself to divine sweetness, achieving a transformative state of peace and enlightenment beyond what your senses can comprehend. It's in surrendering to the suffering of the dark night where true spiritual freedom and divine union become attainable.

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Chapter 24: Explains this purgation fully by a comparison.

Chapter X Summary: The Purification Process

This chapter delves deeply into the concept of spiritual purification using the metaphor of fire transforming a log of wood. The analogy is used to explain how Divine light, or contemplative love, purges the soul, preparing it for perfect union with the Divine. This process is compared to how fire acts on wood, first drying it out, making it appear unsightly and black as it expels moisture and impurities, and finally kindling it until it becomes fire itself.

1. Purification through Divine Light: The chapter begins by comparing the purgative effect of Divine light on the soul to the transformative power of fire on wood. Just as fire gradually purges wood of its moisture and impurities, Divine light removes the soul's deeply rooted imperfections, making them visible as it enlightens the soul. This awareness may cause the soul to feel undesirable in the sight of God, yet this process is necessary for ultimate purification.

2. Transformation and Affliction: This divine purgation is essential for the soul's transformation and involves affliction, as the soul confronts its weaknesses and imperfections. The knowledge and wisdom that will



eventually unite with the soul also initiate its purgation. This experience can be painful as the soul is not yet ready to receive Divine light and sweetness, similar to how wood must be prepared before it can burn brightly in the fire.

3. Purgatory Parallel: The chapter draws a parallel to the souls in purgatory, where the fire cleanses only those imperfections that exist. Once those are consumed, the soul is free from suffering and able to enjoy its union with the Divine.

4. Gradual Enkindling of Love: As the soul undergoes purification, it becomes increasingly enkindled with love, akin to how wood becomes hotter as it is more thoroughly prepared by fire. While this increase in spiritual love might not always be perceptible, moments of clarity allow the soul to recognize and appreciate the work being done in it.

5. Cyclic Nature of Trials: The purification process is cyclical and intensifies with each phase. Initially, the soul feels relief and joy, believing the trials are over, yet as it delves deeper into purification, more subtle and internal imperfections are revealed, leading to renewed suffering.

6. Hope Amidst Suffering: Despite the intense suffering during this internal purgation, the soul can experience periods of relief, where it rejoices in the progress made. However, awareness of remaining imperfections warns of future trials, as the deepest parts of the soul take the



longest to purify.

7. Completion and Continuation: The chapter concludes by stressing that although the soul often feels devoid of good during purification, these experiences are temporary. Eventually, the soul will emerge from this process kindled in love and yearning, as indicated in the subsequent line of the poem.

Overall, the chapter emphasizes the necessary suffering and purification the soul must endure to achieve a profound spiritual transformation and union with Divine love.

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Chapter 25 Summary: Begins to explain the second line of the first stanza. Describes how, as the fruit of these rigorous constraints, the soul finds itself with the vehement passion of Divine love.

Chapter XI delves into the profound transformation of the soul initiated by the intense passion of Divine love, as expressed in the second line of the first stanza. This transformation is depicted metaphorically as a fire, similar in concept to the physical action of fire upon wood. However, it fundamentally differs from the more sensual aspects previously discussed. This chapter focuses on the spiritual enkindling of love within the soul during a state of contemplative darkness.

As the soul undergoes this dark night of contemplation, it experiences a deep, passionate love for God. This love is not conjured actively by the soul but is infused by Divine influence, creating a state of passivity in the soul, which is akin to being wounded by the love of God. This process leads to an incipient union with the Divine, echoing the comprehensive nature of God's love, which involves not just the soul's emotional faculties but its entire being. Consequently, the soul becomes increasingly focused and detached from worldly desires, as its energies and desires are drawn inward toward God.

This intense focus and purification are considered necessary for the soul to



attain a strong union with God. The soul's desires and capacities become realigned to achieve the fulfillment of the first commandment: to love God wholeheartedly, with all its strength and spirit. This preparation enables the soul to be receptive to the strong divine union of love that God bestows through this purgative process.

In its yearning and longing, the soul experiences profound yearning and desire, akin to spiritual hunger pangs. The scriptural references to David's thirst for God and the parched soul's lament in Job illustrate the depth of the soul's longing. In its darkness and doubt, the soul finds itself craving divine love while unable to attain a sense of satisfaction or peace. This state of spiritual unrest is exacerbated by the soul's awareness of its distance from God and the simultaneous stimulation of Divine love, which intensifies its yearning.

Despite this afflictive darkness, the soul gains a certain strength and companionship from the very love that assails it, affirming its existence and connection to the Divine. Should this dark fire of love cease its assault, the soul would feel empty and weak, as its strength is derived from this divine enkindling. This dual experience of spiritual suffering and divine love allows the soul to be transformed, preparing it for a deeper union with God, as depicted by the prophet Isaiah's yearning in the night, signifying the soul's continual watchfulness for divine presence.



Chapter 26 Summary: Shows how this horrible night is purgatory, and how in it the Divine wisdom illumines men on earth with the same illumination that purges and illumines the angels in Heaven.

Chapter XII delves into the complex interplay of divine wisdom, love, and purification, drawing a parallel between the purgation of souls on Earth and that of angels in Heaven. This chapter emphasizes a mystical journey—a dark night for the soul where earthly suffering serves as a purgatorial fire, akin to the purifying flames experienced by spirits in the afterlife. This divine illumination purges the soul of its impurities, mirroring how angels are cleansed and enlightened by the wisdom of God.

This process on Earth is distinct because it involves not material fire, but the intense spiritual fire of divine love. King David, in the Bible, sought this purifying love, equating a clean heart with divine grace. As described in the Book of Lamentations, the soul's purification is a divine process wherein wisdom and love are intertwined. This spiritual purification is not only an earthly experience but aligns with the celestial, as angels receive illumination and knowledge from God, filtering down through hierarchical ranks to humans.

The chapter further explores how this divine light is communicated swiftly and seamlessly, like sunlight passing through windows, with its intensity

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varying based on proximity to the divine source. Higher beings, close to God, receive His light fully, while humans experience it more distantly, with greater suffering. This is due to our impure nature, which initially causes distress when met with the divine light, similar to how a weak eye reacts painfully to sunlight.

However, over time, as the soul is purged and becomes more refined through this purgatorial process, it begins to receive this divine union more sweetly, eventually akin to the angelic experience. This transformation involves an enkindling of love that isn't always immediately perceived by the soul. At first, the divine fire works subtly, preparing and drying up the soul, akin to wood, before it can feel the full warmth of the fire. Gradually, as understanding is further purged, the soul may experience mystical knowledge and love that inflame its will and understanding.

The chapter poetically describes this overwhelming experience, drawing on King David's psalm imagery, where his heart grows hot and a powerful fire is enkindled within him during contemplation. This divine touch, combining both understanding and love, represents a glimpse of the perfect union with God that the soul strives toward.

Conclusively, the chapter highlights the duality of divine light and love in this mystical process, akin to fire's heat and light. God's operation in this night can strike either the will with love or the understanding with wisdom,



sometimes independently, reflecting the profound mystery of divine interaction with the soul on its quest for union with God. Throughout this purgatorial journey, the soul learns to embrace the profound love of God, even when understanding remains limited—a concept discussed at length by theologians and mystics who debate the relationship between love and knowledge.

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Chapter 27 Summary: Of other delectable effects which are wrought in the soul by this dark night of contemplation.

Chapter XIII delves into the transformative effects of the "dark night of contemplation" on the soul. This mystical state, characterized by darkness, paradoxically becomes a source of profound enlightenment for the soul, as it helps individuals experience the divine presence in various forms and develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationship with God.

The chapter describes how, during this dark night, the soul occasionally encounters a divine light that penetrates the darkness, illuminating the soul's understanding in a way that surpasses the limits of language and comprehension. It discusses the dynamic tension between the understanding and the will—two faculties of the soul—which can sometimes become united in this contemplative state. When this happens, the purgation or cleansing of the soul's understanding is intensified, allowing for a greater capacity to receive divine insight.

A critical aspect of this chapter is the exploration of why the effects of purgative contemplation are first felt more strongly in the will than in the understanding. This is attributed to the nature of enkindling love, which operates more as a passion affecting the soul's emotions, rather than a



conscious, deliberate act of the will. This passionate love compels the will toward divine union, even though the understanding might still be immersed in darkness and not fully cleansed.

The chapter compares this spiritual thirst and love to that described during the "night of sense," wherein the spirit's superior part, rather than the senses, experiences a profound longing for divine union. Despite greater perceived distress during this spiritual experience compared to the initial night of sense, the soul feels a yearning for God that far transcends any physical or sensory suffering.

Interestingly, this yearning for divine connection involves a dynamic transformation alongside purgation. Even when the soul is initially unaware of this in its dark spiritual night, God kindles a profound love within it. Initially, the soul is consumed by anxiety over its perceived separation from God, fearing abandonment. These fears and suffering are compounded by the soul's deeper realization of its spiritual impoverishment and yearning for divine love. The intense desire impels the soul into bold acts of love, as exemplified by biblical figures like Mary Magdalene, who metaphorically pushed through societal barriers to express her devotion after the death of Jesus.

As the soul progresses through contemplation, the inner purgation allows it to become attuned to divine love's passionate inebriation. It propels the soul



into unafraid acts of devotion, paralleling the love of Rachel for her children or Mary Magdalene's courage to confront obstacles in seeking the divine.

Ultimately, the chapter suggests that the soul undergoes a profound transformation. This process strips away imperfections, renewing the soul much like an eagle gaining fresh plumage or the renewal of the inner person in divine likeness, as spiritual faculties gradually become imbued with divine characteristics. Consequently, as God continues this purgative work through contemplation, the soul becomes increasingly divine, transcending human limitations and living for God alone.

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Chapter 28: Wherein are set down and explained the last three lines of the first stanza.

Chapter XIV delves into the profound journey of the soul towards union with its Divine Beloved, illuminated through a metaphor derived from a discrete nighttime departure. This metaphor reflects the soul's need for solitude, reminiscent of a night escape to evade disturbances within its house—symbolizing the soul itself, along with its faculties, passions, and desires. The soul yearns to unite with the Beloved, seeking a serene, solitary encounter much like a bride desiring to meet her beloved alone.

The passage elaborates on the necessity for this metaphorical nighttime escape. The "house" represents the individual's internal world, where various passions and desires—likened to people residing within—often disrupt one's spiritual journey. These 'inhabitants' are described as a man's enemies, as stated in the Gospel, due to their tendency to hinder the soul's pursuit of ultimate spiritual good and freedom. For the soul to attain divine union, these distractions must be pacified or put to rest, allowing the soul to operate freely and open itself to divine love. This state of passivity is crucial as it permits God to bestow supernatural blessings upon the soul, transcending any natural ability or inclination that might obstruct this divine reception.

The chapter describes this pivotal moment as a "happy chance," an



extraordinary stroke of fortune when God Himself subdues the inner turmoil of faculties, passions, and desires, facilitating the soul's unobstructed passage into the vastness of divine love. This divine intervention quietly quells these disruptive forces, enabling the soul to transcend beyond its sensual house, into the spiritual union of perfect love with God.

The metaphor signifies liberation from the shackles of internal turmoil, depicting not only freedom but a newfound richness and profound liberty inherent in spiritual life. It highlights the transformative journey from the misery of enslavement to desires, towards inestimable spiritual blessings. The subsequent stanzas promise to further reveal the soul's jubilant song celebrating this fortunate transformation from night into the dawn of spiritual enlightenment and freedom.

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Chapter 29 Summary: Sets down the second stanza and its exposition.

In Chapter XV, the text continues to explore the transformative journey of the soul through the metaphorical "dark night." This chapter delves into the concepts and experiences that the soul encounters during this spiritual passage, emphasizing the profound happiness and security it finds despite the challenges it has faced. The soul addresses an implicit concern that the darkness and tumult it endured could have led to its downfall. Contrary to this worry, the soul claims that the night has actually led to its salvation and liberation.

Within the darkness, the soul manages to evade its adversaries—forces that constantly obstruct its spiritual progress. This evasion is made possible by the soul's ability to "disguise" itself using three metaphorical garments, which symbolize different spiritual states or virtues, although these will be detailed later in the text. The soul's escape follows a "secret ladder," representing living faith, that facilitates its hidden and secure departure from its current condition.

This purgative night acts as a time when the soul's desires, emotions, and passions are subdued, enabling it to achieve its spiritual goals unimpeded by past hindrances. The chapter underscores that this process occurs in profound secrecy and safety, illustrating the protection and peace the soul



experiences even amidst earlier sorrows. The opening line of the stanza, "In darkness and secure," encapsulates this idea of finding true safety and fulfillment in the mysterious, yet enlightening, darkness of spiritual growth.

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Chapter 30 Summary: Explains how, though in darkness, the soul walks securely.

In Chapter XVI, the text explores the transformative journey of the soul through what is described as spiritual darkness. This darkness symbolizes the suppression and purging of the soul's natural desires and faculties, encompassing sensual, interior, and spiritual aspects. The purpose of this dark night is to prepare the soul for divine illumination by eliminating dependence on its own limited and human capacities. This process effectively blinds the senses and intellect, leaving the soul unable to rely on its own understanding or desires, which, paradoxically, ensures its security.

The chapter asserts that the soul's typical pitfalls arise from its desires, reflections, or understanding becoming misaligned with its true calling. However, in this state of darkness, these faculties are suspended, shielding the soul from its usual vulnerabilities, such as worldly temptations or satanic misleadings. As a result, the absence of natural operations in this darkness leads to greater spiritual security and eventual union with God, as foretold by the Prophet in scriptural references.

A critical point addressed is why God would darken not only sinful desires but also spiritual understandings. The argument is that the soul's natural faculties are inherently flawed and impure; hence any spiritual activity they undertake would be tainted by their baseness. The soul must first be cleansed



of these impure inclinations to receive divine encounters in a manner that is truly spiritual and celestial.

Furthermore, the text explores how genuine spiritual growth often feels like regression. When the soul embarks on new, unknown paths, led by divine guidance, it may mistake the absence of familiar signposts for loss. This is likened to a traveler venturing into uncharted territories to broaden their experiences and knowledge, relying on unfamiliar routes to make progress.

The chapter also highlights the role of suffering as a more secure and growth-inducing path than active efforts or enjoyment. Suffering aligns the soul more closely with divine strength and wisdom, purifying and readying it for divine encounters.

Another significant reason for the soul's secure journey in darkness is the protective, divine guidance of a higher wisdom. This "dark light" or divine contemplation draws the soul ever closer to God, at times feeling more intense obscurity as it approaches divine radiance. This protective guidance is likened to a patient being carefully tended during a cure, ensuring minimal interference from external distractions as the soul regains its spiritual health.

The chapter concludes by realigning perceptions of divine union as a journey of faith rather than clarity. The true light and truth of God often appear as the darkest obscurity to human faculties, requiring the soul to transcend its

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natural tendencies, thus walking securely in this divine darkness—disguised and guided by a secret, internal compass.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The transformative role of spiritual darkness

Critical Interpretation: In the depths of your spiritual journey, the notion of spiritual darkness can initially seem daunting, yet it holds the promise of extraordinary transformation. This dark night serves as a divine tool, purging your soul of worldly distractions, and reframing your understanding of genuine spiritual growth. As the familiar fades, you're propelled away from reliance on personal desires and intellect, instead ushering you into a space where faith becomes your compass. Paradoxically, these phases of obscurity offer much-needed protection, as they guide you away from the traps of everyday temptations or deceptions. Venturing into uncharted spiritual terrains, although uncertain, prepares your soul for a deeper, purer union with the divine essence, teaching you to trust in the unseen paths. Embrace this darkness, knowing it equips and refines you for a divine love and truth that surpasses all understanding. Such is the beauty of spiritual reliance over clarity; it's in darkness that your soul truly thrives and discovers internal divine guidance.

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Chapter 31 Summary: Explains how this dark contemplation is secret.

Chapter XVII delves into the concept of "dark contemplation," a mysterious and secretive spiritual process leading to a profound union of love with the divine. This chapter is part of a larger discourse on mystical theology, a deep and obscure spiritual understanding of God's nature, which infuses the soul with love without the soul's conscious grasp or the interference of natural faculties. Here, the text aims to explain the secretive nature of this mystical journey using the metaphor of a "secret ladder."

The term "secret" is pivotal to understanding this chapter, as it characterizes the nature of the mystical experience. This experience is secret in several ways: first, because it transcends human understanding and remains hidden from the intellect and senses. According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, this wisdom is infused into the soul by the Holy Spirit in a manner beyond the grasp of natural faculties, thus only the soul itself can faintly perceive it, and neither human understanding nor even other spiritual beings like the devil can penetrate it.

The secretive aspect is further explored through the transformative effects of this dark contemplation. During the purgative process, it is shrouded in darkness and affliction, purging and preparing the soul for divine union. Even upon the soul's later illumination, when the soul is flooded with divine



wisdom, it remains indescribable. This mystical knowledge is so refined and abstract that it defies articulation in human language or imagination. The text compares this experience to beholding something unprecedented, beyond natural comparison or expression.

Scriptural references are employed to illustrate the ineffability of God's communication with the soul. Examples from the Bible, such as the encounters of Jeremiah and Moses with God, demonstrate the limitations of human expression when faced with divine revelation. These experiences are so profound that neither internal imagination nor external speech can adequately convey them. The soul, recognizing its communion with God, perceives this wisdom but remains unable to articulate it.

Furthermore, the text notes that this mystical wisdom not only conceals itself from the individual but also cloaks the soul itself within a divine abyss. Herein, the soul feels detached from worldly entities, as though dwelling in an infinite, peaceful wilderness, thereby emphasizing the remoteness and sacred solitude of this state. This isolation enhances the soul's elevation above worldly concerns, allowing it to experience the divine more purely.

Ultimately, this chapter underscores the inherent secrecy and unknowability of the divine paths leading to spiritual perfection and union with God. The divine wisdom imparted during this journey is beyond human comprehension and language, accessible only through direct, mystical



experience. The paths toward God are likened to invisible footsteps on water, imperceptible and unexplained by human means, reinforcing the theme of spiritual transcendence and the sacred mystery of divine union.

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Chapter 32: Explains how this secret wisdom is likewise a ladder.

Chapter XVIII Summary: The Secret Wisdom as a Ladder

This chapter explores the concept of secret wisdom as a metaphorical ladder in the spiritual journey. Secret contemplation is compared to a ladder because, just like climbing a ladder to reach treasures, this mystical contemplation allows the soul to ascend toward divine treasures and heavenly knowledge without conscious effort. The biblical reference to David's Psalm is used to illustrate this journey, where divine favor helps a soul ascend through the "vale of tears" (a difficult journey) to divine blessing.

The chapter further elaborates that this contemplative ladder, like any physical ladder, has rungs for ascending and descending. Mystical insights raise the soul toward God while simultaneously humbling it. This dual movement mirrors the spiritual principle that true humility leads to exaltation, as emphasized by biblical teachings in Luke and Proverbs.

The path to spiritual perfection involves experiencing and balancing exaltation (understanding God's grandeur) and humiliation (recognizing one's limitations). The soul navigates continual ups and downs until



achieving a perfect state of love and humility, eventually uniting with God at the ladder's top.

This journey is further compared to Jacob's ladder in the Bible, which he saw in a dream with angels moving between heaven and earth—a

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Chapter 33 Summary: Begins to explain the ten steps of the mystic ladder of Divine love, according to Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas. The first five are here treated.

In Chapter XIX, the narrative explores the mystical journey of the soul ascending towards Divine love through a metaphorical ladder, as described by Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas. This ladder consists of ten steps, each representing a deeper level of spiritual engagement and longing for God. The chapter delves into the first five of these steps, detailing the transformative process of the soul.

The first step is characterized by a profound longing that causes the soul to swoon with love for God. This longing echoes the words of the Bride in the Song of Songs, expressing a spiritual sickness that empties the soul of worldly desires for the glory of God. This conceptual sickness is not detrimental but purifying, making the soul indifferent to everything but God's presence.

On the second step, the soul becomes relentless in its search for God. This continuous quest mirrors the Bride's nocturnal search in the scriptures, reflecting a determined and unyielding desire to find the Beloved in every aspect of existence. As David counsels, the soul seeks God's presence in all things, finding spiritual discourse in the mundanity of daily life. This step



transitions the soul towards the third level through a renewed purgation process.

The third step involves fervent labor in the soul, inciting a tireless commitment to serve God. Here, fear, as a derivative of love, inspires an eagerness for spiritual toil. Drawing parallels with Jacob's love for Rachel, the narrative illustrates how great love reduces labor to insignificance. The soul becomes acutely aware of its inadequacies in serving God and humbly perceives itself as inferior to others, signifying deep spiritual humility and the absence of vainglory.

At the fourth step, there is an enduring suffering endured willingly for the sake of the Beloved, displaying the soul's fortitude. Inspired by Saint Augustine's insight, the soul minimizes great burdens through love. The Bride's plea to the Spouse symbolizes the soul's desire for an eternal seal of love. The soul seeks not its own pleasures but focuses on pleasing God, feeling grateful for the opportunity to suffer for divine love. This level kindles spiritual detachment from worldly things, pressing the soul towards the fifth step.

The fifth step intensifies the soul's desire for union with God, driven by an impatient longing. The vehemence of this yearning is similar to Rachel's desire for children, highlighting a distress that arises from delays in spiritual fulfillment. Here, the soul is nourished by love, causing a hunger that



propels it to strive fervently towards a closer communion with God, preparing it to transcend to the sixth step.

Throughout these steps, the narrative captures the soul’s transformative journey through purgation, fervent service, and intense longing, painting a vivid picture of the divine ascent towards deeper spiritual union.

Step	Description
1	A profound longing for God causes the soul to swoon with love, marking the beginning of spiritual purgation. The soul detaches from worldly desires, focused solely on God's presence.
2	The soul becomes relentless in searching for God, akin to the Bride's quest in the Song of Songs. Seeking God in all things, the soul finds spiritual meaning even in mundane life, positioning itself for further spiritual refinement.
3	This step is characterized by fervent labor inspired by love. The soul understands its shortcomings, embracing spiritual humility and feeling inferior to others. Love minimizes the perceived burden of spiritual toil.
4	The soul willingly endures suffering for the Beloved, encouraged by spiritual fortitude and a desire to please God rather than seeking personal pleasure. This journey fosters detachment from worldly goods.
5	An intensified desire for union with God permeates the soul. The longing, akin to Rachel's desire for children, drives the soul to strive intensely for a deeper connection with God, propelling it towards further spiritual transcendence.

Chapter 34 Summary: Wherein are treated the other five steps of love.

Chapter XX Summary: The Ascension of Love's Steps

In this chapter, the progression of the soul through the remaining five steps of a mystical ladder of love is explored, highlighting a journey toward divine union. This ascent illustrates a deepening relationship with God, characterized by a series of spiritual elevations where each step reflects a profound transformation within the soul.

Sixth Step: Swiftiness and Hope

The sixth step describes a stage where the soul, bolstered by hope, moves swiftly and repeatedly toward God. Here, the prophet Isaiah's words resonate: those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength, akin to eagles soaring without exhaustion. The swiftiness reflects the soul's deepening purification and aligned desire for God, echoed in the Psalms that speak of running towards divine commandments as the heart enlarges with love.

Seventh Step: Vehement Boldness

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At the seventh step, the soul is infused with courage, marked by a boldness that emerges not from reasoning but from unwavering trust in divine favor. This resonates with the Apostle Paul's attributes of love, which include belief, hope, and potential without limit. Historical figures like Moses and the biblical bride emphasize the empowering nature of this divine boldness, tied to moments of intercession and divine favor. The soul must approach this step with humility, confident only when sensing God's extended favor, avoiding the fall from previous advancements.

Eighth Step: Unyielding Union

In the eighth step, the soul captures and binds itself to God, like the bride who finds her beloved and refuses release. Although this union does not endure perpetually in mortal life due to its closeness to heavenly glory, it offers the soul brief tastes of divine satisfaction. The reference to the prophet Daniel underscores the rarity and profound experience of staying within this step as a "man of desires." This step is a prelude to the more refined state of perfection.

Ninth Step: Sweet Burning Love

The ninth step epitomizes the perfection where the soul burns sweetly with God's love, a flame kindled by the Holy Spirit due to intimate union with the divine. Saint Gregory's description of the Apostles burning with love



post-Pentecost illustrates this transformative sweetness. Here, the soul savors God’s inexhaustible riches, though words fail to fully encapsulate this experience. It sets the stage for the final transformative step beyond this earthly existence.

Tenth Step: Divine Assimilation

The final step occurs not in this life but in the afterlife when the soul achieves perfect likeness to God through direct, unmediated vision. This ascent signifies complete purification, akin to the pure-hearted who see God, as Matthew’s Gospel declares. Saint John hints at this ultimate resemblance to the divine, a participation in God’s essence without possessing His vastness. On this step, the soul’s journey on the secret ladder concludes as it experiences total unity, with nothing hidden from its understanding in divine clarity.

The chapter concludes by articulating that this mystical theology continuously elevates the soul above all things, driven by love’s eternal desire to unite with its source. This transformative journey draws parallels to fire rising to merge with its origin, a central metaphor for the soul’s ascent toward God.

Step Number	Step Name	Description
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Step Number	Step Name	Description
Sixth Step	Swiftness and Hope	The soul, filled with hope, hastens toward God, drawing strength like an eagle soaring. It represents purification and a strong desire for God, characterized by willingness and enthusiasm to follow divine commandments.
Seventh Step	Vehement Boldness	Infused with courage and trust in divine favor, the soul exhibits boldness without relying on reasoning. This stage involves humility and a confident reliance on sensing divine favor, linked to moments of intercession and historical figures like Moses.
Eighth Step	Unyielding Union	The soul binds itself to God, experiencing fleeting moments of divine satisfaction similar to glimpsing heavenly glory. This union is rare and profound, offering a "man of desires" sensation and indicating a more complete spiritual state of being.
Ninth Step	Sweet Burning Love	This step embodies perfection where the soul thrives in God's love, ignited by the Holy Spirit. The experience parallels the Apostles' transformative love post-Pentecost. The soul enjoys divine riches, though the experience transcends verbal expression, setting the stage for ultimate transformation.
Tenth Step	Divine Assimilation	This posthumous step sees the soul attaining likeness to God through direct vision. Signifying complete purification akin to seeing God in Matthew's Gospel, the soul reaches total unity, with full understanding in divine clarity. The journey concludes in eternal alignment with the divine source.



Chapter 35 Summary: Which explains the word 'disguised,' and describes the colours of the disguise of the soul in this night.

In Chapter XXI, the author delves into the significance of the term "disguised" in the context of spiritual contemplation, building upon previous explanations of the "secret ladder" of faith. The concept of disguise is essential for the soul's journey towards divine communion, symbolizing its transformation and protection as it seeks to align with divine grace and deter opposition from spiritual adversaries such as the devil, the world, and the flesh.

To successfully undertake this spiritual journey, the soul adopts a disguise illustrated by three distinctive colors—white, green, and purple—each representing a fundamental theological virtue. White signifies faith, which serves as an invisible shield against the devil. It is through faith that the soul remains unseen and unharmed by the most cunning of its enemies, affirming Saint Peter's assertion that faith is the strongest defense against evil.

Green, meanwhile, stands for hope. It shields the soul from worldly distractions, elevating its aspirations toward eternal life where earthly desires become trivial and void. This green armor of hope ensures that the soul's gaze is constantly fixed on divine realities, thus safeguarding it from worldly temptations and sustaining its upward focus towards God.



Finally, the purple garment represents charity, or love, which crowns this spiritual disguise. Charity enriches the soul, rendering it beautiful and desirable to God, while also providing resilience against the flesh's temptations. This color facilitates the ultimate union with the divine by negating selfish desires and enhancing the grace of the other virtues.

Together, these virtues—faith, hope, and charity—align the soul's faculties of understanding, memory, and will, drawing it closer to God. Faith obscures natural intellect to enlighten it with divine wisdom, hope redirects longing away from temporal possessions towards eternal divine union, and charity fosters an exclusive yearning for God.

In summary, the chapter underscores the soul's need to embrace these virtues as a disguise to achieve spiritual union with God. This transformation is both a strategic necessity and a fortunate opportunity, described as a "happy chance," enabling the soul to progress from its dark night into the light of divine love and salvation.

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Chapter 36: Explains the third line of the second stanza.

Chapter XXII Summary: The Third Line of the Second Stanza

In this chapter, the author delves into the significance of a soul embarking on its spiritual journey, as encapsulated in the third line of the second stanza of a poem by St. John of the Cross. This line symbolizes the soul's liberation from worldly and sinful attachments, a profound transformation facilitated by stepping out into the unknown. This journey marks the soul's evolution from earthly concerns to a more divine existence, ultimately attaining a state of spiritual freedom that is ardently sought after by many.

The soul's journey is depicted as an ascension from earthly to celestial realms, from human qualities to divine nature. Such a transformation allows the soul to engage in higher conversations and connections with the heavens, achieving a state of perfection. While the chapter touches upon the nuances of this process, it prioritizes helping those souls currently navigating these trials, yet unaware of their purpose or significance—a task that was outlined in the prologue of the book.

The central theme of the chapter is the dual nature of this spiritual night. Although it is fraught with trials and fears, it simultaneously offers the promise of divine blessings for those who persevere. This journey through

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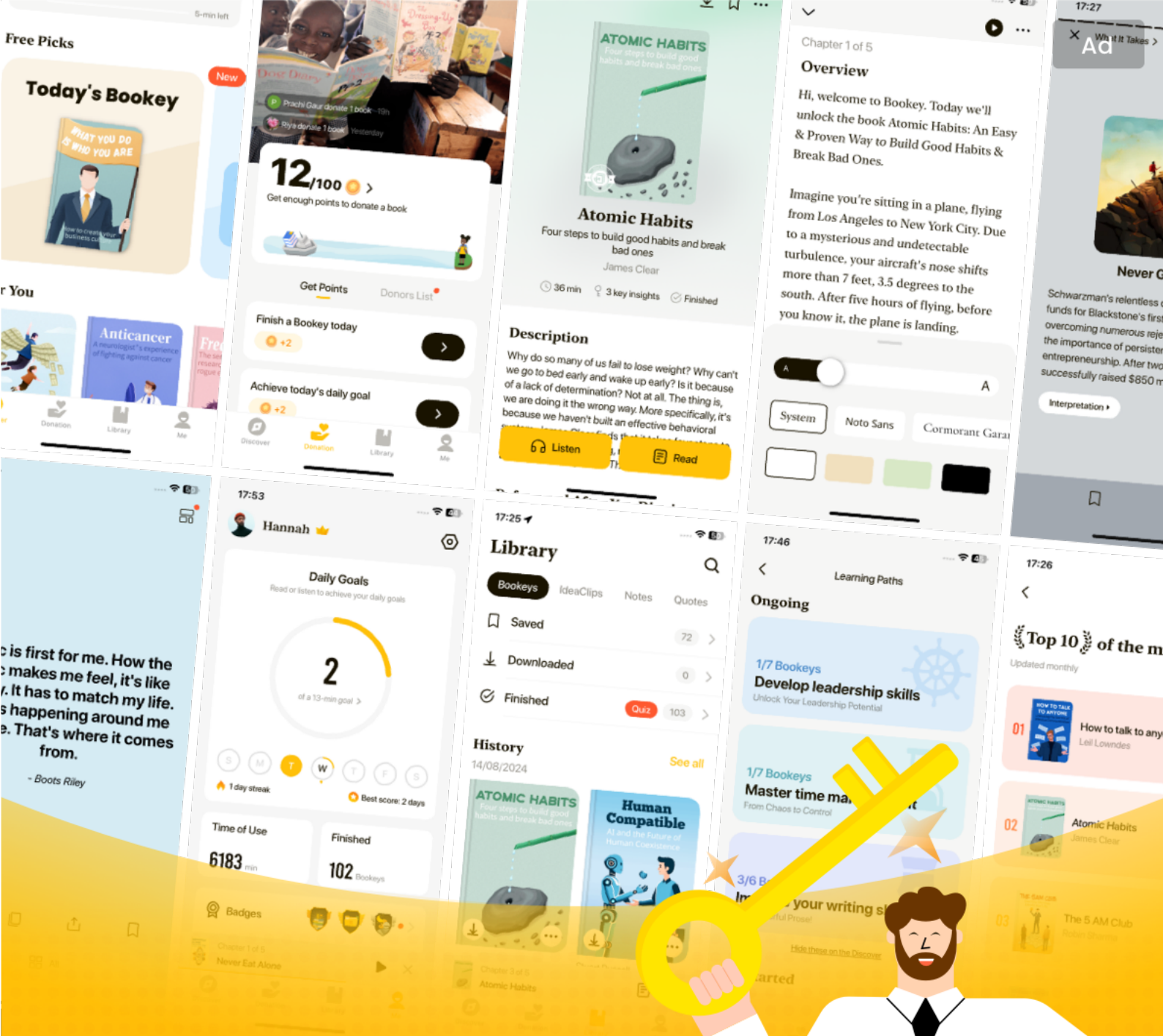
the darkness is portrayed as a fortunate opportunity for the soul, reinforcing the idea that enduring these challenges can lead to extraordinary spiritual rewards.

Finally, the concept of 'darkness and concealment' is introduced as the environment through which the soul must navigate. This setting underscores the mysterious nature of the spiritual journey, where the unknown serves as both a challenge and a guide to deeper spiritual understanding. Through these challenges, the soul finds a deeper connection with the divine and greater clarity in its spiritual pursuits.

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Chapter 37 Summary: Expounds the fourth line and describes the wondrous hiding place wherein the soul is set during this night. Shows how, although the devil has an entrance into other places that are very high, he has none into this.

In Chapter XXIII, the text elaborates on the fourth line of a mystical poem by St. John of the Cross, exploring the profound concept of the soul's refuge during the spiritual night. Here, the soul attains a profound sense of security and intimacy with God through dark contemplation, a state that cleverly conceals it from demonic intrusion. This chapter emphasizes that while the devil can access high ranks of spiritual experience, he is barred from the intimate hideaway where the soul dwells in union with God.

When the text mentions “in darkness and in concealment,” it signifies the protective nature of this spiritual hiding—shielding the soul from the devil's strategies. The mystical union the soul experiences is so profound and secretive that neither the interior nor exterior senses can fully discern it, creating an impenetrable veil against the devil's attempts to comprehend or disrupt this divine communication. This concealment is essential because it ensures the soul's freedom and deeper spiritual connection, highlighted by the Biblical reference in Matthew: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," symbolizing the separation of the sensual from the spiritual.



Despite the devil's inability to understand these sacred interactions directly, he can perceive the tranquility they cast over the soul's senses and may attempt to disrupt this peace through external fears and afflictions. However, such disturbances can often push the soul further into its divine refuge, strengthening its joy and security against adversarial forces. The Song of Solomon metaphorically represents this spiritual strength and security, suggesting that the soul, guarded by divine protection, rests in confidence despite external threats.

When spiritual communications include sensory experiences, the devil might more easily cause inner tumult. Yet, during these trials, God's intention is purification and deeper preparation for divine grace. After enduring such tribulations, the soul often receives an even greater spiritual communion. Paradoxically, these disturbances refine and ready the soul for transcendent insights, often akin to preparations for the life to come.

Conversely, when the soul receives visitations directly from God, it is cloaked in perfect secrecy, making it impervious to devilish interference. This illustrates the exclusive and sovereign nature of God's substantial dwellings within the soul, touching it with divine unity beyond angelic or demonic comprehension.

These divine interactions are what the spiritual Bride in the Songs earnestly

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craves—a divine touch so intimate and divine that it transcends all other spiritual gifts. This longing for secret embrace with God is a desire to experience His presence in complete spiritual stillness, free from sensual desires and demonic disruptions. It is a sublime state achieved through extensive purification and detachment from creaturely entanglements.

Concluding, this chapter underscores the dual nature of the soul, one part spiritual and the other sensual, which becomes vividly distinct during profound spiritual experiences. The soul, through contemplative union, gradually becomes spiritually dominant, its lower nature subdued, leading to the ultimate peace articulated in the phrase: “My house being now at rest.” This signifies the tranquil stilling of the sensual desires, allowing the soul to rest in divine love.

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Chapter 38 Summary: Completes the explanation of the second stanza.

In Chapter XXIV, the narrative delves into the intricate dynamics of a soul's journey towards a deeper union with the Divine. This chapter continues explaining the second stanza, highlighting the necessity for one's soul to be at peace, both sensually and spiritually, to achieve Divine union, a central theme rooted in Christian mysticism and often discussed by theologians like St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila.

The chapter begins by noting that the soul must be purged and disciplined through a metaphorical 'dark night,' which addresses both the sensual and spiritual aspects of being. This dual purification process is essential for bringing the soul to a state of peace and rest, which is a prerequisite for Divine union, a concept symbolized by the 'state of innocence' akin to that of Adam before the Fall, albeit without the error-free state of impeccable innocence.

This state of restiveness and tranquility is achieved through repeated, hidden acts of Divine grace, where the soul detaches from worldly perturbations and receives purifying love from the Divine. By doing so, the soul gradually prepares itself for the final union, likened to a spiritual betrothal with God.

The text also emphasizes that complete union with the Divine requires



profound purity, which is obtained through self-detachment and mortification. The soul must be stripped of its previous desires and willfulness, akin to the Bride in the Song of Songs, who must lose her mantle and endure wounds in her night-time search for the Beloved, to attain a new, sacred mantle of Divine betrothal.

In essence, Chapter XXIV elaborates on the transformative journey of the soul towards divine love, necessitating a purification process that involves both renunciation and a deep yearning for the divine, culminating in spiritual communion. This allegory underlines the sacrifices and trials one must undergo to achieve a profound and transformative spiritual union.

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Chapter 39 Summary: Wherein is expounded the third stanza.

Chapter XXV of this contemplative text delves into an exploration of the spiritual journey toward divine union, framed metaphorically as a "happy night." This conceptual night represents a deeply spiritual state detached from earthly senses and experiences, allowing the soul to progress unimpeded toward its ultimate goal: union with God. The chapter reveals three key attributes of this spiritual night, each offering insight into the soul's transformative passage.

Firstly, the night is described as "happy" because it provides a solitary and secret form of contemplation, where divine guidance allows the soul to detach completely from worldly distractions. In this state, no external forces can disturb or delay the soul's path toward the union of love it seeks with God.

Secondly, the "spiritual darkness" of this night refers to a complete absence of sensory or intellectual distractions. The faculties of the soul's higher part are enveloped in darkness, meaning that its focus is entirely on God, undisturbed by forms, perceptions, or natural apprehensions that typically impede one's spiritual ascent. This deliberate embrace of darkness allows the soul to navigate without hindrance toward the eternal presence of God.



Lastly, despite the absence of any clear intellectual or external guidance, the soul is propelled forward by its fervent love alone. This love, burning within the heart, serves as the sole guide, driving the soul along the solitary path toward divine connection. The soul soars upwards with an innate longing for its Beloved, moving mysteriously yet assuredly through this contemplative solitude.

The chapter highlights how this "happy night" embodies the purging and preparation of the soul for greater illuminative and unitive stages, suggesting that the journey does not conclude with purgation. Although the text hints at further stages of the spiritual journey, such as the illuminative and unitive ways, it stops short of expounding upon these due to the incomplete state of the treatise. It is noted that this incompleteness was not due to the author's death, as Saint John of the Cross lived for many years afterward. Instead, it reflects the ongoing, evolving nature of the spiritual journey he sought to depict.

