



# **The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth**

*Gerald G. May*

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Distinguished psychiatrist, spiritual counselor, and bestselling author Gerald G. May argues that the "shadow" side of the spiritual life has been trivialized and neglected to our serious detriment. In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Dr. May shows that the dark side is a vital ingredient for deep, authentic, healthy spirituality.

Superficial and naively upbeat spirituality does not heal and enrich the soul; nor does our tendency to relegate deep spiritual growth to mystics and saints help us cope with the fullness of what we experience in life. Only honest, sometimes difficult encounters with what Christian spirituality calls "the dark night of the soul" can lead to true spiritual wholeness.

May emphasizes that the dark night is not necessarily a time of suffering and despair, but rather one of deep transition, during which our lives are clouded and full of mystery as we move through a time of trial and uncertainty to freedom and joy. The darkness of the night implies nothing sinister, but rather that our liberation takes place mysteriously, in secret, and beyond our conscious control.

May draws on the great Christian spiritual teachings and writings on the "dark night," especially by John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, on other spiritual traditions, psychiatric ideas and resources, and on poetry and literature. *The Dark Night of the Soul* embraces the universal spiritual experience of disorientation, doubt, fear, emptiness, "dryness," and despair, all of which are ingredients in developing a mature, authentic spiritual life.

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