

Joserra Gonzalez: A Re-Love-Ution Blooms in Spain

by Awakin Call Editors

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Jose Ramon Gonzalez ("Joserra") is a service-hearted generosity entrepreneur, meditator, and activist for the common good. He is also the founder of "ReLoveUtion" -- a renaissance of compassionate societies. What follows is an edited transcript of an Awakin Call interview with Joserra, moderated by Rina Patel. You can read the full transcript or listen to the audio [here](#).

Rina Patel: I want to jump right into things and ask you what a Re-Love-ution is?

Joserra Gonzalez: I had an experience in India, two years of volunteer work, and I was touched by many of the things I could see there. I can say I have never received so much love. It really touched me deeply how people treated me, how everyone gave me everything without expectations, with so much love and patience. And since that experience for me it is about this: how can I bring the spirit of love to everywhere I am?. Our nature is this- how can we spread the love? This is the Re-love-ution, an opportunity to spread love. Recently we just had a 3-day retreat, "Head, Heart, and Hand" retreat. People left the retreat feeling much richer in many ways. That is the reason behind all what we do in Re-Love-ution.

Rina: Can you tell us a little more about what you did in the Gandhi Ashram and what led you to spending two years there?

Joserra: I have to say thank you to my brother, Jesus, who might be listening to this in Kenya. He was there as an architect working for Manav Sadhna, one of the most beautiful NGOs I know. They do amazing work supporting the journeys of under privileged people in this land. They work with thousands of people every day and always with a smile, always with that sense of how can I change myself in the process. I was lucky to be connected with Jesus. He has beautiful small practices, and one of those practices was to send emails to all his friends and family, all of them were so touching. I could feel there was a lot of coherence in what he was saying. In many NGOs the "talk" and the "walk" are not aligned, but this all sounded like inner transformation and service where hand in hand.

Rina: You mentioned there were so many people who showered this unconditional love on you. Who were some of those people who left a deep imprint on your heart?

Joserra: I have to say Jayesh bhai. Many of you know he is one of the coordinators at the Gandhi Ashram and he is also leading other organizations that work for service. When I entered the Gandhi Ashram I felt there was something different in that place. And I can say the same thing of Jayesh bhai. When I met him I thought "there is something special about this person which is invisible". Just by being he expresses his motherly and fatherly love, just through his presence. I really felt embraced by him and I'll be always grateful.

Another is brother Nipun. He has been a lighthouse for me in many ways. I remember him talking to everyone in the same way. It was the same attention to every moment, that mindfulness was very touching and very inspiring.

In the whole ashram you can feel Gandhi's spirit is very much alive. The people who are living there are very responsible for that renaissance of Gandhian spirit, not only in the ashram but also in the world. The space is a lighthouse for so many people. I am so glad I fell into their lap.

Rina: Very beautiful and we had a lot of conversations before about bringing the values you know, you felt, and experienced in India. Can you tell me a little more about how this shift happened? When was that period where you felt you were ready to go back to Spain and start your experiments there?

Joserra: I want to share a little story of the Ashram. I was working on a gardening experiment in the slums near by. We started few gardens there to see how they could be of service for the community... The whole process was full of gems. It was a space for working together, for conversation, for circles, for harmony... I received so much. It was eight months after we started one of the gardens when we had an amazing experience of generosity that will stay forever with me. We were harvesting the fruits and vegetables for the first time. They [the family in the slum] said "We want to give this first harvest to you, we want to give it to the volunteers". This was after 8 months of working hard and taking care of the space themselves... We were all in tears, like wow, where does this generosity come from? What a tremendous capacity to give love...

To your question, I don't know if I'm ready to be here in Spain. I feel sometimes I am out of my mother's womb. We have a very strong machinery which is about consuming and polluting the environment. There is also a lack of empathy in many ways. Some people say we are born where we are born for a reason... Let's see... As we say in Service Space, it is about trying to amplify the good. Although in Spain we are poor in many ways, we are rich in different ways...

Rina: I know you talked about amplifying the good through gift, and this paradigm shift from consumption to contribution. Maybe if you can tell us about your experience living on gift, and what drove you to live that way?

Joserra: Yeah. I'm experimenting and I try to follow what feels alive for me. When I had this experience with gardening in India and thought of offering everything as a gift, I could see the reaction of people and my own - it brought up different dynamics. For example we were working with slum families but also with families with material resources. After the whole process of building the gardens, families were so open to the volunteers, they were inviting us for dinner, connecting us to other people who wanted to create gardens, sharing the stories everywhere... Offering our time and services as a gift opened all up to more abundant dynamics, which were not only about money... a lot of capital which is usually hidden, suddenly appeared.

I don't know if I would be living as a volunteer for many more years, but for now it's unlocking a lot of different possibilities. I have many stories...For example, recently a friend of ours who is undergoing the last part of a drug addiction program came to an Awakin Circle and since then has been coming all the time. He told me one day "I have this problem in my back". I'm a physical therapist by profession so I told him to come to my home. I offered the treatment and he was very happy, not just because of the massage but also the conversation, it was a very special feeling to receive something like that. He couldn't believe it was offered as a gift.

Rina: You mentioned opening your home and I know you started to do this with Awakin Circles. Retreats are also being held in a village close by to where you currently live. Can you tell us a little more how it's created a shift in the community?

Joserra: I have to talk about my parents because they have been such an example for many of us. A lot of friends from India and different places come and they've always been super open with their home. People in the village always understood it as a community home. It's because they had that clarity...we just have to keep the door open. They said, "Everyone is welcome and we serve everyone."

I've learned a lot from people like Pancho, who lives in a dangerous place but still keeps the door open for everyone even if there are gunshots in the street. People like them encourage me to try to practice that trust. How can we create trust in others? For example, with my bicycle I have this experiment of not locking it.

Rina: I'm curious to hear other stories because there's this theme emerging of isolation to community. I'm curious to hear other stories you might have.

Joserra: One example is Karma Kitchen, a gift economy restaurant. We work on going from yourself to sharing the values together. In Karma Kitchen it's so beautiful because it brings so much diversity together from 15-year-old kids to my auntie who is 100 years old. For example, one thing we do is gather in the beginning where everyone shares their name and why they are there. It can bring up a lot of change. When you have these underlying values it's very beautiful to see what happens and a lot of people feel more resilient after Karma Kitchen. A lot of people feel they are richer in connection, richer in friendship, richer in community. I feel all these experiments have a component of "How can we show people we are not alone on this journey?" And this is one of the things people feel the most.

Rina: I know you're a meditator and you have some other practices, what keeps you rooted as you continue to work?

Joserra: Friendship is very important, like being here and having this conversation definitely supports. You share from this space of opening your heart and learning together...friendship is not a practice but it's something that's very powerful for my journey. I try to meditate two hours a day. It helps me.

Rina: When I met you I had learned you'd spent 7 months at a Vipassana center. What made you stay for those 7 months? That's a long time to spend at a center!

Joserra: I felt I had to do it. I went for the first course, and I didn't know it was a possibility, that you could go, stay, and do service for longer periods. When I came back from India I felt I was not totally aligned with the values I wanted to work for, for example when we talk about kindness or generosity or mindfulness, we cannot force change onto people, we can't change anyone actually. But my experience is as I go deeper, or when I see other people who have gone deeper in that sense of changing themselves, I see how it changes other people as well. We cannot control how but it really helps those good qualities to emerge in others too. I felt I had to do more of that inner work to really be able to share my experience from India here.

Rina: I was thinking about -- how you live along the Camino -- it's a beautiful pilgrimage route that goes from French Pyrenees to the Atlantic Ocean on the westernmost coast of Spain. I know you and I have had a lot of conversations about the Camino, how you grew up in Burgos where pilgrims are always coming in and out and in some ways it's really influenced you as you became a pilgrim yourself. I'd love to hear your experiences of being a pilgrim.

Joserra: There is a difference when you are a traveler and when you're a pilgrim. A traveler is someone who wants to get somewhere and a pilgrim is someone who wants to change himself and learn in the process. For example this last week we were in Japan, there is this beautiful family, the Saionji family, who are promoting a culture of peace. After the second world war, a few awakened people decided to start a prayer movement, a prayer for peace movement. They do one thing, it's called Symphony of Peace Prayers where they gather all religious leaders, and people from everywhere with local Japanese people to pray for peace; it's like 10,000 people together with that intention of sending good vibes to the world. It's very difficult to describe it in words, but when I was there I had a wonderful feeling of oneness.

Rina: Can you tell us a little more about some things that have created that love for mother earth in your life?

Joserra: I have tried a few experiments of not buying plastic and trying to go by bicycle everywhere. I feel I can do much more; I think we can all do much more. We are failing in fighting climate change. Of course, all the problems we are having connected to nature are very much related to our culture; we cannot dissociate the environmental issues with the social issues. I want to answer your question with this intention of trying to serve more to Mother Earth.

We still don't know how beautiful Nature is, there are a lot of things we don't understand totally. I feel our understanding will be higher when it's collective. When more and more people have this understanding, we will be able to see more gifts Nature has ready for us. Hopefully, I can raise more awareness on loving the earth. We are having this experiment, for example, that we call 'peace tree', in the same spirit as the Saionji family. In December, we had our first 'peace tree'. The whole idea was to gather around the tree and to wish peace for the world. We gathered for 20 min of silence and then we started to hang messages of peace in the tree with this beautiful origami paper, actually! I didn't know I was going to Japan, but we had origami paper for that activity. We didn't even reach-out that much but we ended

up being 40 or 50. It was a wonderful feeling of being again under the tree, sharing stories, sharing good intentions.

I feel when we connect environmental activism with inner transformation, our environmental movements will be much more empowered. We need that empathy with nature but we need to have that spiritual ground, so we can be more efficient in our movements.

Rina: And that reminds me of the word, you had made it up before that you had told me, called "Meditaction"--meditation and action put together. Through all of these experiments and all the personal practices and staying rooted in yourself, this community has emerged in Burgos and Madrid. What do you feel are some next steps? What do you feel it is coming to light?

Joserra: Yes, we keep having these at Head, Heart, and Hands retreats. Next one is in September. I can feel how it is creating this ecosystem. People are really seeing the support of creating those connections, because it is one of the main things that happens there...people connect. One girl was reflecting, she was like: "Wow, you know, I have all these friends for many years, like twenty years, but I have a deeper connection to all of you, and I just met you."

I feel we will keep working with that--trying to create those spaces where people can connect with themselves, others and nature.

We have an amazing team of translators at ServiceSpace. We want to keep building up content in Spanish. I feel connecting those worlds, so the offline projects, like Karma Kitchen, retreats, and Awakin Circles will merge with the online content. They won't feel, "you go to a retreat, then what?" We want to facilitate a sense of connection and interconnection, so we can create that feeling of an ecosystem.

Rina: As you have been in this process of community and with these experiments, were there any challenges that you ran into along the way?

Joserra: I'm always with this question, "Should I go to the Himalayas?" When you work with people, you have all kinds of challenges coming up because anger, grief, sadness, or doubt emerge. All of them are great challenges to oneself, because you are opening yourself up in front of many people and you have to stay balanced and rooted. That's my main challenge: how can I be my best self all the time, even in the midst of any situation?

Birju: The original context in which I met you was in Ahmedabad where you were doing these organic gardens for the people who live in these slums. I would love to know a bit more about your connection with the land. How has your understanding of being in service to land grown and changed over time as you have learned more about what that means?

Joserra: Yeah, I feel, again, I am in kindergarten in that sense. I was deeply moved by my last trip to India last winter. I visited Auroville, a town whose mission is how can we realize human unity. I was so happy because in the fifties and sixties they started to create this city, and it was a barren land. It was completely empty. Now it's all green.

Birju: I'm curious about what that means in terms of how do you feel like serving

nature is best done? When you're with people in the slums there is only so much organic kind of things you could do, and so to what extent do you feel like you are limited when you may want to do natural farming or permaculture, but limited in the circumstances? So how do you determine what's the best way to connect the land to people given all these unique circumstances?

Joserra: You remember the story of Raghubhai who lost his legs. He had polio when he was a child. He lived in the slums and he wanted to do something. He said, "I want to do service even if I cannot move my legs, but I still want to serve." He said, "I'm going to go to everyone's home and I'm going to give tulsi plants." Of course, a tulsi plant is very sacred in India. Even if it's a small plant, it makes a difference in the slums. When you see that small bit of green, it awakens something. When there is beauty outside it helps your inner beauty. The garden, even if it is one plant, it can help to bring about your own beauty.

Birju: Thank you for that additional context, and we have a question from Greg in Ahmedabad and he was curious about the term "reloveution." How old is it? When did you first connect with it.

Joserra: Yeah, thank you Greg. I love you brother. I heard in Ahmedabad actually. It was on a wall. And there was like "RE" and they "love" in red and then "ution". It stayed with me, how beautiful that concept is. It speaks a lot about what we are doing here which is trying to create bridges between the inner world and the outer world.

Birju: I'm curious if you could share a bit more about your humanity, the other side of you. I am curious if you could share some fears or concerns you have and when you walk this path of constant unconditional service. What comes up inside, what boundaries of your own limitations do you come across?

Joserra: The biggest is "Am I doing my best?" Many people who are in the service journey have this, and personally I have this sometimes. Because I had some spiritual experiences where I could see with clarity what I had to do next. Like OK, now you have to serve this way. But we are not always in that space. I am not always in that state where I can see clearly what I have to do next. So that's my biggest fear: spending time or doing things which disconnect me from my true purpose. That is where meditation is very helpful, because I feel the more I have my own practice, the more I can connect to my own true purpose. Yeah, that's a little bit of a fear, Birju.

Birju: And I want to invite you into...I'm going to call it the shadow. What are the potential issues you've seen could come with leading with this edge of kindness and compassion? Where have you seen your own concerns come up in terms of missing something, in terms of going into your own dark night, in terms of going to places that bring up real struggle inside of you or have you seen that with others?

Joserra: One challenge is to find our own truth. This is the challenge we have in the collective spaces. We might have the best of our intentions and best interests, but we are

connecting with other people, sometimes in those collective dynamics, we might, for example, create leaderships which are not useful for us. We might silence or not listen to our own voice and listen more to other people. There is a balance, that's an edge. In collective settings, how much do we use other's truth and how much do we listen to our own voice, our own inner truth. How much do we follow our own intuition. That is an edge we can see in many of the social movements we are involved with.

Birju: I appreciate that as context. I'd love to hear a bit more about what you're seeing happening in the whole world around this topic. You're this rare kind of person who is not only engaging with such deep love, but you've been globetrotting along the way. Whether that's doing this gathering in Japan, or I hear of this "giftaval" movement where you've gone to their conference gatherings which is all about exploring this questioning of how to live in the space of gift. And what are you seeing out there? Is this a wonderful thing you are doing in combination with ServiceSpace and Moved By Love or is this happening elsewhere?

Joserra: We always talk about this. It's not so much about organizations or closed groups, but more about this feeling that we are working in the same direction. I've been blessed to be invited to Giftival last year and to Japan this year. I can see it is the same spirit. In Giftival, for example, one of the most beautiful things I found there was this sense of celebration. They were saying it is a collective inquiry on gift, but with celebration. We have the space for contemplation, but also there is the space for celebration. Gandhi said, "without a sense of humor I long ago would have committed suicide". A lot of spiritual people can tell you that. They brought people from North America from the Lakota tradition, people from the Amazon, from Africa. There was this lady from the Lakota tradition, she shared a prayer when all the protests were happening at Standing Rock. She shared a beautiful prayer where she included not only the people who were harmed, but also the people who were harming others. She was feeling compassion not only for the aggression, but also for the people aggravating other people.

Birju: When you call out this question or this inquiry around humor, I wanted to go deeper into that because to me it is a little bit of a paradox. Part of the reason, as I understand it, you are doing all of this work is because you see what may be considered as issues or things you like to change in society. And here you are looking at the social structure and saying, "Wow, there's profound disharmony out there." How can you find a space for humor though that? If ignorance is lessened...you're still finding things to be in a space of humor, how does that happen?

Joserra: That is another edge you were talking about. Of course, we need to be serious about many of these things, but also when we are with real situations that sense of humor is always a tool. Even if I'm grieving with people that are suffering, we can connect, first with empathy, but at some point, you will be able to use the sense of humor, even in very hard situations.

Rina: How are you unlocking different forms of capital in your own life in addition to what you shared?

Joserra: It's funny because we have many things which are there and we don't use them. For example, In Spain, we have four million houses which are empty or we throw away 7.7 million pounds of food every year and there are so many other resources that we just waste. Maybe one of the reasons is because we don't have enough connections to share those. For example I'm living in a flat which was empty and my aunty gifted it to me. She is one hundred year old Aunty who is super alive. I can talk the

whole Awakin call about her. She is turning one hundred this July and we all love her. She hadn't been renting it for three or four years and she said "I know how you are living, so you can use it and you don't have to give me any money".

Birju: You've chosen to live in a place in India where I believe your language command is certainly not your first language or your second language or maybe your third language and your goal was to live right you weren't there as an expat and I'm curious what you've learned through grappling with language barrier and still connecting with people so deeply as you do?

Joserra: Language is there, not verbal language but really we are always communicating in different ways and some scientists say most of our communication happens without words. The way we look or the way we touch people is also communication. Even if you are not speaking I could feel the love. In India I got a chance to connect with people without the verbal language. I actually liked that a lot! It's such a great game to try to connect with people with the language barrier.

Birju: I love it. I want to ask like a more pointed question because yeah, there's many ways can look at the world, they can call it a very friendly perspective of saying of course we want to walk towards love and compassion and there's a lens that says Joserra this is this is really nice but it's also all waste of time. You've been well educated in the main system of the world, you could be running some major organization having some leveraged path to make a big difference and to support the causes that you care about. So I'm curious what you'd say to that? What leads you to purposefully not walk on that path that is well traveled that people think is the way that would make the world a better place?

Joserra: It is still a doubt which is alive for me. I'm finding my way and don't have a final answer to this. I definitely feel cultivating myself has been the priority for last years and now I am manifesting it in very small experiments. I feel it's of value for me right now and this is the place where I see myself. I can see they are not two different things actually. For now I'm going this small experiments but I guess I can also see the greatness of it. But I'm not closed to go for a bigger organization. It's an open question for me.

Rina: We had one question from Birdie in Texas. What is one practical small step a person in the USA can do daily to foster more loving presence?

Joserra: There are many different ways. Meditating is a beautiful act of love. When I started to read about neuroscience, how we can actually change our brain through small practices. There are so many things you can try and there are these [kindness] challenges I was talking about which you can find in the website kindspring.org. For twenty one days you can just perform small acts of kindness, for example, giving cake or flowers to your neighbor.

Rina: Any last words you would like to leave our callers with in terms of any lessons you learned through your own personal transformation or through the work you've been doing these past couple of years?

Joserra: I have no lesson to give. We are at the verge of many changes, and if we stay

together in this journey, we can really face this big current which is taking us in a direction we don't know. We all feel we are holding hands in the journey for more peace in the world and more kindness and generosity. Hopefully, with every thought and every action, we can add to that current of love and as they say in Japan: "May peace prevail on earth." May peace prevail on our hearts.

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