

The Path of Unknowing

By Revd Lucy Austin



From Mirabai Starr, inspired by the teachings of John of the Cross

It is time to enter the desert. You may not take anything with you: not your insulated bottle of cool water, not a knife, not a single raisin. You may not take a sleeping bag. No cell phone or map. Leave the sunscreen behind. Burn.

It is time to enter into utter unknowing—and, by unknowing, come to know truly.

The mind is an impediment on this journey. The senses are misleading. Leave them on the porch when you slip away in the middle of the night. Be very quiet as you close the door behind you. The members of your household will not understand your quest. They will try to keep you home. Leave. Go now.

No one claims this will be an easy journey. Your senses will thirst for

the familiar juices that remind them of a time when the Holy One fed them from her own breasts. The intellect will grope around in the dark, panicking. Pay no attention. Walk through the night. Sit very still in the daytime and watch the miracle of your breath as it quietly fills your lungs and empties them again.

Spend days in the wilderness, and nights. Don't give up. The worst that will happen is that you will die. Die to your fragmented self and be reborn into your divine self. Enter knowing through the needle of unknowing. In silence, finally hear the voice of the Holy One. In surrendering to sheer emptiness, be filled with the Beloved at last.

Starr translates John of the Cross's poem "Glosa á lo Divino":

I would not sacrifice my soul
for all the beauty of this world.

There is only one thing
for which I would risk everything:
an I-don't-know-what
that lies hidden
in the heart of the Mystery.

The taste of finite pleasure
leads nowhere.
All it does is exhaust the appetite
and ravage the palate.
And so, I would not sacrifice my soul
for all the sweetness of this world.

But I would risk everything
for an I-don't-know-what
that lies hidden
in the heart of the Mystery.

The generous heart
does not collapse into the easy things,
but rises up in adversity.

It settles for nothing.
Faith lifts it higher and higher.

Such a heart savours
an I-don't-know-what
found only in the heart of the Mystery.

The soul that God has touched
burns with love-longing.
Her tastes have been transfigured.
Ordinary pleasures sicken her.
She is like a person with a fever;
nothing tastes good anymore.

All she wants
is an I-don't-know-what
locked in the heart of
the Mystery....

I will never lose myself
for anything the senses can taste,
nor for anything the mind can grasp,
no matter how sublime,
 how delicious.

I will not pause for beauty,
I will not linger over grace.
I am bound for
an I-don't-know-what
deep within the heart of the Mystery.

With much love and many blessings

LucyA