

## Inner watchfulness

***May the person and the spirit always walk together*** : that's our maxim for today .  
*May the person and the spirit always walk together.* One way of saying this is this : may our sense of being a person emerge from the gathering and collecting up of all our human capacities so they work ( or walk ) together in a new way.

### **The larger spiritual process of recollection.**

Osuna , before anything else , uses this saying as pointer toward the larger, wider spiritual process of recollection which is the constant theme and the 'big idea' we will follow. He uses the saying as a reminder of the possibility *in this life* where all human potentials become conscious, alive and work together in harmony – or as he would say, the powers of the soul are 'recollected'. He also says, this soul work of recollection is a way of preparing and opening us to mystical communion in God.

### **Limiting beliefs**

Before we can even begin we may need to take stock of any limiting beliefs that we may have that get in the way of us undertaking the work of prayer and meditation. Perhaps we say this is only for those with a religious vocation, or this is an impossible ideal in this life , or our life circumstances needs to be different one way or another, or we are of the wrong age , or not well enough... or what ever. The one thing needed is willingness and clarity of purpose to take the journey.

Another kind of limiting belief , then and now, is a belief that our spiritual mind is separate from our sensual nature. That the sensing body and spiritual mind cannot work together in harmony – that there is an inherent body/mind split. That there can be no 'walking together'. No says Osuna, the relationship between reasoning mind and sensuality is like that of siblings sharing an inheritance , or of neighbours both under the law of love, or lovers joined in marriage.

### **Beginning with watching experience.**

So where would we begin in this inner work of reconciling the powers of the soul. The traditional way of beginning the work of spiritual recollection is to develop our capacity for bringing a watchful attention to inner experience. Watchfulness is a fundamental spiritual attitude and to get the feel of this quality of attention it helps to know that in the Greek it was understood to have connotations of sobriety - a kind of alert and sober attentiveness to what is happening within our own awareness. The opposite to watchfulness is a kind of drunken stupor, and by implication much of our ordinary level of consciousness can be compared to being in this foggy and sleepy state of soul .

Watchfulness then, means learning to be vigilant and purposeful and wholehearted in the spiritual exercises we undertake. It means developing a quality of attention much like, Osuna says, a poor and hungry fisherman watches his bait , or a miner turns each and every spade-full of earth expecting to find a nugget of gold. And once we begin this work, he goes on– intend to finish it and go wherever it takes you – be like a pilgrim who begins a journey dreaming of its end.

### **Exercising detachment**

So what may this look like in practice? The inner watching of recollection is not any one practice but many forms and processes of reflection, meditation and prayer. The

key quality being nurtured is detachment . The detachment that grows from this inner watching is not cold neutrality : it is rather a spiritual way of being awake and alert and alive .

We exercise detachment when we bring attention inwards to the responses that constantly rise up in our awareness. We learn not to get caught up in judging our experience, or constantly and endlessly developing our thoughts, but from a deeper watching place we learn to see with clarity the full drama and display of our inner experience coming and going. The very act of maintaining that watchfulness without getting hooked into habitual responses creates a spaciousness, a freedom, a clarity of mind.

### **Watching attractive thoughts.**

Osuna reflects on particular kinds of thoughts where learning detachment is most helpful. We may notice the kind of thoughts that have an energy and quality of sticky attractiveness. They seem irresistible and demanding. To be clear, to choose to simply watch an attractive thought is *not* to say that our sense of enjoyment or beauty is bad or wrong or not to be trusted. Instead what we are doing in simply watching what is compellingly attractive in our inner experience is that we are interrupting the habitual responses to automatically go with what we like. We learn watchfulness to weaken any compulsive clinging energy. Ultimately our capacity to enjoy becomes free of compulsion and we can more freely and fully sense delight and embody joy.

### **Watching fearful thoughts**

Another kind of thought where we need to learn to exercise loving detachment is in relation to anxious thoughts - those fear-laden thoughts that may constantly keep getting triggered off within us. Here again it's not to get rid of our capacity for fear, which is so essential for us, but by being willing to maintain watchfulness in our meditation, we recognise each fear-laden thought that comes up, and, by not feeding it we are able to see it just for what it is as something in our awareness rather than being overwhelmed in it. Bearing in mind the purpose of recollection it is not undermining the deeply human fear response but gradually changing our manner of fearing so that this fear response is honed for bold action and a right fearing visceral awe.

### **Watching sorrowful thoughts**

We may also, thirdly, notice and begin working with thoughts that are heavily laden with sadness. Once again, not to make a judgement on our capacity for sadness, which is also so much part of us, but we learn to keep a watch on our grieving so we are no longer so identified with the 'I am sad' that floods our consciousness and overwhelms to our souls. So watchfulness is about learning to let our habitual grief responses be - and ultimately it's about recollecting the powerful potential to mourn so it operates in a subtle way. To mourn spiritually it to be finely attuned to presence and absence of goodness and life. Blessed are those that mourn.

### **Watching wanting and desire**

And the fourth quality of thoughts that we may begin being attentive to in our watchfulness are those that carry a particular energy of wanting, of desire. And once again, for the purpose of recollection we learn to interrupt our compulsive attractions, and the thoughts that carry a 'must have' kind of quality. As we simply watch these obsessing thoughts we slowly quieten their energy and break the patterns of

response. For the sake of spiritual recollection we are not getting rid of the capacity for desire – but creating a free inner space for the deepest and truest longings to intensify.

### **The fruits of detachment**

To exercise a kind of loving detachment in relation to thoughts and feelings restores clarity, harmony and spiritual freedom. It bears fruit in the new way of responding from our true nature as embodied being lit up by spiritual mind. A true walking together of all aspects of our personhood. Most significantly what begins to increase is wisdom. When we are no longer caught up in the power and unreality of our habitual thoughts there is a quiet awakening of the inner conscience . And it is in the inner conscience that gift of what the ancients called prudence begins to show itself in ways that we know intuitively and wisely know what is needed to watch and stay in the harmony of recollection.