



DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL



*A GUIDE TO
FINDING YOUR WAY THROUGH
LIFE'S ORDEALS*

THOMAS MOORE

Author of the Classic #1 New York Times Bestseller
Care of the Soul

DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

*A Guide to Finding Your Way
Through Life's Ordeals*

THOMAS MOORE



G O T H A M B O O K S

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Introduction](#)

[PART ONE - PASSAGES](#)

[CHAPTER ONE - THE NIGHT SEA JOURNEY](#)

[CHAPTER TWO - RITES OF PASSAGE](#)

[CHAPTER THREE - SORTING OUT AND STARTING OVER](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR - THE VIEW FROM THE MOON](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE - LIFE'S IRONIES](#)

[PART TWO - DISTURBANCES](#)

[CHAPTER SIX - LOVESICKNESS](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN - WEDDING NIGHTS](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT - NIGHT EROS](#)

[CHAPTER NINE - CREATIVITY, THE CHILD, AND THE SURE-FOOTED
GOAT](#)

[CHAPTER TEN - DARK BEAUTY](#)

[PART THREE - DEGRADATIONS](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN - THE DEEP-RED EMOTIONS](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE - TEMPORARY INSANITIES](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN - THE ISLAND OF ILLNESS](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN - THE TWILIGHT YEARS](#)

CHAPTER FIFTEEN - NAVIGATING A DARK NIGHT

NOTES

INDEX

Praise for *Dark Nights of the Soul*

“. . . [A] fluent, unflaggingly honest style. . . . Short on detail, long on evocation, this book conveys the important . . . message that spiritual growth entails darkness as well as light.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Moore pulls insights from a variety of disciplines and belief systems that one can use when dealing with illness, divorce, joblessness, or the death of a loved one. . . . He has a gift for recognizing the pain yet encouraging the reader to see the bright spots and move productively through the experience. Easy to read and sure to appeal to intelligent, open-minded readers. . . . ”

—*Library Journal*

“In these reductive and fundamentalist times, Thomas Moore asks us to acknowledge the dark moon within us all, to question the workings of a sun-bright culture which demands our happy, healthy productivity at perhaps the cost of our very souls. This is a wise and timely book, and I cannot recommend it highly enough.”

—*Andre Dubus III, author of House of Sand and Fog*

“Thomas Moore is one of the profound spiritual writers of our time. *Dark Nights of the Soul* delves into the mystery of human suffering and *really* tells it like it is. We’ve all been discouraged by neat, tidy self-help dogmatism and Moore refuses to succumb to the commercialism of simplistic, superficial, and subjective solutions.”

—*John Bradshaw, author of the #1 New York Times bestsellers Homecoming, Creating Love, and Healing the Shame That Binds You*

“Thomas Moore is the master of conveying the insight that the dark times in our lives are not threats but friends and teachers.”

—*Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

“Thomas Moore is a compassionate, wise guide who shows us why walking with God always requires wrestling with the devil. To find out why wholeness always trumps perfection, and why life’s ups and downs are joined in an eternal dance, *Dark Nights of the Soul* is highly recommended.”

—*Larry Dossey, M.D., author of Healing Beyond the Body,*

Reinventing Medicine, and Healing Words

“. . . [A]n intriguing, insightful and ultimately seductive book, inviting us below all surfaces into the undercurrents of human endeavor. Amidst every difficulty Thomas Moore is there to offer each of us a very sure and companionable hand, guiding us through the awkward, the unforeseen and the unforgivable.”

—*David Whyte, poet, and author of Crossing the Unknown Sea and Everything Is Waiting for You*

ALSO BY THOMAS MOORE

Care of the Soul

SoulMates

Meditations

The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life

The Education of the Heart

The Soul of Sex

Original Self

The Soul's Religion

Rituals of the Imagination

The Planets Within

Dark Eros

*A Blue Fire: The Essential Writing
of James Hillman (Editor)*

DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

*A Guide to Finding Your Way
Through Life's Ordeals*



THOMAS MOORE



G O T H A M B O O K S

GOTHAM BOOKS

Published by Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.); Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R
0RL, England; Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of
Penguin Books Ltd); Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell,
Victoria 3124, Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd); Penguin Books
India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India;
Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand
(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd); Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd,
24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa
Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

First Gotham trade paperback printing, June 2005

Copyright © 2004 by Thomas Moore

All rights reserved

Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint the following:

“The Forge” from *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966-1996* by Seamus Heaney. Copyright
© 1998 by Seamus Heaney.

“The Forge” from *Door in the Dark* by Seamus Heaney.

An excerpt from *The Ink Dark Moon* by Jane Hirschfeld and Mariko Arantani, copyright
© 1990 by Jane Hirschfeld and Mariko Arantani. Used by permission of Vintage Books,
a division of Random House, Inc.

Gotham Books and the skyscraper logo are trademarks of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

eISBN : 978-1-101-09738-0

1-592-40133-3 (pbk.)

1. Suffering—Religious aspects. 2. Depression, Mental—Religious aspects.
3. John of the Cross, Saint, 1542-1591. Noche oscura del alma. 4. Spiritual life. I. Title.
BL65.S85M66 2004
204'.42—dc22 2004003140

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage

electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is printed on acid-free paper. ♻️

<http://us.penguinroup.com>

*That sweet night: a secret.
Nobody saw me;
I did not see a thing.
No other light, no other guide
Than the one burning in my heart.*

JOHN OF THE CROSS (transl. Mirabai Starr)

*Between living and dreaming
There is something else.
Guess what it is.*

ANTONIO MACHADO (transl. Mary Berg and Dennis Maloney)

to my brother Jim

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A BOOK ABOUT THE DEEPEST, darkest, smokiest experiences in a life can't be written alone. I'm grateful to a number of people for their help. As always, I have been sustained by Michael Katz, who is more than a survivor and more than an agent. Bill Shinker showed an amazing trust in me and supported me in a time that could easily have turned into a dark night of the soul. I got to know Lauren Marino, whose patient editing helped me remember that books have readers. Emily Archer has the golden touch, the ability to advise critically and inspire at the same time. Redmond O'Hanlon, my Dubliner miracle-worker and bosom buddy, supported me in ways he knew nothing about. Other friends from Ireland haunt these pages: John Moriarty, the most gifted bard I have ever met; Michael Kearney, a steady friend who knows something of my own dark nights; his brother Richard Kearney, a philosopher with a heart and a teeming imagination; Brendan and Hazel Hester, whose friendship and counsel during this time were precious. In the field of medicine, besides Dr. Michael Kearney, Dr. Balfour Mount and the Reverend George Doebler helped in kind and quiet ways. Dr. Bettina Peyton-Levine is part angel and part human—both parts are evident in this book. Dr. James Guy has been an inspiration to me, someone who navigated his own dark night with amazing grace and whose example leads me on.

Pat Toomay constantly teaches me how to see things and how to write. He also took a major misty journey during the time of this writing and shared it with me.

I want to thank Siobhán and Abe from the Persephonic depths of my heart, and Hanley, my soror mystica.

During the writing of this book, my mother was hospitalized for nine months with a stroke and died just as I was completing the writing. I owe a debt I could never express to my father; my brother Jim; Peggy; and my aunt Betty. About

my mother I can only sing a prayer of praise. Her dark night accompanied my writing like a shadow and guided me from an angelic place. Her influence is in every cell of my being.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the splendid people whose stories I tell in these pages. I can't begin to honor them enough and to thank them for giving so much to me.

In the middle of our life journey I found myself in a dark wood. I had wandered from the straight path. It isn't easy to talk about it: it was such a thick, wild, and rough forest that when I think of it my fear returns. . . . I can't offer any good explanation for how I entered it. I was so sleepy at that point that I strayed from the right path.

—*DANTE, Inferno, Canto I*¹

INTRODUCTION

THE DARK NIGHT

A TONE TIME or another, most people go through a period of sadness, trial, loss, frustration, or failure that is so disturbing and long-lasting that it can be called a dark night of the soul. If your main interest in life is health, you may quickly try to overcome the darkness. But if you are looking for meaning, character, and personal substance, you may discover that a dark night has many important gifts for you.

Today we label many of these experiences “depression,” but not all dark nights are depressive, and the word is too clinical for something that makes you question the very meaning of life. It’s time for a different way of imagining this common experience, and therefore a different way of dealing with it. But, I warn you, this business is subtle, and you will have to look closely at yourself and at the examples I give to see how a deeply disturbing episode can be a precious moment of transformation.

Every human life is made up of the light and the dark, the happy and the sad, the vital and the deadening. How you think about this rhythm of moods makes all the difference. Are you going to hide out in self-delusion and distracting entertainments? Are you going to become cynical and depressed? Or are you going to open your heart to a mystery that is as natural as the sun and the moon, day and night, and summer and winter?

If you are like most people, you have gone through several dark nights of the soul. You may be in the middle of one now. You may be in a difficult marriage, have a child in trouble, or find yourself caught in a tenacious and terrible mood. You may be grieving the loss of a spouse or parent. You may have been betrayed by a lover or a business partner or going through a divorce. For some people,

these situations are problems to be solved, but for others they are the source of deep despair. A true dark night of the soul is not a surface challenge but a development that takes you away from the joy of your ordinary life. An external event or an internal mood strikes you at the core of your existence. This is not just a feeling but a rupture in your very being, and it may take a long while to get through to the other end of it.

A dark night may not feel like depression. In a long illness or a troubled marriage you may be anxious, but not depressed. On the other hand, a clinical depression might well qualify as a dark night. Whatever you call it, the experience involves you as a person, someone with a history, a temperament, memories, emotions, and ideas. Depression is a label and a syndrome, while a dark night is a meaningful event. Depression is a psychological sickness, a dark night is a spiritual trial.

Many people think that the point in life is to solve their problems and be happy. But happiness is usually a fleeting sensation, and you never get rid of problems. Your purpose in life may be to become more who you are and more engaged with the people and the life around you, to really live your life. That may sound obvious, yet many people spend their time avoiding life.

They are afraid to let it flow through them, and so their vitality gets channeled into ambitions, addictions, and preoccupations that don't give them anything worth having. A dark night may appear, paradoxically, as a way to return to living. It pares life down to its essentials and helps you get a new start.

Here I want to explore positive contributions of your dark nights, painful though they may be. I don't want to romanticize them or deny their dangers. I don't even want to suggest that you can always get through them. But I do see them as opportunities to be transformed from within, in ways you could never imagine. A dark night is like Dante getting sleepy, wandering from his path, mindlessly slipping into a cave. It is like Alice looking at the mirror and then going through it. It is like Odysseus being tossed by stormy waves and Tristan adrift without an oar. You don't choose a dark night for yourself. It is given to

you. Your job is to get close to it and sift it for its gold.