Readings for Week 3: The Way of *Light*

1. In itself, humility is nothing but a man's true understanding and awareness of himself as he really is. It is certain that if a man could truly see and be conscious of himself as he really is, he would indeed be truly humble. There are two causes of this meekness. One is the foulness, wretchedness and weakness into which a man has fallen by sin. The other is the superabundant love and worthiness of God himself. At this sight of this, all nature trembles, all learned men are fools, and all the saints and angels are blinded; so much so that were it not for the wisdom of his godhead, whereby due proportion is set between their contemplation and their natural and grace-given capacity, I would be at a loss to say what would happen to them. (*Cloud of Unknowing*, chapter 13)

2. Once you feel that you have done all that is in your power to make amends according to the law by the judgment of the Holy Church, then you must begin to dispose yourself earnestly for the labor of this exercise. If it happens that particular sins which you have committed are always inserting themselves, in your awareness, between you and your God, or any new thought or impulse concerning any other sin, you are bravely to step above it with a fervent impulse of love, and tread it down under your feet. And try to cover them with a thick cloud of forgetting, as though they had never been committed by you or by any other man. And if such thoughts often arise, put them down often. (*Cloud,* chapter 31)

3. Why does this little prayer of one syllable pierce the heavens? Surely because it is offered with a full spirit, in the height and the depth, in the length and the breadth of the spirit of him who prays. In the height: that is with the full might of the spirit; in the depth: for in this little syllable all the faculties of the spirit are contained; in the length: because if it could always be experienced as it is in that moment, it would cry as it does then; in the breadth: because it desires for all others all that it desires for itself. . . . Yes, and even if it were a very sinful soul, one which is, as it were, God's enemy, as long as it should come, through grace, to cry out with such a little syllable from the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of its spirit, it would always be heard and helped by God in the very vehemence of its shriek. (*Cloud*, chapter 38)

4. We must therefore pray in the height and depth, the length and breadth of our spirit; and not in many words but in a little word of one syllable. What shall this word be? Surely one that is in accordance with the nature of prayer. What word is that? First see what is the nature of prayer in itself; and then we can more clearly see what word will be best in accordance with the nature of prayer.

Prayer in itself is nothing but a devout reaching out directly to God, in order to attain the good and to do away with evil. And since every evil is comprehended in sin, either as to its effect or as to sin itself, when we wish to pray with concentration for the removal of sin, we must neither say or think, nor mean anything else, using no other words, but this little word "sin." And if we desire with all our intent to pray for the attainment of any good, let us cry either verbally or in thought or desire, using nothing else, nor any other word, but this little

word “God.” Because in God is contained all good, both as effect or as Being. (*Cloud*, chapter 39)

5. So feel sin as a lump, never mind what it is, nothing else but yourself. Cry out spiritually, always with the same cry, “Sin, sin, sin”; “out, out, out.” The spiritual cry is better taught by God by experience, rather than by the words of man. Its perfection consists in pure spirit, when there is no particular thought nor any word pronounced; though it can happen occasionally that because of fullness of spirit it bursts forth into words; for both body and soul are filled with sorrow and the heaviness of sin. Do exactly the same with this little word “God.” Fill your spirit with its spiritual meaning, without concentrating particularly on any of his works. (*Cloud*, chapter 40)

6. For often he desires to have a true awareness and experience of God in purity of spirit, as far as this is possible in this life, and as often he feels that he cannot, because he always finds that his awareness and his experience are in a sense occupied and filled with this foul and fetid lump of himself. And because this lump must always be hated and despised and forsaken, if a man would be God’s perfect disciple and taught by him on the mountain of perfection, he is nearly out of his mind with sorrow; so much so that he weeps and wails, strives with himself, denounces and heaps curses upon himself. In a word, it seems to him that the burden of himself which he carries is so heavy that he does not care what happens to him as long as God is pleased. At the same time, in all this sorrow he has no desire not to be, because that would be the devil’s madness and contempt for God. Rather, he is very glad to be, and he is sincere in his heartfelt thanks for the noble gift of his being, although he desires without seeking to lose the awareness and experience of his being. (*Cloud*, chapter 44).

7. For the high road and the shortest road [to heaven] is measured by desire and not by yards. And so Saint Paul says about himself and many others: “Though our bodies are now on earth, nevertheless our living is in heaven.” By this he means their love and their desire, which spiritually is their life. And indeed a soul is wherever it loves, as truly as it is in the body that lives by it, and to which it gives life. (*Cloud*, chapter 60)