

# THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

*Anhedonia*, n. 1. The inability to experience pleasure. 2. Woody Allen's original name for the title character in "Annie Hall".

Your energy is low. There is little motivation or drive to do anything. Activities that were pleasurable are now tedious. You can't find joy anywhere. None of your teachings, practices, or tools for inner maintenance are of any help. It all seems meaningless, you feel lost, disconnected. Your mind plagues you with thoughts of worthlessness and deficiency.

Welcome to the threshold of a new life.

These could be signs of Clinical Depression. Go to your doctor, and you are likely to be given medication to "manage" the symptoms. This will be helpful only if there is indeed a chemical imbalance that needs correction. What does he know about existential crisis? Go to your Guru, he will tell you nothing matters, it's all an illusion. What does he know of brain chemistry?

More likely is that life is calling you to break through old patterns, and well, you're not sure you're ready...

St. John of the Cross, a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Carmelite mystic, originated the term "Dark Night of the Soul." This experience has been described as a lengthy and profound absence of light, hope, and connection to existence. One feels profoundly alone and cut off from Self, others, and Source in the Dark Night. At times, the longing for spiritual union is exquisitely painful.



The Dark Night of the Soul occurs at that points in our inner journey where our old way of being can no longer be maintained in the light of what is trying to emerge in us. It is where the Irresistible Force (evolving consciousness) is met by the Immovable Object (attachment to the familiar). The degree of fear, grief, and frustration can reach intense proportions.

We search for escape. We ask, "How can I make this go away"? This is a time when addictions may overtake us, we may turn to substances (proscribed or prescribed) in an attempt to "elevate our mood". But a better question might be, "How can I embrace this and allow it to transform me?"



Some guidelines:

1. Surrender. Surrender. Surrender. Our conditioning tells us that this is bad, wrong, shouldn't be happening, we attribute the occurrence to some statement of our deficiency and will do anything to make it stop. This, in itself, creates opposition and suffering. Something is being transformed, it doesn't feel good, but the transformation is more important than the momentary discomfort.

2. Move the body. It's the last thing you want to do. Walk, run, use a bat on a pillow, practice martial arts, dance wildly – the more you support the body in moving the energy, the faster you will be able to get through it.

3. Reach for help. Talk to friends and loved ones who can really support you through this (and refrain from talking about it to ones who can't). This is a PERFECT time to do deep inner work (you're already there!). The focus needs to be on facilitating the deep transformation that is happening, and not on alleviating uncomfortable symptoms.

4. Take actions you have been avoiding. When life calls us to end a relationship, leave a secure job, or make other major changes, fear may stop us from taking the necessary steps. Is there someone you need to say something to? Is there something you would rather avoid that just won't go away? What might you be resisting?

5. Grief is not depression. When you suffer great loss, such as death of a loved one, you go through great pain. This is NORMAL and HEALTHY. Cry. Wail. Curse the fates. Allowing the pain to be felt helps the process of letting go.

*"Feeling depressed is our inner self asking us to listen."* – Gangaji

Many great masters would have been classified as “depressives” today. St. Teresa of Avila suffered from epilepsy and mood problems. If she had been received drug treatment for depression, it is likely she never would have entered into the ecstatic states that produced her visions.

We may experience several “Dark Nights” of varying intensity and duration. If we can endure, not abort the process, support ourselves in encountering the experience fully, a major breakthrough is likely to be waiting. The price of entry? Your willingness to see it through to the other side.