

**ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOKS ONE, TWO AND THREE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount Carmel (from The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross) Introduction     Rodriguez-Kavanaugh edition.**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:**

- 1. What are the three components which make up the Ascent of Mount Carmel?**
- 2. What is the other work which is closely linked to the Ascent?**
- 3. For what purpose did John create the sketch of the Mount of Perfection?**
- 4. What was John's personal experience of darkness and abandonment? Where?**
- 5. What is the path or way to the summit of the Mount called in Spanish?**
- 6. What is John's preferred term for perfection?**
- 7. What gave John great sadness concerning the darkneses and trials of others?**
- 8. What two dimensions of the human person must be purified?**
- 9. What is the "double manner" in which these purifications are wrought?**
- 10. What is the main theme of the first book of the Ascent?**

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**11. What method will John suggest in the first book for entering the active night of the senses?**

**12. What definition of contemplation can you find in the Introduction?**

**REFLECT: Meditate for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts from the Sketch: (One line each day would be a good plan.)**

**To reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing.**

**To come to the knowledge of all, desire the knowledge of nothing. (in prayer)**

**To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing.**

**To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing**

**To come to enjoy what you have not, you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.**

**To come to knowledge you have not, you must go by a way in which you know not.**

**To come to the possession you have not, you must go by a way in which you possess not.**

**To come to be what you are not, you must go by a way in which you are not.**

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**When you delay in something, you cease to rush toward the all.**

**To go from the all to the all, you must deny yourself of all in all.**

**And when you come to the possession of the all, you must possess it without wanting anything .**

**In this nakedness the spirit finds its quietude and rest,  
for in coveting nothing, nothing tires it by pulling it up,  
and nothing oppresses it by pushing it down, because  
it is in the center of its humility.**

**RESPOND: You might like to write out a short prayer based on the fruits of your meditations:**

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK ONE      LESSON 1**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount. Carmel (from The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross) Sketch, Poem, Prologue and Chapters 1 through 6**

**NOTE: *You may want to do the responses below as you read, in order to save time.***

**REPLY: Write brief answers for the following, to help you better grasp and retain the material.**

- 1. As the soul recites the poem “One Dark Night”, from what perspective in her spiritual journey is she speaking? (That is to say, she is now at what place in her journey?)**
  
- 2. What reasons does John give for the lack of progress of those souls whom the Lord wishes to place in the dark night so that they may move toward divine union? (Prologue)**
  
- 3. What are some of the false explanations often given to those who are experiencing trials, conflicts and temptations as they are being led along the path of dark contemplation and aridity? (Prologue)**
  
- 4. What does John hope that the readers of his book (Ascent) will discover? (Prologue)**
  
- 5. What two words could we substitute for the word “night”? (chapter 1)**
  
- 6. Which is the night that beginners in contemplation experience? (chapter 1)**
  
- 7. Which is the night which pertains to proficient in contemplation? (chapter 1)**

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8. Why does John speak of the night of the senses as a sheer grace? (chapter 1)
  
9. What are the three reasons John offers for calling this journey toward union with God a night? (chapter 2)
  
10. How does John relate these three kinds of “night” to the natural night, and which is the darkest of the three? (chapter 2)
  
11. Why can we call the mortification of the appetites of the senses a “night”? (chapter 3)
  
12. Since the sensory perceptions of hearing, sight, etc. are unavoidable, how can we keep them from hindering us? (chapter 3, and also 5)
  
13. What does John say about the mere lack of things versus the craving for them? (chapter 3)
  
14. What does John say our attachment to a creature (thing or person) does to us? (chapter 4)
  
15. What are some of the things John mentions to which we may become attached? (chapter 4)
  
16. Why does John say that a person who loves and is attached to something other than God, or together with him offends God exceedingly? (chapter 5)
  
17. What does John say about trying to practice virtue without emptying the soul of its appetites?      (the desires of the will)      (chapter 5)
  
18. What are the two goals of a person who desires to be a true “ark”? (chapter 5)

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**19. To what does John liken a soul in the state of union, in whom God alone dwells? (chapter. 5)**

**20. What very graphic comparisons does John give concerning creatures and those who "feed" upon them? (chapter 6)**

**21. What is the privative harm John speaks of in regard to our appetites for creatures? (chapter 6)**

**REFLECT: Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts:**

**What things and what people do I depend upon for my happiness, fulfillment and satisfaction in life? What would my life be like without them? How "lost" would I be?**

**Do I have any desires or craving for anything which I do not now possess? Is there anything (outside of God) which I feel I need to make my happiness complete?**

**How well do I use and enjoy creatures (people and things) only for the honor and glory of God? (as opposed to using them for the purpose of my own satisfaction)**

**How well am I doing in regard to self-mortification? Do I try to do something in this regard each day? How do I mortify the sense of sight? of hearing? of taste? of smell? of touch?**

**More importantly, am I making progress in the *mortification of my will*? (all that contradicts the desire to have things my way)**

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK ONE      LESSON 2**

**READ:** Ascent of Mt. Carmel, last part of chapter 6 to the end of chapter 15

**REPLY:** Answer the following questions as you read the above:

- 1. What five adverse effects do the appetites (desires) have on us? (chapter 6:5)**
  
- 2. What does John have to say about those who seek divine union through extraordinary penances and other exercises? (chapter 8:4)**
  
- 3. What is the effect of even one small habitual, voluntary appetite which is left unmortified? (chapter 11)**
  
- 4. Explain the difference between the natural (involuntary) appetites and the voluntary appetites. Under what condition are these natural appetites harmless in reaching divine union? (chapter 11)**
  
- 5. In order for a person to reach divine union with God, what must he/she have the power and the freedom to do? (chapter 11)**
  
- 6. How harmful are occasional small falls (imperfections) from grace? How do these differ from a particular *habitual* imperfection? (chapter 11)**
  
- 7. What are some good examples of habitual imperfections? (chapter 11)**
  
- 8. Since the possession of a certain object is not offensive to God, how is our attachment to this object harmful? (chapter 11)**

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**9. What good example does John give in chapter 11:5 on the harm in attachment to conversations and friendships?**

**10. Why don't we realize the harm that is being done when we are giving reign to our appetites? (chapter 12:5)**

**11. What does John say about harm from temptations? (chapter 12:6)**

**12. Explain the difference between the active and the passive entries into the "night" of sense. What help by God is needed for complete detachment? (chapter 13)**

**13. What are John's two counsels for the conquering of the appetites? (chapter 13)**

**REFLECT:**

**Which of the maxims in chapter 13, section 6 do I need to work on more diligently?**

**How does chapter 13, section 9 apply to me?**

**Choose a portion of the verses in chapter 13, section 11, and keep it constantly in mind.**

**READ: Ascent of Mt. Carmel, Book II, Chapters 1 through 8**

**REPLY: Answer the following questions as briefly as you can:**

**1. Contrast what is needed in order to enter the night of the *senses* with that which is needed for a complete pacification of the *spirit*. (chapter 1)**

**2. Why is the first night (of the senses) more external, and the second night (of the spirit) more internal? (chapter 2)**

**3. What are the limits of the intellect, acting under its own power? What does faith do to the natural light and knowledge of the intellect? (chapter 3)**

**4. What does John of the Cross say we must do upon receiving supernatural communications? What is the danger of such perceptions? (chapter 4)**

**5. What does he say about having an impressive feeling and/or knowledge of God? (chapter 4)**

**6. What does he say about the possibility of a permanent actual union of the faculties in this life? (chapter 5)**

**7. What kind of union exists even with great sinners? Of what does supernatural union consist? (chapter 5)**

**8. What does it mean to be reborn of the Holy Spirit in this life? (chapter 5) And what definition of love does John of the Cross give on this same page?**

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9. What can make our burdens and trials in this life seem light? (chapter 3)
10. In reference to the esteem of our will, to what does John compare the extent of denial and negation needed to reach union with God? (chapter 7)
11. Why is intellectual comprehension of God impossible through heavenly or earthly creatures? What, then, *is* the proximate means to the attainment of God? (chapter 8)
12. Who is our model for this death to self? (chapter 7)
13. What happens when we are brought to the highest degree of humility, that is, to nothing? (chapter 7)
14. Of what does the journey to union consist? (chapter 7)

**REFLECT:** Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts:

What attitude should I have toward any supernatural communications I might receive? (chapter 4)

Do I equate what I have felt or “tasted” with God himself? Should I do so? (chapter 4)

Do I seek the distasteful in God rather than the delectable? Going without, rather than possession? Dryness and affliction rather than sweet consolation? My answers will tell me something about where I am spiritually at this time.

How much rank and esteem do I give to my knowledge, experience and imagining?

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK TWO    LESSON 2**

**READ: Ascent of Mt. Carmel, Book II, Chapters 9 through 15**

**REPLY: Prepare brief answers to the following questions, based on the reading:**

- 1. Explain why interior images (of the imagination or fantasy), whether natural or supernatural (interior visions, etc.), cannot be an adequate, proximate means to union with God.**
  
- 2. In what limited sense can interior images of the imagination (as in meditations) be good?**
  
- 3. What are some of the dangers and harms of esteeming visions, revelations, locutions, etc. that one may receive?**
  
- 4. To which of the three theological virtues are they contrary?**
  
- 5. Distinguish between natural and supernatural knowledge.**
  
- 6. Of what does corporal knowledge consist? And spiritual knowledge?**
  
- 7. Which of the subdivisions of spiritual knowledge is desirable? What is another name for it?**
  
- 8. Why is it not necessary to esteem supernatural communications in order to benefit from them?**

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**9. What should be the attitude and reactions of a person receiving supernatural communications?**

**10. How does God usually lead a person toward more spiritual, interior and invisible graces?**

**11. How should we react if this (no. 10) happens to us?**

**12. What is the result of forcing oneself to meditate when one would prefer to remain in the calm and repose of interior quiet?**

**13. Remaining in this quiet repose, what must we do to help?**

**14. What are the signs St. John of the Cross gives in Chapter 13 for knowing when we should discontinue discursive meditation and pass on to the state of contemplation?**

**15. Why isn't it sufficient to have the first sign without the second? If the first and second are realized, why is it necessary to have the third also?**

**16. Why is the loving knowledge almost unnoticed at the beginning of this state of contemplation?**

**17. What does John give as the cause of our inability to consider and meditate as we did before?**

**18. What is the purpose of discursive meditation on divine subjects?**

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**19. Why are people mistaken if they think time is wasted in the prayer of quiet repose?**

**20. Should those who are entering into the path of contemplation never return to meditation?**

**21. Copy the last sentence of chapter 15 in Latin, then in English. Remember, too, that pacification of the soul is no small accomplishment!**

**REFLECT: Think on these things.**

**What a wonderful gift we have in the writings of St. John of the Cross on prayer! Let us not only be thankful for them, but study them well, trying to apply whatever we can in our own prayer.**

**Where do I find myself right now in my prayer time? Am I spending the time in meditation, and is this appropriate for me? Or do I meet the criteria for leaving meditations in order to enter into a more contemplative state? Is my prayer perhaps a mixture of these two? These personal considerations are very important, and so we need to understand the signs very well. Do I?**

**Have I understood well the advice, given in Book II, Lesson 1 and this, concerning the dangers of esteeming supernatural communications if and when I receive them? Again, this is extremely important.**

**Do I understand well the difference between meditation and contemplation? If not, I should bring this up in one of our discussion times.**

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK TWO      LESSON 3**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount Carmel . Book Two Chapters 16 through 22**

**REPLY: Answer the following as briefly as you can:**

- 1. Explain why God gives supernatural apprehensions when they present so many dangers and obstacles to union.**
- 2. Contrast the differences between the value of using the imagination in discursive meditations, and the acceptance or refusal of supernatural communications which are independent of our own efforts.**
- 3. Explain how and why supernatural communications should be told to our director, and the proper attitude of the spiritual director toward these.**

**Fill in the blanks below, after you have finished the reading:**

**In the state of union, God does not communicate himself to the soul through any \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, likeness or \_\_\_\_\_. Some souls obtain sensible or spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ from God because they are incapable of eating the more solid food of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Cross of his Son. We should never imagine that because God (and or the saints) converse with us amiably on many subjects, they will tell us our faults! Rather, we should discern these \_\_\_\_\_. To desire communication with God in external, supernatural ways is to \_\_\_\_\_ him. However, God sometimes responds because of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the person who desires this.**

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**REFLECT:** Spend some prayer time with the following Scripture passages:

**Numbers 12: 6-8    Dt. 4: 12    I Cor. 13:11    I Cor. 3: 1-2    I Cor. 2: 14-15  
Heb. 1: 1-2**

**What has been my manner of communication with God? Have I desired or sought any illicit means, such as visions, locutions, etc.? Or have I been content to humbly follow the Gospel, the teaching of the Church, and to use my reason when needed?**

**Have I taken from any spiritual apprehensions I have received only what God wants me to take, that is, the spirit of devotion? Have I rejected the sensory element, when present?**

**Do I clearly understand that God prefers to lead me away from the sensory and into the more purely spiritual aspects of relating to him? Will he find me ready to respond in this way, whatever the cost?**

**Do I understand the absolute necessity of submitting any supernatural apprehensions to a competent spiritual director or confessor?**

**REACT:** What would your reaction be in the following situations? Write a brief answer:

- 1. In a vision you receive instructions as to a course of action to be taken.**
- 2. A friend claims to have visions and supernatural communications with Jesus. Will you consult him/her to obtain an answer to a problem you are having?**
- 3. You are having many supernatural communications of various kinds. Will you keep them to yourself, or to whom should you divulge them?**

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK TWO      LESSON 4**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book Two, Chapters 23 through 32**

**REPLY: Consider the following questions carefully and answer them briefly:**

**What should my attitude be in regard to (most of) the spiritual apprehensions described in these chapters?**

**In which cases is a spiritual director (or confessor) indispensable?**

**Am I desiring of knowing the truths of faith *clearly*, so that I might conserve pure and entire the merit of faith and also pass through this night of intellect to the divine light of union?**

**What advice could I give to someone who is always saying “God told me this”, and “God told me that”...? And to someone who tells me about his/her visions of Christ?**

**Do I really understand that spiritual apprehensions are not necessary for reaching union with God? What is the difference between pure faith and knowing God?**

**For what reasons and benefits should I desire the divine touches spoken of by John?**

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**REFLECT:** Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts:

Any spiritual apprehensions I might receive should produce both humility and a greater love of God. If they produce disturbance, pride or dryness, they do not have their source in him.

I must always remember that the devil tempts the devout soul with something good in the beginning, so that little by little he can lead one into what is not good.

If I receive a locution in which I am told to proceed in a certain way, I must never act upon it, but rather take the matter to my confessor.

**REPLY:** Fill in the blanks below after reading the assignment:

Successive locutions are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ that we form in our minds while recollected. They can originate from either the \_\_\_\_\_, the natural light of the intellect, or the \_\_\_\_\_. Formal locutions are not received from the spirit itself, but from another \_\_\_\_\_. Substantial locutions are words produced in the spirit which cause the \_\_\_\_\_ and very substance they signify. These locutions produce a vital and substantive \_\_\_\_\_ on the soul. They are important and \_\_\_\_\_ because of the blessings they impart. There is nothing in them for the soul to \_\_\_\_\_ or refrain from \_\_\_\_\_. And there is nothing to reject or \_\_\_\_\_.

**REACT:** Tell what you would do if you knew someone who was having all kinds of visions and revelations and wanted to tell you about them at length. (if you are not a confessor)

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK THREE      LESSON 1**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book Three, Chapters 1 through 16**

**REPLY: Write out brief answers to the following questions:**

- 1. Our previous readings dealt with the active night of the *intellect*. With which faculties of the soul does this lesson's material deal?**
  
- 2. Whereas the theological virtue of *faith* unites the intellect with God, with which two theological virtues are the memory and the will united with God?**
  
- 3. When does the ecstasy (total suspension of the memory) which John mentions occur?**
  
- 4. In what does purity of soul consist?**
  
- 5. What is one benefit resulting from closing the memory to all considerations and reflections, even those about God? NOTE: when one is ready for contemplation, not before.**
  
- 6. What does John say about the proper use of sacred images and objects?**
  
- 7. What four passions does John *intend* to discuss in regard to the purification of the will? (Unfortunately, the Ascent ends abruptly after he discusses the passion of *joy*.)**
  
- 8. In what way do these passions keep the strength of the soul for God?**
  
- 9. How closely related to each other are the four passions?**
  
- 10. What is the source of all vice and imperfection?**
  
- 11. What must we do in order to live in perfect and pure hope in God?**

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**REFLECT: Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following thoughts:**

**The soul must journey by knowing God through what he is not, rather than through what he is.**

**He who is united to God is one spirit with him. And the children of God are moved by the Spirit of God.**

**Disturbances never arise in a soul unless through the apprehensions of the memory. And indeed, every man is disturbed in vain.**

**The soul must empty itself of all that is not God in order to go to God.**

**You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And I will keep my strength for You.**

**If you desire a clear understanding of the truth, you must cast from yourself all joys, hope, fear and sorrow.**

**RESPOND: Choose one of the following to complete before the next lesson:**

**Keep a record of your joys, hopes, fears and sorrows for one full week. How many had their source and their end only in God?**

**Keep a journal for one week regarding the ways in which you felt disturbed about things.**

**Keep a list for one week of all the ways in which you did *not* love God with all your heart, etc.**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount Carmel. Book Three, Chapters 16 through 29**

**REPLY: In this reading we are given four categories of good in which joy may be exercised. Try to list at least four examples under each of these, using the reading material, but being more specific. One example is given to help you:**

**Temporal goods: Example: receiving an honorary degree from Harvard University**

**Natural goods: Example: having a perfect figure or physique**

**Sensory goods: Example: conversations with friends**

**Moral goods: doing volunteer work**

**Explain how we can know whether or not the gratifications of the senses are beneficial.**

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**REFLECT:** Meditate on the following questions and keep notes in the spaces given:

**If I am to reach God by union of the will through charity, I must direct all my desires and emotions toward God, thus keeping my strength for him alone. As I reflect on my entire day yesterday and again today, in what did I find pleasure or joy, either actually or in thought? Were these instances of joy or pleasure inordinate in any way? Which of them were solely for the honor and glory of God? (You might wish to extend this exercise on other days, writing on the reverse of this page.)**

**What did St. John of the Cross say about most good works performed publicly? As I reflect on how this applies to the good works I have done recently or am now doing, how can I avoid the pitfalls he mentions, so that all my works are done with purity of intention?**

**St. John of the Cross says that when one of the passions is regulated according to reason, the other three will follow suit. He says that if my will rejoices over something, it must consequently in the same degree hope for it, with the virtual inclusion of sorrow and fear—sorrow when I lack it, and fear that I may lose it. With removal of satisfaction in this object, fear, sorrow and hope will also be removed. When these passions reign in my soul, I will not be able to live in the tranquility and peace needed for the wisdom I can receive both naturally and supernaturally. What can I do to attain to this freedom from the passions?**

**THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL, BOOK THREE      LESSON 3**

**READ: The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book Three Chapters 30 through 40**

**REPLY: Try to list at least four examples for each of the following categories of goods in which joy may be exercised. An example is given for each, to help you:**

**Supernatural goods: Example: receiving foreknowledge of an event**

**Spiritual goods: Example: getting a statue of our Blessed Mother**

**Answer the following questions briefly:**

- 1. What is the distinction John makes between the purpose of supernatural gifts vs. that of the spiritual gifts?**
- 2. When do supernatural works merit joy of soul, and when do they not?**
- 3. What harms can result from rejoicing in supernatural goods?**
- 4. What are two benefits of denying joy in supernatural goods?**

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**REPLY:** By spiritual goods John refers to all those goods which are an aid and motivating force in turning the soul to divine things, and to converse with God, as well as a help in God's communication with the soul. For discussion.

**REFLECT:** Meditate/Journal for a few minutes on each of the following questions:

**Am I trying to follow the suggestions given in chapter 41, section 2?**

**Do I avoid the pitfalls spoken of in chapter 43, section 2?**

**What personal application can I make of John's admonition concerning preachers, in chapter 45, section 2?**

**Do I concentrate the strength of my prayer on what is more pleasing to God? (see chapter 44, section 2)**