

Loving Wisdom

Finally we come to speak of love . 'Apply love to everything and draw love from everything' . This exercise of love is the beginning, the path, and the end of spiritual recollection. The potential of spiritual love is the one thing necessary, love alone is sufficient and love is the effective force in spiritual recollection.

How does Osuna speak of this spiritual love on which everything turns? He offers propositions on love to contemplate – Love is the one thing necessary . Love gives all. Love contains all virtue and is more than them all. The law of love is spacious and broad. Or he offers word pictures that resonate with the direct experience of spiritual love. The soul is an empty hive that longs for and receives the swarm of bees filling it with a wax honeycomb to hold sweet honey. Or he offers the more traditional language - Love is the highest heaven influencing all other heavens . Love is the first sketch of glory already begun.

But as always the maxim brings us to the inner exercise of attention and intention . The soul work that we undertake for love sake to consciously and intentionally apply love to all things and draw love from all things.

Bringing loving attention to all experience

To undertake the inner work of love is not dependent on prolonged reflection, nor peak experiences, but a kind of sober willingness to bring loving attention to every aspect of human experience. Apply love to *really* everything. Osuna names qualities of the energy and the intelligence of love that we gradually learn to bring into our attention. A capacity to see into spiritual dimensions , a capacity to hold all things in the unconditional embrace of love, a capacity to endure all things , to see all things with equanimity , to be responsive and attuned to fruitfulness and subtlety. Any and all of these qualities of attention bring love to our human experience of good and of evil, of life and death, of love and the lack of it.

But then we have the second necessary dynamic of the maxim - without which the first would be something of an impossible ideal. Draw love from everything. What might that mean?

Drawing love from nature

We might begin with the natural world . We can make it our practice to bring loving attention to something as simple as a blade of grass and recognising its essential qualities of aliveness and intelligent design we may draw out and expand these qualities in our awareness to their fullness and completeness as we may find in divine love . We do this , Osuna points out, the with aid of affection and loving will rather than as an act of understanding. We do not do it to understand the construction of a leaf but we do it because we are willing to undertake a practice that nurtures spiritual affection . We do it to orientate it to divine love active within creation.

Drawing absolute love from relationships

This is one way of beginning to train our will in the habits of love. But this work of loving attention really deepens when we bring it to our experience of human relationships – the joy and the suffering that comes with this. How then, we may well ask do we draw out love from failures and hurt? Or we may well ask, does this practice of drawing out spiritual love diminish our natural loving human relationships?

The key to ‘drawing out love’ as a spiritual exercise is the willingness to draw away and redirect the heat of attachments to the good in our temporal loves and orientate them to greatest goodness in God. If we experience a sense of being accepted , in the practice we open and expand our sense of being accepted in the love of God which is the fullest experience of acceptance. We are consciously turning awareness into acceptance that is beyond and greater than our imagining or experience. In doing that our loving will is getting used to joining in God’s loving. It is getting used to being recollected.

The effect on our relationships may be gradual but can be radical. There comes a new ordering of relationships so we no longer cling to them as absolute necessities , we no longer lay upon them burdens of unrealistic expectations to meet all our deepest needs. The impact of living in love for God is to free us for real, loving intimacy without confusion or fear.

Drawing love from suffering and spiritual values

We can learn, even, to draw love from suffering and failures in love. We draw out how lack of love reminds us and points back to the existence of undiminishing and unfailing love. We can even learn , Osuna insists , to draw love from hell itself.

A subtle aspect of the practice is to draw love from virtue – drawing our attachment out of the what is good – hopes , delight, peace, wisdom, inspirations and visions and many other good things in the inner life and in others. Even these lovely goods are not ultimate goods .We can let go of them to place our affection for them in God's love. They are not destroyed but continue to come and go free from our tendency to cling to them.

Making love our meaning and purpose.

To bring loving attention to sacred scriptures , the creeds and commandments and to draw out the meaning of love from them is a contemplative practice that underpins all of this inner work of love. We learn then to interpret them in the light of love. So in all these ways, and more, we are schooled in loving wisdom till our turning to love is instinctive and spontaneous and completely unselfconscious. As Osuna says, ultimately, it is possible that love begins to operate by itself, and uses all things for the purposes of love.