

The Adornment of Love

Virtues are like an invisible adornment, a beautifully embroidered cloth that covers our shoulders, or a golden crown that surrounds our head. When we are getting ready every morning for the day ahead, we take a few minutes to meditate on the qualities we want to practice, and mindfully wrap our words and actions with our virtues. Similarly, at day's end, we re-visit our deeds and the adornment, or lack thereof, with which we carried out our work.

This is not to say that developing our virtuous thoughts and actions is a way of hiding or covering what is underneath. There can be a delicate balance between beautifying and adorning our inner selves, and accepting and loving others and ourselves for who we are at any moment in time.

There are some virtues such as *Courtesy*, which help to adorn our tongues with words like "Please" and "Thank you." Some virtues help us make golden our promises, such as *Trustworthiness*, when we do what we say. The virtue of *Courage* gives us power and makes us feel strong in the face of injustice, like a mighty lion with a golden mane.

What would the virtue of *Love* look like as an adornment? Some have said that Love is kind words and gentle thoughts. Love is good, patient, and humble. Love comes from the inside out, and spreads all around. It could be thought of as a silk blanket that starts small and grows and flows around us and outwards to everyone we meet, surrounding everything we do. When we have love, we feel warm, and warmth radiates from us. Many have said that Love is like the sun, and how great it feels when we feel its warmth on us!

Perhaps of all the virtues, Love can be the most powerful adornment because of this flowing, growing power it has to encompass everything around it. As evidenced by Mother Teresa's great example, she started with simple acts of love and kindness that grew to a movement of worldwide admiration. Mother Teresa said, "Spread love everywhere you go, first in your own house." (Quoted in *The Virtues Project Educator Guide* by Linda Kavelin Popov, p. 196)

When we allow children to enjoy the freedom to move, to explore, to serve guests, and encourage them to become a responsible part of the household, we are giving them valuable lessons in love. We show our love for them by giving up our own expectations, so that they can develop their individuality and experience first-hand the benefits of serving others and taking care of themselves.

Eric Fromm, who is well-known for his Book *The Art of Loving*, explores the reality of love as something that can be taught and developed through discipline and the honing of our other virtues, including care, respect, and knowledge (p.24). He also

said that “Love is the child of freedom, never that of domination.” (Quoted in *Sacred Moments: Daily Meditations on the Virtues* by Linda Kavelin Popov, no page number)

It is useful to reflect on the environments we create for our children, and how we deal with conflict within our household to create a loving place for learning. A joyful, nurturing household or school environment where mistakes are treated with respect and used as stepping-stones for growth is fertile ground for nurturing this virtue.

The poet Kahlil Gibran notes “Love gives naught but itself and takes naught but from itself. Love possesses not nor would it be possessed; for love is sufficient unto love” (*The Prophet*, p.12). An act of love is an act of selflessness. When we do something out of love, we do it for the sake of love itself. Just like a silk blanket that spreads outward, love is light and detached and does not carry itself like a burden.

Based on these writings, here are three ways to adorn our homes with Love:

1. Doing with Love – Many daily activities in our household can be part of this. These are things we *do* for those we love and live with. When we do them in this spirit, they can also become fun and very rewarding! Some examples that can be done with children: Cooking, cleaning, painting, decorating, perfuming, gardening, organizing, mending... and many more. The key is to do them with gusto, and for children to see everyone in the family taking part.
2. Saying with Love – We can help children express their feelings of love by using this language daily in our interactions with them and those we love too: “I appreciate the gentle way you woke your *baba* today.” “I love you darling, have a great day!” “I can’t wait to see you and give you a great big hug!” Words of loving appreciation, when they are sincere, sustain the bonds of love in our relationships.
3. Feeling with Love – Many of the songs we hear on the radio today are about love, but they often involve painful episodes of separation and unrequited feelings. We can instead fill our home with music and art that expresses the true nature of love – one that is always giving, fulfilling, and never-ending. Children absorb our attitudes and feelings about love, so we would do well to turn to sources of inspiration that sustain and ground us rather than deplete us.

So, when choosing to adorn ourselves, our homes, and our relationships with Love, remember that it can start small... and never stop growing.

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