

THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

by Dr. Beverly Lanzetta

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Session 8: Conclusion

WE ALL KNOW of course that the letting go—the *cloud of forgetting*—divesting ourselves and practicing emptiness, does not happen all at once. It requires time and awareness and heart intention. It requires communion and communication. It may take place in unexpected moments. But to feel even for one moment that you have given your heart to something that is not distracted, that is everything. And it shines a light on the path, on how to move forward. I often find that the most difficult thing for people to put under a *cloud of forgetting* is their negative opinions of themselves. To actually accept oneself as being born in goodness is very difficult. And this is where the practice of love, the practice of remembrance, and the practice of forgetting applies not just to external things—what we have done to others—but to those things we have harbored in our own beings about who we are and what other people have said we are and our own sense of inadequacy or failure.

The great liberation is when we can see even the emptiness of our errors. It is a great grace. This is something we should realize is extremely important in the spiritual life. Not only what we feel we have done to others, but what we harbor about ourselves. For we will never know who we truly are until we know the Divine. And that is why *The Cloud* instructs us to divest ourselves of everything in order to put the poultice of the divine on our hearts and let it leech out the sickness that you are ultimately impure or tainted or can never reach the divine nature. This is really important and the source of much grieving in the spiritual life.

To come to a conclusion, I will summarize *The Cloud* and then I will end with a meditative prayer. The heart of the holy quest is to preserve and maintain the grace of participating in the Divine life regardless of circumstance, of practicing gratitude for life itself, of forging ahead into the desert wilderness, never succumbing to despair and loss of hope. In a mature soul, this occurs because the false self has been effaced and in its place is the light of the Divine shining through the temple of the soul, illuminating the precious gift of being made in the divine image. All else can be borne from this unimaginable grace. All else can be transcended, placed under the *cloud of forgetting*. Our personal despairs and petty desires and collected grieving can only be felt as true sorrow, the sorrow that heals and transforms when we bear in the depth of our being all that pains us; when we allow the self to be vulnerable to the flux of life—the uncertainty, the darkness, the fear, the abandonment, the betrayal, and loneliness, that emerge on the other side of nothingness to the light beyond light, the light that heals at dawn all our wounds. The spiritually mature soul is a beacon helping the world to dispel despair and pain,

illuminating the path away from materialism and self-interest, to love of solitude and to love of God for its own sake.

All that we think about as we age, as we change, as we experience disease, people around us dying, or people retiring, is helped by the eternal principles of *The Cloud* which have efficacy and are applicable at every level in this great journey we call life. They can be practiced together, they can be talked about, they can be shared, and be part of your spiritual practice. Use the exercises we did today and share them with each other or in your prayer life. It is such a gift to be alive, to honor the precious gift of being born, and to be around people of like mind and heart. To be here with all of you, to know that your hearts and your souls are listening to the Divine voice, and to be able to share with you some of my own meditations on this path, and underlying pattern of transformation, which we find represented in all religions in one form or another.

I wrote this meditation in 2007 called “Altar of the Heart.” I feel it is a good way to close. Please visualize as I read a portion of the prayer.

Altar of the Heart

Within our bodies as in our souls is a temple, an altar, a spiritual center on which our offerings are made to God. Upon this altar we offer ourselves to the Divine, we make ourselves receptive and pliable to receive in the great blessing. On the altar of the heart, the flame of love is always burning in longing for the Beloved and is always turned toward the light of the Divine.

Sometimes the flame flickers, sometimes it flutters, sometimes it grows dim. But the flame of the heart can never be extinguished because it is the center from which the Divine speaks in you: spirit, soul, body, earth. It is the center from which the Divine speaks through you into the world. It is the center in which all of creation resides.

In this temple, in this altar in your heart, you return for healing, you return for reconciliation, you return for compassion, and for the love that only the Divine can give. Treat the center of the heart as a holy place; do not allow it to be defiled. Do not allow the pain of the world to extinguish its pure light.

In the altar of your heart, God speaks to you in secret, through love and in love and with love. Upon this altar you lay down your weapons, the weapons of the self, the weapons of separation, despair, and doubt. You lay down your weapons to bare yourself and to offer yourself in adoration to the one light that sustains you.

When you allow the world to diminish the flame in your heart you suffer. When you allow your own fears to diminish the flame in your heart, your soul is pained. When you allow harshness, sarcasm, or disbelief to wound the altar upon which your barren heart rests, all creation suffers.

Interior to this altar is humility, shyness, tenderness, sweetness, longing, beauty, radiance, vulnerability and peace. How we long to lay ourselves down upon the altar and to give ourselves as an offering! How we long to give away our false selves so that the Divine Self will be present in the world to all who suffer and long for a drop of moisture to quench their thirst.

In our hearts, upon our altar, we sacrifice ego, selfishness, loneliness, disbelief, and woundedness in order to receive that which only can be given for free. Out of the freedom of the offering, out of the pure gift that we have done nothing to deserve, all life flows.

Upon our altar, we pray to know truth, we pray to be made simple, we pray to be made holy. We pray to learn how to love. None of our prayers go unheard; none of our prayers lie fallow. For they are the seeds of our desire, moistened and nourished by the divine heart, aided by the forces of the universe. Where God alone comes to our aide

Amen



REFLECTION:

- What are the negative opinions that you harbor of yourself? Can you place them under the *cloud of forgetting*?
- Are you able to connect beliefs you have about yourself with the grieving you've done in your spiritual life?
- Picture yourself as “a beacon, helping the world to dispel despair and pain”. Can you feel some of what it takes to get to such a point?



PRACTICE:

Return to the practice of imaging the Divine as a poultice on your heart. Visualize the contents of the poultice and imagine the feeling, the weight, of this salve on your heart. Find 6:36 in the audio from this session and listen to Dr. Lanzetta read the Altar of the Heart again, as you imagine yourself with the poultice of the Divine on your heart.



PRAYER:

Blessed One, come to our aid.
May our longing be your longing
May our desire to love be fulfilled
May your mercy consume us with gratitude
In all things, may we be worthy of your gifts.

—Excerpt, Beverly Lanzetta, *May We Be Worthy*



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