

“Gaslight” starring Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, Joseph Cotten, 1944, NR, 114 minutes

Major themes:

- Secrets
- Fear
- Greed
- Manipulation
- Insanity
- Gaslighting
- Stress
- Turmoil
- Psychological abuse
- Discovery

Major characters:

- Gregory Anton
- Paula Alquist Anton
- Brian Cameron
- Miss Bessie Thwaites
- Nancy Oliver

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- This film, set circa 1874, was adapted from a play of the same name by Patrick Hamilton, and won two Academy Awards (Best Actress and Best Production Design).
- Angela Lansbury made her theatrical movie debut in this film, after previously working in a department store. (Her former boss offered to match the pay for her new job but was taken aback when he discovered that her current salary of \$27 / week had leapt to \$500 / week.) Because she was only 17 when filming began, a social worker monitored her. The social worker refused to allow her to smoke, so the filming of the scene in which she lights a cigarette was postponed until immediately after her 18th birthday.
- The Koh-i-Noor (literally "Mountain of light") is one of the largest cut diamonds in the world, weighing 105.6 carats (21.12 g). It is part of the British Crown Jewels.
- Named for this movie, "gaslighting" has become a recognized form of controlling and manipulative behavior. It is now classified as a form of psychological abuse. Seven "warning signs" of gaslighting are the observed abuser's:
 1. withholding information from the victim
 2. countering information to fit the abuser's perspective
 3. discounting information
 4. using verbal abuse, usually in the form of jokes
 5. blocking and diverting the victim's attention from outside sources
 6. trivializing ("minimizing") the victim's worth
 7. undermining the victim by gradually weakening them and their thought processes.
- Ingrid Bergman spent some time in a mental institution to research her role, studying a woman who had suffered a nervous breakdown.

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Scriptures:

Matthew 5:37 (The Message) – *“Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.”*

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 (The Message) – *“Since God has so generously let us in on what he is doing, we’re not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. We refuse to wear masks and play games. We don’t maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. And we don’t twist God’s Word to suit ourselves. Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God.”*

Psalms 56:6 (NLT) – *“They are always twisting what I say; they spend their days plotting to harm me.”*

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (The Message) – *“The world is unprincipled. It’s dog-eat-dog out there! The world doesn’t fight fair. But we don’t live or fight our battles that way—never have and never will. The tools of our trade aren’t for marketing or manipulation, but they are for demolishing that entire massively corrupt culture. We use our powerful God-tools for smashing warped philosophies, tearing down barriers erected against the truth of God, fitting every loose thought and emotion and impulse into the structure of life shaped by Christ. Our tools are ready at hand for clearing the ground of every obstruction and building lives of obedience into maturity.”*

James 3:13-16 (The Message) – *“Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here’s what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It’s the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn’t wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn’t wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn’t wisdom. It’s the furthest thing from wisdom—it’s animal cunning, devilish plotting. Whenever you’re trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others’ throats.”*

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Discussion points:

1. How did this film better help you to understand the term “*gaslighting*”?
2. What advice could you give to someone who you realized was a victim of gaslighting? (To gaslight is to psychologically manipulate a person into questioning their own sanity, often resulting in a greater dependence or attachment due to the victim’s uncertainty about their ability to perceive reality correctly.)
3. This film was groundbreaking in focusing on a woman’s point of view and taking it seriously. Where did you notice this?
4. What irritated you the most about a character’s actions in this film?
5. What did you most appreciate about this film?
6. What surprised you the most about this film?
7. What is the significance of the literal gaslight in Paula’s room?
8. A home is intended to be a place of safety. How would you describe the home depicted in this film?