

# THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

by Dr. Beverly Lanzetta

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## Session 7: Loving the Divine Alone

**N**OW OUR MONK friend says to us (Chapter 68): “Never give up but steadfastly persevere in this nothingness, consciously longing that you may choose to possess God through love, whom no one can possess through knowledge. For myself, I prefer to be lost in this nowhere, wrestling with this blind nothingness, than to be like some great lord traveling everywhere and enjoying the world as if I owned it. Forget that kind of everywhere and the world’s all. It pales in richness beside this blessed nothingness and nowhere. Don’t worry if your faculties fail to grasp it. Actually, this is the way it should be, for this nothingness is so lofty that you cannot reach it. It cannot be explained, only experienced.” You must abandon everything that stands in the way, actively resisting in a most loving manner the thought forms and emotions and feelings that distract you and diminish your capacity to move deeper into the divine nature. Don’t take them as the truth, as fact. Take them as obstacles you are going to pierce with your own blind stirring of love. To see yourself as good and holy even in your failure.

*The Cloud* is telling us that yes, it is inscrutable, it is a tension, it is confusing, it is painful, but there is something on the other side. And if we use our pure intention, if we draw on our deep well of longing, we will break through. If we become aware and not complacent, if we become mindful, if we become practitioners of love, if we devote each day to the practice of emptiness and the practice of love, this practice can heal all wounds including our sins, because we will ultimately see in the divine heart, in the divine mercy, in the divine benevolence, that even our failures are empty. And this is the great light of the Divine. This is the great gift of the mystical life: that even though we deny, and we reject, and we presume that we cannot have love, love is our inheritance. This is what *The Cloud* is trying to show us. If we take up the activity of love, if we take up desire with our full passion to know the Divine, to know God, that desire alone will transform our life. It is not theoretical, it’s not abstract, and it’s not unobtainable. Teresa of Avila reminds us: if we are still only renting and we are still only giving the fruit but not the root of ourselves, then we don’t quite understand what true love is. This is what we need to pray for. It is not a defect in the human personality. It is simply that we haven’t realized that we can actually go in the direction of love. *The Cloud* is saying, you must go in that direction, that is where, from the very beginning, in God’s dearest kindness, that God has been calling you, even when you are resisting.

*The Cloud* (Chapter 75): “It is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with his all-merciful eyes, but what you desire to be.” If you desire love, if you desire to know mystical union, if

you desire to see God face-to-face, that's your intention. For example, Gandhi said that everything he'd done in the field of non-violence and social justice, everything he did in his life was really to see God face-to-face. That was his path. Our monk writes in *Privy Counseling* (Chapter 20): "Thus the mounting desire for contemplation and the joyful enthusiasm that seizes you when you read or hear of it meet and become one. And yet, a day will come when they disappear, leaving you, as it were, barren; or, as it will probably seem to you then, worse than barren. Gone will be your new fervor, but gone, too, your ability to meditate as you have long done before." We can see this as signs of the dark night. "What then? You will feel as if you had fallen somewhere between the two ways having neither, yet grappling for both. And so it will be; but do not be too discouraged. Suffer it humbly and wait patiently for our Lord to do as he will. For now you are on what I might call a sort of spiritual ocean, in voyage from the life of the flesh to life in the spirit."

"Great storms and temptations shall doubtlessly arise during this journey, leaving you bewildered and wondering which way to turn for help, for your affection will feel deprived of both your ordinary grace and your special grace. Yet I say again: fear not. Even though you think you have great reason for fear, do not panic. Still, do not lose heart. I promise you he will return and soon." God may at times withdraw sweet emotions, joyful enthusiasms, and burning desires but never withdraws grace . . . of this I am certain."

I want to share an exercise using two partial quotes that speak to the essence of *The Cloud*. One is from St. Augustine, Book 9, Chapter 10 of *The Confessions*: "If for any man the tumult of the flesh fell silent, silent the images of the earth, and of the waters, and of the air; silent the heavens; silent for him the very soul itself, and he should pass beyond himself by not thinking upon himself; silent his dreams and all imagined appearances, and every tongue, and every sign; and if all things that come to be through change should become wholly silent to him—for if any man hear, then all these things say to him, 'We did not make ourselves,' but he who endures forever made us—if when they have said these words, they have become silent, for they have raised up his ear to him who made them, and God alone speaks, not through such things but through himself, so that we hear his Word, not uttered by a tongue of flesh, nor by an angel's voice, 'nor by the sound of thunder,' nor by the riddle of similitude, but by himself whom we love in these things."

This is the wisdom of *The Cloud*. Do we want to know the Godself, the Divine Nature?

Now a quote from Thomas Merton in *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Chapter 6): "Untie my hands and deliver my heart from sloth. Set me free from laziness that goes about disguised as activity when activity is not required of me, and from the cowardice that does what is not demanded, in order to escape sacrifice. But give me the strength that waits upon You in silence and peace. Give me humility in which alone is rest, and deliver me from pride which is the heaviest of burdens. And possess my whole heart and soul with the simplicity of love. Occupy my whole life with the one thought and the

one desire of love, that I may love not for the sake of merit, not for the sake of perfection, not for the sake of virtue, not for the sake of sanctity, but for You alone. For there is only one thing that can satisfy love and reward it, and that is You alone.”

The entire *cloud of forgetting*, the whole divesting, the negative apophatic journey, is to basically uncover and ignite the passion to love the Divine alone, which is obviously loving all of creation, all of the world, every sentient and non-sentient being. It is all one. When we say, “God alone,” we are not just speaking about a transcendent figure but the totality of life, the totality of the gift. A little exercise before I finish my talk today, perhaps you can take a few moments to think about or write down: What are those distractions, or memories, or pains, or fears that you do not want to put under the *cloud of forgetting*? What are those things that you still hang on to? I think that is a good exercise. Don’t even think about it. Write it down quickly. Just say to yourself: What is right here that I don’t want to let go?



#### **REFLECTION:**

- What does it feel like to hear that “it is not what you are nor what you have been that God sees with his all-merciful eyes, but what you desire to be”?
- What do you desire to be?
- Imagine how you can “devote each day to the practice of emptiness and the practice of love.” Write about what this might mean for you.
- Imagine yourself on the “spiritual ocean, a voyage from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit.”



#### **PRACTICE:**

Do the practice from the end of the audio. Write for a while reflecting on the distractions, memories, pains, or fears that you do not want to put under the cloud of forgetting, that you are still hanging onto. Ask yourself: What is right here that I just don’t want to let go of?



**PRAYER :**

Please fill me with the balm of divine love  
and guide me on the turbulent seas of  
self-surrender.

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—Excerpt, Beverly Lanzetta, *Prayers to Holy Mystery*



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