

# THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWNING

by Dr. Beverly Lanzetta

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## Session 3: Desiring God for God's Own Sake

HERE'S WHAT HE says in Chapter 3, and it's really the center of the entire commentary. "This is what you are to do: lift up your heart to the Lord, with a gentle stirring of love desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts. Center all your attention and desire on him and let this be the sole concern of your mind and heart. Do all in your power to forget everything else, keeping your thoughts and desires free from involvement with any of God's creatures or their affairs whether in general or in particular." And then he says, because he knows what your objection will be, "Perhaps this will seem like an irresponsible attitude, but I tell you, let them all be; pay no attention to them."

He's saying that you have the right, you have permission, you have the Divine calling you to take all of your energy, all your heart, and seek God for yourself because that's what God wants for you. All of the reasons we give ourselves for not being able, we should pay no heed. We'll go into this more deeply.

The whole of the contemplative method of *The Cloud* can be distinguished in this chapter. He calls it the "blind stirring of love," and I like to think of it as the heart's passion. We know what the passion is when we want something material, or something we think about in the world that we want to do: maybe we want to go buy something or we want to take a walk. But what is the passion of the soul that longs for its divine source? He wants us to know that we have permission for that longing—to put your whole being to that. Even for a moment, even if you can't do it all day every day. But have you ever done it one day, or one moment? Have you ever felt for one moment the blind stirring of love? That's what he's after.

When we love someone, we want to love them for who they are, and we want to be loved for ourselves. Not because we are witty or bright or can play music, or for our beauty. Not for what we can give others, or for what we can receive. We want to be loved for who we are in our interior, in the depth of our beings. It is for this that we long; it is for this that we suffer. *The Cloud* is telling us that this desire to be loved for who we are, for our self alone, is a mirror or reflection of how God loves us. And, therefore, when we raise ourselves up to love, we enter the deep dimension of the inner life.

Right now, let's do a little exercise. Let's think about the blind stirring of love. Just give yourself a moment, either in meditation or in writing, to find where the blind stirring of love is in you. Let yourself ask, "Can I give myself permission to just love God, Absolute Reality, for its own sake?" Sink into that feeling of the blind stirring of love. (*Silence*)

This is a practice that you can do every day. You can pray about this. Maybe you've never felt a moment of unconditional love. Maybe you've never received unconditional love. What we know from our spiritual traditions is that we can pray for the blind feeling of love. We can say: *I grieve because I've never experienced that stirring of love. Please show me this reality. I don't know what it means to sink into a blind stirring. I've never had the passion of a blind stirring of love.*

In this affirmation of the inner life, he wants you to put everything under the cloud, even your losses, your insecurities, and your doubt. He says there's something deeper than all this, so put those away, put them under *the cloud of forgetting*, and pray for what you want. Because that is the arrow that pierces *the cloud of unknowing* and breaks through, brings out the place in us that feels that we can never achieve this, that this is impossible, that we're incapable. And if you know what the blind stirring of love is, then let it out, share it with others. Practice it. There is a part of you that knows what the blind stirring of love is, that knows what love is, and knows how to love, in spite of everything.

He continues in Chapter 4: "This work is not time-consuming even though some people believe otherwise. Actually it is the shortest you can imagine; as brief as an atom, which, as the philosophers say, is the smallest division of time. Nevertheless, it is vastly important, for of this minute measure of time it is written: 'You will be held responsible for all the time given you.' This is entirely just because your principal spiritual faculty, the will, needs only this brief fraction of a moment to move toward the object of its desire."

Again, think about something you want in the material world. You know how to go straight toward something. He's saying that we have the free will to not deplete ourselves with lesser goals that will pull us away from this very necessary and essential meaning of life. He is reminding us that in the spirit, there is no time. A true, whole heart intention of love extends into a timeless realm, breaking up historical time and the sequential manner in which we normally think of change. And you all know those miracle moments, when something just happens that's not supposed to happen, in sequential time. He is referring to mystical time, or to what Meister Eckhart called the "Eternal Now," in which all possibilities exist. Transformation and healing do not come from outside us, but emerge from within us, from the intentionality of pure act.

One of my favorite people, St. Teresa of Avila, talks about this special type of whole-heart intention, and I'm going to read it to you because it's so astute and refers to what we're talking about today. She says, "We don't give ourselves completely to this path to be a servant of love, and therefore we do not attain the blessings we desire in a short amount of time because it seems to us that we are giving all to God, whereas the truth of it is that we are paying God rent, or giving God the fruits and keeping for ourselves the ownership of the root. Since we do not succeed in giving up everything at once, this treasure as a result is not given to us all at once." So, everything is coming out of this total intention of giving of the self. The solitude of the heart, the hermitage of the heart, and the intentionality of love;

to love the Divine for its own sake, not because we want something but because we are made to love, and we are made in love.

*The Cloud* goes on to say, “No one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with his knowledge; but each one, in a different way, can grasp him fully through love.” So that each one of us, in our love, is a representation and a participation in Divine love. “Truly this is the unending miracle of love: that one loving person, through his love, can embrace God, whose being fills and transcends the entire creation.”

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#### REFLECTION:

- Think about the structure of your days, of your duties, obligations. Have you given yourself time to “sink into that feeling of the blind stirring of love”?
- Can you see yourself taking time each day, even if it is a minute here and there, to allow your heart to open in passion to your divine source?
- Reflect on this: you have the right to take all of your energy, all of your heart, and seek God for yourself. Do you pray for what your soul needs or only what you think you should pray for?
- Think of someone you care about deeply, and how in your love, you want the very best for them, without conditions of any return for you. Now imagine that love for yourself.



#### PRACTICE:

See if you can allow yourself to be loved in this full and profound way: In silence and solitude, practice your heart opening to love, accepting love. Allow yourself to put everything under a *cloud of forgetting*. Observe all the reasons you believe you can't do this. Then, feel a simple, deep acceptance of divine love. Then, let love flow back to its source. Feel yourself giving love and receiving love without restriction, allowing the cloud to contain any limitations you have put around your heart in the past.

Though meditation or writing or art, find that blind stirring of love in your being. Sink into love. Ask: Can I give myself permission to just love God, Absolute Reality, for its own sake?"



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**PRAYER:**

Please show me the blind stirring of love.



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