

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

By Gerald G. May

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Gerald May, MD, the esteemed younger brother of the late famed psychiatrist and writer Rollo May, MD, is one of the great spirituality teachers and writers of our time. And his merging of psychiatric analysis and counselling into deep spirituality is unique and highly esteemed.

In this book, he argues that the dark "shadow" side of the true spiritual life has been trivialized and neglected to our serious detriment. Superficial and naively upbeat spirituality does not heal and enrich the soul. Nor does the other tendency to relegate deep spiritual growth to only mystics and saints. Only the honest, sometimes difficult encounters with what Christian spirituality has called and described in helpful detail as "the dark night of the soul" can lead to true spiritual wholeness. He emphasizes that the dark night is not necessarily a time of suffering and near despair, but a time of deep transition, search for new orientation when things are clouded and full of mystery. May draws on the resources of great Christian spiritual teaching and writing on the Dark Night, especially by Sts. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, and on other spiritual traditions, psychiatric ideas and writing, and on great poetry and other literature. *The Dark Night of the Soul* embraces the universal spiritual experience of disorientation, doubt, fear, emptiness, "dryness," despair, and the like, all of which are ingredients in developing a mature, authentic spiritual life. The dark gives depth, dimension, fullness to the spiritual life.

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