

## **Text from the Tradition: The Way of Perfection and The Interior Castle by Teresa of Avila**

*Recollection* (text drawn from pp. The Way, 140-48 and Castle 78-80)

This prayer is called recollection because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God...Those who by such a method can enclose themselves within this little heaven of our soul, where the maker of heaven and earth is present and grow accustomed to refusing to be where the exterior senses in their distraction have gone or look in that direction should believe they are following an excellent path and they will not fail to drink water from the fountain. Those who know how to recollect themselves are already out to sea, as they say. For even though they may not have got completely away from the land, they do what they can during that time to get free from it by recollecting their senses within. There is a withdrawing of the senses from exterior things and renunciation of them in such a way that, without one's realizing it, the eyes close so as to avoid seeing them and so that the sight might be more awake to the things of the soul. So anyone who walks by this path keeps [the] eyes closed...This is a praiseworthy custom for many reasons. It is a striving so as not to look at things here below. This striving comes at the beginning; afterward, there's no need to strive; a greater effort is needed to open the eyes while praying...In the beginning the body causes difficulty because it claims its rights without realizing that it is cutting off its own head by not surrendering. If we make the effort, practice this recollection for some days, and get used to it, the game will be clearly seen; we will understand, when beginning to pray, that the bees are approaching and entering the beehive to make honey. And this recollection will be affected without our effort because the Lord has desired that, during the time the faculties are withdrawn inward, the soul and its will may merit to have this dominion. When the soul does no more than give a sign that it wishes to be recollected, the senses obey it and become recollected. Even though they go out again afterward, their having already surrendered is a great thing; for they go out as captives and subjects and do not cause the harm they did previously. And when the will calls them back again, they come more quickly, after many of these entries the Lord wills that they rest entirely in perfect contemplation. Therefore those who know how to recollect themselves are like those who travel by sea; and since it is important for us not to proceed so slowly, let us speak a little about how we should get accustomed to a method that so good. The fire of divine love is more quickly enkindled when they blow a little with their intellects. Since they are so close to the fire, a little spark will ignite and set everything ablaze. Because there is no impediment from outside, the soul is alone with its God; it is well prepared for this enkindling...

You must understand that this recollection is not something supernatural, but that it is something we can desire and achieve ourselves with the help of God—for without this help we can do nothing, not even have a good thought. This recollection is not a silence of the faculties; it is an enclosure of the faculties within the soul. The soul gains from this recollection in many ways...what I'm trying to point out is that we should see and be present to the One with whom we speak without turning our backs on him, for I don't think speaking with God while thinking of 1000 other vanities would amount to anything else but turning our backs on [God]. All the harm comes from not truly understanding that [God] is near, but in imagining [God] as far away.

Don't think that this recollection is acquired by the intellect striving to think about God within itself, or by the imagination imagining [God] within itself. Such efforts are good and an excellent kind of meditation because they are founded on a truth, which is that God is within us. But this isn't the prayer of recollection because it is something each one can do...In the case of this recollection, it doesn't come when we want it but when God wants to grant us the favor...So I believe that if we desire to make room for [Your] Majesty, [God] will give not only this but more...And this recollection is a preparation for being able to listen, so that the soul instead of striving to engage in discourse strives to remain attentive and aware of what the Lord is working in it. If [Your] Majesty has not begun to absorb us, I cannot understand how the mind can be stopped. There's no way of doing so without bringing about more harm than good...For my part I must confess my lack of humility, but those in favor of stopping the mind have never given me a reason for submitting to what they say. It could be that I'm mistaken but I have the following reasons. First, in this work of the spirit the one who thinks less and has less desire to act does more...The second reason is that these interior works are all gentle and peaceful. Doing something arduous would cause more harm than good. I call any force that we might want to use something arduous. For example, it would be arduous to hold one's breath. Leave the soul in God's hands... with the greatest disinterest about your own benefit as is possible and the greatest resignation to the will of God. The third reason is that the very care used not to think of anything will perhaps rouse the mind to think very much. The fourth is that what is most essential and pleasing to God is that we be mindful of [God] and forget ourselves in our own profit and comfort and delight. How is a person to be so forgetful of the self so as not to stir or even to allow the intellect or desires to be stirred to a longing for the greater glory of God? When [Your] Majesty desires the intellect to stop, [God] occupies it in another way and gives it a light so far above what we can attain that it remains absorbed. Then, without knowing how, the intellect is much better instructed than it was through all the soul's efforts not to make use of it. Since God gave us our faculties that we might work with them and in this work they find their reward, there is no reason to charm them; we should let them perform their task until God appoints them to another greater one.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Recollection has many names in our spiritual traditions—awakening, aliveness, consolation—when have you gathered yourself together so as to kindle a fire of strength, love and compassion? What was it like?
- Recollection in one sense, is to recognize the greater dignity of one's being by recalling that the Holy One resides near and within—and there are many degrees of this recognition. In what ways might the practice of recollecting oneself to God make us into better reflections of our human being?