

Safeguarding and emptying the heart.

Guard the heart vigilantly, for from it flows all life. This is wisdom from the Book of Proverbs and it gives us the framework of understanding for the maxim for today, which is *Empty your heart - and pour out all created things.*

So what does this safeguarding of the heart refer to in *this* context - practical contemplative wisdom of recollection?

Safeguarding spiritual perception

What's really being safeguarded here is our capacity for spiritual perception. What we need to learn is to 'keep' alive, keep safe, is our sensitivity to what is happening in the spirit. What's also being safeguarded is our softness and malleability of soul so that we are able to change. Our habitual responses become set and hardened. Osuna uses the imagery of us becoming calloused in the heart, particularly, he warns, by unhelpful hardening religious or spiritual opinions that prevent us from being in a soft malleable state of soul.

Safeguarding singleness of will

And further, what's also being safe guarded is a singleness of heart, the single orientation of our spiritual will, which so easily becomes divided and fragmented. If we are of two minds about our spiritual practice, we become half hearted - trying to proceed with as much of a 'no' as a 'yes.' It is almost like we have two heads or as Osuna says quite quaintly, it's almost like we have two tongues in our mouth that impede our speech, so that we are not able to say a clear 'yes'.

Safeguarding inner repose

But most of all what's being safeguarded, or needs to be safeguarded is that quality of inner repose, of recollection, that capacity to rest in the heart, as he says, it's a repose enclosed in silence. We are so easily pulled out of that place of repose.

All of these together give us a sense the multiple meanings of the life flowing from the heart that we do not cause, but can take learn to take responsibility for, to safeguard and protect and nurture. Osuna loves this proverbial saying - he urges us to contemplate

on it so frequently that the wisdom of spiritual protection becomes impressed in the heart .

So what does this safeguarding look like? There are many ways, but we can name three very significant ways we can be consciously , and intentionally using our protective energies for this spiritual purpose of staying connected to the flow.

Safeguarding through self examination

First of all we safeguard the inner life by careful and ongoing self examination. We examine carefully and compassionately our emotionally laden, habitual thoughts as they rise up in us. We examine the way they work in us and what happens when they rise up in us, and our relationship with them. We may for instance, have unwittingly given a thought absolute status and we live and are ruled by a thought. The purpose of our self examining is to safeguard the inner freedom from powerful thoughts.

Some other possibilities - we safeguard the inner repose when we, with this same careful and compassionate attention examine the heavily fear-laden thoughts that create turbulence. We safeguard our hearts from compulsive hungers that, upon examination, we discover there is a shrivelling of life. We safeguard our hearts from memories that have the impact of us 'forgetting ' we are connected to this flow of life – not by repressing them , but bringing them into the light of our awareness in our vigilant self enquiry.

Safe guarding through contemplating symbols

But a second way to keep and intensify the inner life is through contemplating powerful spiritual symbols and spiritual archetypes of the heart. An important example of this in Osuna's writings is the spiritual archetype of the paradise of the heart - or the return to the paradise of the heart. In contemplation, holding these powerful and complex and ancient symbols we may feel a resonance set up between the symbols and the flowing, nourishing, delighting already alive within us. As we feed our spiritual imagination with symbol after symbol of paradise – symbols of flourishing, of fullness, of virtue and wisdom in abundance that is fiercely protected from all harm, and where, as Osuna says, 'God walks in delight ' - all of this feeds and intensifies the feeling in the heart

and orientates us to this spiritual source of life flowing in a hidden dimension. Its another way of safe guarding the flow.

Safe guarding spaciousness and surrender.

Then the third way of safe guarding is the way of letting go and emptiness. And here the saying, 'Empty your heart and pour out all created things' is speaking to what this safe guarding looks like in silent meditation and prayer. It's here in stillness and silence, the heart being emptied by letting go of all thoughts, all feelings, all activity that strangely, the fullness of life in the heart flows most freely. This kind of purposeful emptying is a process of slowly unburdening our souls of self created thoughts, created habits, that weigh on the soul. Thoughts that preoccupy and take up the room in our awareness. By letting them flow out of our awareness we actively safeguard the real spaciousness and freedom and lightness of being that's possible.

So something of the pith of wisdom in the saying 'pour out all created things' in prayer, like a sacred vessel pours out its contents, is to say that in this kind of pouring out of ourselves there is an increase of life of the heart. Osuna reminds us constantly, this pouring out creates spaciousness and therefore room for the activity and presence of the divine within. Ultimately, it is this inner roominess and openness that is being safeguarded in the inner art of letting go.