The Love and Demands of the Imaginal (Part 2)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:05:03

At the end of the first part of this talk, I quoted Henri Corbin when he wrote, "Not your individuation, but the angel's individuation. The individuation of the angel is your task."

We were presenting that as a radical possibility—a way of looking at imaginal figures, a way of relating to and conceiving them—a sort of reversal of perhaps what might be tempting to many of the usual ways of seeing, relating to, and conceiving of imaginal figures and their relationship with the self.

Of course, Henri Corbin was, as I think I mentioned one time, writing about actually just certain streams of the Islamic mystical tradition—people like Ibn Arabi and Avicenna and Suhrawardi. And so that phrase of Corbin really has its home or originates from those streams, certain streams, very much a minority within the Islamic mystical tradition, or the range of that. And so that is from a more—or has its context in those traditions.

And we can actually fill out a little bit and elaborate a bit more about that and then see how it might parallel with some more dharmic traditions and Buddhist traditions.

So that perspective on the angel, on the daemon, on the imaginal figure—we can fill that out a little bit and put it into a larger context, actually, from looking briefly at the Hasidic traditions. In the streams of the Hasidic tradition, the Kabbalistic tradition in Jewish mysticism, we see something there that's filled out as a kind of philosophy and practice that gives more flesh around this phrase of Corbin's.

So there they talk about, or it is taught, the encouragement and injunction of the practitioner to practice a twofold movement in relation to the divine.

The first aspect of this twofold movement is a movement towards dissolving the being, dissolving the self, dissolving the consciousness actually in the Godhead—transcending the world of self and other and the world of appearances, in fact transcending and dissolving it in the Godhead. And that Godhead, that essence of God, if you like, in this tradition is also ayin. Ayin is a Hebrew word. It means nothing or nothingness. A-Y-I-N.

So there's this movement of dissolution of self, being, world in the essence of God, which is nothingness—very much a transcendent dissolution there of the world, of appearances, and everything that goes with that.

Now, I'm going to make some parallels here with dharma teachings, classical Buddhist teachings, and right there, as I'll explain shortly, is a very classic teaching of the Buddha about cessation of consciousness

in what he would call the unfabricated. So that first of the twofold movement in the Hasidic teachings has really a clear parallel in Pali Canon Buddhism and the Buddha's teaching of the deathless and the unfabricated. I'll come back to that.

So this first movement of transcending and dissolving in the mystical nothingness, the pregnant mystical nothingness of the Godhead. But the second of the twofold movement is in a way a kind of opposite movement, a movement in the opposite direction. So this was regarded as a dissolution or transcending upwards into the Godhead of the being. And then secondly, a drawing down of the divine influx from God in order to spiritualize the material world. I think those words are from either Sanford Drob or Rachel Elior, who wrote about these teachings in the Hasidic tradition—to draw down the divine influx in order to spiritualize the material world.

In other words, there isn't just the dissolution in the transcendent mystical nothingness, just the sort of disappearance of form into the absolute, but there's the drawing down from God into the world and into, as I explained, actually the perception of the world, of the divine influx to spiritualize the material world. That's using a certain way of putting it.

But included in that second aspect of the twofold movement is the idea and the fantasy of our, if you like, completing God. So that our drawing down of the divine influx is part of what, if you like, completes God or actualizes God or, in a manner of speaking, creates God. So this is a very sophisticated philosophy, if you like, that's bold enough to admit that the human being creates God in a sense.

So there's quite a lot I want to pull apart here and elaborate on and fill out, but just to draw attention to one aspect, because what's possible then with such a framework—such a conceptual framework—is the view then of practice and imaginal practice and the whole journey of practice and of life as being for God rather than for the self.

So it's possible to approach and conceive of one's practice and imaginal practice and one's whole journey as being not for the self—the completion, the actualization of the self, the individuation of the self and all that—but for God. Again, quite a radical shift in view. In other words, we are drawing down this divine influx, if we use those words, for God's sake, for the completion, actualization, creation of God.

Now, I know for some of you, just the word God doesn't compute, or even one has an aversion to it. Is it possible to actually entertain such a radical view, hold it lightly, and as I said, still potently in this kind of middle way understanding? Can I hold such a view without believing in God—the existence or the non-existence of God?

So this whole area about the divine and God—the first thing most often people jump to is, does God exist or does God not exist? And they quibble and quarrel over such notions. But actually, is it possible either to just put aside such questions and inquiries of the existence or non-existence, and just enter into holding lightly this way of seeing and way of relating? Or actually to have more sophistication, more cunning, if

you like, philosophically, to see beyond such simplistic notions of existing and non-existing?

So can I have a potent sense of God, view of God, if I feel like I'm playing with this? I'm playing with it—it's light and I see it's—I'm not getting sucked into having to believe or not the existence of something, and I can—that can create a kind of platform where I can go even further and turn around the whole purpose of my practice, not for me but for God.

So I don't have to believe in existence or non-existence, and nor do I have to have a clear concept of what the divine is. Interesting that these kinds of views are entertainable without believing so rigidly in things like existence or non-existence—not a question of belief, or a question of having a clear concept of what divinity means and what God is. This is something I'm going to come back to later, but there's a possibility there of a radical shift in view.

So let's fill this out a little bit more. This ayin that we mentioned—this nothingness or nothing in Kabbalistic and Hasidic traditions—has its parallels, as I mentioned briefly, very clearly in what the Buddha talked about in the Pali Canon: the unfabricated (asankhata), the deathless, the unborn—something he usually put in negative terms, beyond anything that can be conceptualized, beyond any attributes and any qualities, something that was utterly transcendent, without qualities, without attributes.

I could give many examples from the Pali Canon where he speaks in that way. For example, from Udana 8.1: "There is that sphere where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind"—in other words, no materiality. "Neither sphere of infinite space, nor sphere of infinite consciousness, nor sphere of nothingness, nor sphere of neither perception nor non-perception." It's beyond even the more mystical realms of perception. "Neither this world nor the next world, neither sun nor moon. And there, I say, there is no coming and no going, no staying, no passing away, and no arising. It is without foundation, non-continuing, and objectless."

So he talks about practicing and developing skill in practice. The Buddha in the Pali Canon, as I would read it, speaks of eventually developing that skill in practice to a point where it culminates and one is actually able to enter into or open up to a cessation of perception—not just cessation of appearances and things, but cessation of perception of any kind of forming of anything: any subject, any object, any time, any space. No appearances whatsoever.

The Buddha talks about cessation of perception, the cessation of consciousness, the cessation of mind. And that doesn't mean just the cessation of thinking—it means the cessation of all subtle conceptualities of space, of time, of thing, of subject, of object. Even in the most subtle way: cessation of all appearances, as that description in the Udana and many other descriptions in the Pali Canon point to.

Sometimes he talks about cessation in very negative terms: not this, not that, this isn't there, that's not there. Occasionally he puts it in the positive—this unfabricated, this transcendent unfabricated, the

parallel of what we're calling ayin. Ayin, meaning "nothing" in Hebrew, is also a negation, a negative way of expressing this essence of the ultimate.

Sometimes the Buddha puts it in the positive. For example, he talks about "consciousness without attribute." There is a sense that there is some kind of consciousness there—consciousness without attribute, without object, without end, and luminous all around. "Here water, earth, fire and air have no footing. Here long and short, subtle and gross, pleasant and unpleasant, and nama-rupa"—which means all the factors of mind and conceiving and perception—"are all destroyed." It's a transcending and going beyond all those appearances and materiality and measurement and perception and appearance.

"With the cessation of the six sense consciousnesses of smelling, tasting, touching, seeing, hearing, and thinking—with the cessation of the sixth sense consciousness, here all is destroyed." All these other perceptions are destroyed, and it's just this consciousness without attributes.

Sometimes this unfabricated is given a positive description by the Buddha, as much as possible. Most often it's given this negative language—what in the Christian mystical tradition is called the via negativa: not this, not that, beyond, beyond, beyond, the unborn, the deathless.

And occasionally the Buddha says something quite striking. Neither putting it in the negative nor the positive, he simply says: "Where all phenomena are removed, all ways of speaking are removed as well." When all appearances fade—phenomena means "appearance," actually, from the Greek—where all phenomena are removed, all ways of speaking are removed as well. In other words, there's nothing that you can really say about this transcendent unfabricated, this deathless, this unborn. It's utterly beyond words and concepts in the usual sense, which tend to base themselves on subject, object, thing, perception, space, time. The whole fabric of conceptuality is based on that, and this is beyond all that—not just beyond thinking, but beyond perception, beyond consciousness in the usual sense.

We can know this. We can know this transcendent unfabricated through practice. It's a matter of practicing in the right way. It's a matter of knowing how to move deeper into this unfabricating—how can I practice in a certain way so that the mind does not just keep fabricating appearances, self and world, the world of things and the world of space and time?

Through emptiness practices, there is a deeper and deeper unfabricating of the world of appearances. One can develop that. It's just a matter of finding that thread, those threads, and following them, developing them in practice. And we can taste this unfabricated, we can open to it. A whole different sense of existence comes out of that—of life and death, of being. It is available to us if we practice in a way that leads in that direction.

But this transcendent, unfabricated, this deathless or unborn—as the Buddha called it—has parallels in all the great mystical traditions that point to this same dimension. In Neoplatonism, they speak of "the One" in very similar terms: beyond attribute, beyond space, beyond time, transcendent. The parallels are

striking.

Plotinus, the father of Neoplatonism, articulated this with remarkable precision. Neoplatonism was probably one of the most influential mystical philosophies that ever existed. It grew out of the classical Greek era and pervaded Western thought in countless ways, shaping so much of Western mystical practice, religious thinking, and entire domains of Western sensibility. Plotinus declared: "Even being cannot be there." Even being cannot exist in this unfabricated, transcendent One. It is beyond being and non-being.

This teaching echoes powerfully in the Pali Canon, where Sariputta explains to another monk that this cessation of consciousness, this total unfabricating of perception, transcends all categories. You cannot say there is something there. You cannot say there is nothing there. You cannot say there is both something and nothing there. You cannot say there is neither something nor nothing there. Plotinus points to something beyond even the most basic, subtle, non-verbal conceptuality of existence and being.

In Gnostic teaching—another stream within the Western spiritual tradition—we find similar expressions regarding this transcendent aspect of the divine: "Nor is he something that exists that one could know. But he is something else that is better, whom one cannot know. He has non-being existence." Notice how language struggles here to articulate what can be tasted and known through practice, yet cannot be conveyed through conventional perception bounded by space, time, and the usual framework of subject and object. It is not even oneness—not a sense of everything being one—but something beyond that.

The fourteenth-century Jewish Kabbalist David Ben Abraham Halavaan expressed this beautifully: "This nothingness, this 'I am,' is more existent than all the being in the world." This statement parallels very strongly how I read the Buddha's teaching of the unfabricated and the deathless.

When we learn to practice in this way, we begin by undoing grosser fabrication. Take papañca, for instance—this proliferative, ego-driven mental elaboration that creates so much suffering. Through mindfulness and skillful practice, we learn to untie this knot. We realize: "Oh, that whole perception I was experiencing in that state of mind—that's fabrication." This recognition of gross-level fabrication becomes obvious in hindsight. We see how constructed and fabricated our entire way of perceiving ourselves, others, and situations really was, and we learn how to undo it.

But this is just the beginning. Following this thread deeper through practice, we ask: Can I unfabricate further? Can there be even less fabrication? What else is fabricated in this world of appearances? We learn how the world of appearances—self, other, and world—are fabricated, and how to unfabricate them by removing different kinds of clinging and developing skill in this process.

Eventually, layer by layer, we see: this is fabricated, and that's fabricated too—even what seemed so basic and real. Even more fundamental levels reveal themselves as fabricated. Through this understanding, we can go all the way to the unfabricated. Not to live there permanently, because that's impossible—it's a

realm of non-manifestation, non-appearance—but by moving in that direction in practice, we understand that all appearances are fabricated: space as perception, time, self, other, world, solidity—all fabrication.

Reaching toward the unfabricated, we understand the relative reality of everything else. We can speak meaningfully of what is less fabricated versus more fabricated, what is more real versus less real. This is why David Ben Abraham's words ring true: this nothingness, this unfabricated, "is more existent than all the being in the world." It is more real because it is unfabricated.

These parallels appear clearly throughout the great mystical traditions—this first aspect of the twofold movement I'm presenting. In Hasidism, it's the transcending, the dissolution in the Godhead. In Christian mysticism, it's the essence of the Godhead in mystical nothingness. All point toward this same transcendent, unfabricated dimension.

What about the second aspect, this drawing down of the divine influx and this idea or fantasy of completing and creating God? Here, we may need to look to Vajrayana Buddhism for a more fully fleshed out understanding, where the ultimate is not regarded as purely transcendent, unfabricated, without appearances, qualities, or attributes.

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the ultimate—while people use different vocabularies—is Buddha nature in some schools. This Buddha nature is replete with qualities, full of beautiful qualities, not devoid of manifestation, appearance, or expression. This Vajrayana ultimate is a primordial wisdom awareness that is empty, yet ultimate because it represents how a Buddha sees—the wisdom awareness of a Buddha that is primordial and cosmic in nature.

We possess this Buddha nature within us, or it forms part of the deep fabric of our being, though it may be covered over. It too is understood to be empty, yet impossible to completely comprehend or fit into neat concepts. We can say it is a kind of awareness—a seeing and knowing that perceives everything as empty, but not merely empty. It also sees all things as divine.

This awareness sees all things, including oneself, others, objects, the world, and the cosmos as divine, as deities. Yet this awareness is not separate from what is seen. It encompasses both the subjective aspect—the awareness itself—and the objects that are seen, the divinities that are manifested. It is both the seeing and the seen: the seeing of everything and everyone, including oneself, as empty divinity, and the objects being seen. The awareness remains inseparable from the divinities and objects seen and manifested.

Tantric practice is regarded as a skillful mimicry of this Buddha mind, this primordial wisdom awareness. It involves entering into or supporting, for a period of time, that view which sees everything as empty divinity—where both the awareness and what is seen, the world and beings, are perceived as empty and divine.

The second Dalai Lama, in his mystical verses, describes the experience of the practitioner: "The world is

seen as the mystical mandala and all living beings as tantric deities. Everything that one eats and drinks becomes transformed into blissful ambrosia. All of one's activities become spiritual, regardless of how they conventionally appear. And every sound that one makes becomes part of a great Vajrasana."

This tantric practice rests entirely on an understanding of emptiness. This wisdom awareness is empty. Everything perceived—all material objects, space, and time—are understood to be empty. The deities perceived in practice are also regarded as empty emanations of this primordial wisdom awareness, which is itself emptiness. The whole framework depends on understanding emptiness, not a concretized or reified view.

Often people discuss tantra or believe they're practicing it without having developed the view of emptiness sufficiently. True practice involves emptiness meditation—developing skill with emptiness meditation deeper, wider, and more fully. The understanding arising from emptiness meditations and the developing skills allow tantric practice to unfold more completely, enabling the ways of looking that constitute tantric practice to be explored and experienced as palpable perceptions.

Through understanding emptiness and developing skill in emptiness practice, the world of perception—self, other, and things—becomes much more malleable. Understanding it as empty, not independent of our way of looking, allows us to play with perspective. The world of self, other, and appearances becomes malleable and can be seen as divine, as those beautiful verses from the second Dalai Lama describe.

For most people, the more skill and understanding of the thorough emptiness of everything one develops, the more perception becomes flexible. It becomes a natural outflow of that understanding to see the world—things, self, other, bodies, and cosmos—as divine.

This too has parallels in Western mystical traditions. The Dov Ber, the Maggid of Meserach, a great Jewish mystic of the eighteenth century, said: "First, each thing must arrive at the level of ayin, the level of mystical nothingness, this unfabricated transcendent. Only then can it become something else."

In other words, when I see its emptiness, its equivalence with nothingness, its non-separation from the unfabricated, then it can become something else. Knowing its emptiness, perception becomes malleable, and it can become divine in perception.

One of his disciples said: "When one attains the level of gazing at ayin, gazing at this mystical, unfabricated nothing, the essence of the Godhead, one's citta is annihilated." The translation I have speaks of intellect being annihilated, but let's use the word citta. In that moment of seeing the unfabricated, of knowing it and dissolving in it...

The mind is annihilated, he says—the intellect, the mind, the citta is annihilated. But that doesn't mean just a quietening of thinking. It means, as I said before, the whole of conventional cognition. Any perception, any appearance, any typical consciousness—even beyond all the jhānas, all the eight

jhānas—all that's annihilated. All the subtle conceptuality, non-verbal, non-thinking, all the conceptuality that goes on as part of what fabricates perception and appearance, all of that is quietened.

Buddhist practice, through the skill in unfabricating, is a bit like that game Kerplunk, or I've forgotten the other names of it, where you have those sticks or a house of cards. Instead of pulling out one card and hoping that the house of cards remains, you're actually pulling out this and that stick or card, and then at some point the whole thing collapses, the whole edifice of appearances collapses, and there is a transcending of the whole world of appearances.

So the Magi's disciple: when one attains the level of gazing at Ayin, one's citta is annihilated. One's whole cognition and perception and conceptuality, even the subtle, is annihilated. Afterwards, when one returns to the citta, to the whole realm of perception, of conception, mind, and the perception that comes out of subtle conceptuality, afterwards, when one returns to the citta, it is filled with divine emanation.

So again, this mirrors what should be the platform and the support of tantric practice—that there's this deep understanding of fabrication and emptiness, and one, if you like, plunges into that emptying. And then on emerging, the mind is flooded, if you like, with this knowing of the emptiness of all things. There's a malleability, and it's possible to see everything as divine. Actually, that will be the natural outflow of that.

So this, again, in Buddhist practice—this developing skill in unfabricating and understanding the implications—it's not just about the experience of this unfabricated, it's about understanding what that implies about the fabrication of appearances, or in other Buddhist language, the dependent arising of appearances, understanding that they're empty. And that opens up a door, if you like, or a realm of the malleability of perception, of appearance, the possibility of a range of appearances, and the ability for a sense of the divine to be part of perception in all kinds of ways.

In the more theistic framework of the Abrahamic religions, God is regarded as infinite. And so because God is infinite, his aspects are infinite—they're inexhaustible. So not just transcendent—actually the aspects, the manifestations, the expressions, the faces of God are infinite, inexhaustible. But all this, when we frame it this way, all this has to do with perception. Perception, perception. Everything hinges on perception.

As I've said several times on this retreat, one possibility is actually relating to the whole teaching of the Four Noble Truths and this teaching of clinging as a key element to unlock, if you like, the secrets and the doors of perception and appearance, and recognize emptiness, and then see what's now possible. Now that I know that everything is empty, or to the degree that I see that everything is empty, what does it free up in terms of perception?

And of course, practically speaking, the advantage of putting all this—whether it's tantric practice or imaginal practice or these practices from the Jewish mystical tradition or the Islamic tradition,

whatever—the advantage of framing it in terms of emptiness, or seeing image as image, whatever language one uses, is that one can play with perception this way, play with this perception of divinity. And even the divinity coming through one, through one's personhood—not just that one's fabric is the same stuff as everyone else's fabric and everything else's fabric in the great oneness of things, not just that kind of divinity. I'll say more about this tomorrow, hopefully.

But the ability to perceive that divinity, knowing it's all empty, knowing self and other and all things are empty, and this appearance too, this divinity too, is empty—it's understood. And that way there's much less danger of what Jung would call inflation, or the ego getting grandiose ideas, puffing itself up and all that.

To return to the Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalistic tradition, particularly the Lurianic Kabbalah of Isaac Luria and what came out of that—they have this beautiful concept, Tikkun HaOlam, which translates to something like healing of the world. And the movement, the encouragement, the injunction as part of practice to heal the world—what does that mean? Dana and loving-kindness and all that, of course, part of that. What does it mean, the healing of the world, the healing of our planet, the care for the other species, the care for the fate of this world? But even wider than that, what does it mean to heal the world, heal the cosmos? It's a beautiful, rich, deep, fertile concept that's there in the Lurianic Kabbalah and elsewhere in Jewish mysticism.

But this movement of Tikkun HaOlam, of healing the world, is actually regarded in the Lurianic Kabbalah as part of God. It's an aspect of God. It's a human movement, but it's part of God. It's part of the Ein Sof, which means literally "without end"—the endless, the infinite. So the Tikkun HaOlam, the human healing of the world, is part of God, of the infinity of God.

And as I mentioned in another talk, part of this Tikkun HaOlam, part of the healing of the world, happens through, in the Jewish mystical tradition, particularly the Lurianic Kabbalah and others, through the interpretation of, in that case, the holy texts of the Bible and the Zohar and other holy texts. In other words, the healing, the Tikkun HaOlam, which is part of God, happens through the interpretation of what is holy, but also the interpretation of the world, the reading, if you like, of the text of the world, if we use postmodern language. And that human interpretation is part of this movement of God. Why? Because God and the soul and the human are not separate.

In the same way that Buddha-nature as that empty primordial wisdom awareness is not separate from us—it's, so to speak, in us, part of the fabric of our being. We are not separate from our Buddha-nature. So that when we interpret—if you interpret a sacred text that way, we interpret, so to speak, the world that way—that's actually God. It's part of the movement of God, so to speak seeing through your eyes.

But more than seeing through your eyes, shaping perception. Seeing in a certain way. Not just seeing in general—we could say that—but seeing in certain ways through one's eyes. Seeing this or that, that way or this way. Seeing imaginally.

For Corbin, he conceived of the faculty of the imagination. The imaginal is not just a human faculty, but actually in some ways continuous with, if you like, God's imagination, God's creativity. So images in the sense that we've been using that word—images are regarded as influxes, as part of the divine influx. They're not just me and my imagination. There's something divine, as I said, they have their roots in some way in the divine, or they mirror or echo divinity.

And so this word interpretation, we really stretch it to mean, to stretch it to become perception. As I say, everything hinges on perception.

So this drawing down of the divine happens—that I mentioned is the second aspect of this Hasidic teaching of the twofold movement. One is the transcendence and the other is the drawing down of the divine in order to spiritualize the material world. That happens certainly through acts and through what we do in the world—the generosity and the kindness and what we manifest—but it also happens through interpretation, in other words, through perception.

How do I perceive this world? My perceiving of it in this way or that way, my perceiving of this as holy, my seeing this person as a theophany, as a face of God or an angel. My seeing of the world and the sacredness of it and its non-separateness from God and its particular manifestation as a particular aspect of God. So not losing the particular there. These ways of perceiving are part of the divine drawing down, drawing down of the divine.

And that includes the imagination, as Corbin was saying. The fantasies and the images, when they're alive for us in this soulful way, is also this—we could see it as a drawing down of the divine, as part of it, through the imagination.

So this range of perception is part of this drawing down of the divine, because in this other language God is infinite and the aspects of God are infinite and inexhaustible. The range of perception can open up infinitely—our perception—and that's part of the expanding of God. So this tikkun olam, healing of the world, is also, in a way, the completion of God, the filling out of God, the actualization of God through our acts, and more importantly, through our perceptions and through the marrying—or, what word would I say there—like the flowing together, the imbuing of the perception with the imagination. The imagination coming into like water, mixing with water. Imagination and perception.

And this opening out is part of the divine drawing down. It's part of the healing, the completion, the actualization of God. Do you understand? We could say the healing of the world—tikkun olam—is actually the healing of God, if we use that language.

But again, I want to put this in this more radical view. There's a lot of pieces to this. I appreciate that. It might be difficult to follow all the threads and how they fit together. But coming back to something I said earlier, when I see things this way, then the whole practice with images and imaginal practice and my whole practice, my whole life even, can be seen as for God. It's for the sake of God, not for the sake of

myself. Because this expansion of the perception is part of the drawing down of the divine. And it's also part of the tantric seeing. So it's for the sake of this, if you like, the primordial wisdom or the tantric deities, the deities that are perceived in that way, the divinities.

There's something, as I said, radical in the shift. I'm seeing all this, I'm conceiving of it, I'm sensing it as for God's sake, not for the sake of self, my journey, etc.

And when one begins to open to this kind of way of conceiving, if it attracts one, if one is attracted by it, one also then begins to realize that with regard to the demand of imaginal figures or the sense of the demands they make on us, we could say that God or the gods or however we're going to put it, they're always going to be bigger than me because they're infinite and they're bigger than my life's possibilities. So there's a kind of infinitude here.

Again, I talked in other talks and other retreats about this pothos, this aspect of eros, this kind of infinite longing. There's always more. There's always something on the horizon or beyond the horizon that one is moving towards. So this way of conceiving in relation to imaginal figures also incorporates that or opens to that sense. So I might feel this or that demand from images and I realize I cannot possibly manifest all this in my life. There's too many.

God is always bigger than my life and its possibilities. The gods are always bigger because they are infinite, and that is good. For in a way, what it also means is that there is no end to soulmaking. There is no end to this eros and psyche opening each other and deepening each other.

So the imaginal sense expands, the sense of the divine expands, and there is more love and more. And that love, that eros, expands the psyche further and the logos with it. And that process doesn't end—this expansion and penetrating deeper, this opening and growth, this insemination, this fertilization of eros, psyche, and logos. There is no end to that, no end to soulmaking.

So if with an imaginal figure, or an angel, or daemon, or however we're going to talk about it, or with the sense of God or gods—whatever words we use—we're entertaining this sense of telos, this sense of the God or the angel or the daemon drawing me toward something, there, as Corbin talks about, is the angel out ahead. But it's open-ended. That angel is always out ahead. I never really, if you like, merge with it or finish it. It is always out ahead.

I remember when I was very young and learning to swim in the sea in Italy, and my father would stand—I don't know, five yards away—and face me and say, "Come, swim toward me." And I would start paddling as best I could. And I was sure he was moving backwards, imperceptibly stepping backwards to get me to keep swimming. And I would protest that: "You're moving backwards!" He said, "No, no, no, I'm not." I think he was. But that's the angel out ahead. It's not a static figure that we at some point reach. There's this open-endedness to the telos. There's a direction. There's a drawing toward, a beckoning toward, a glimpse of something we're moving toward. The telos—this end, this Greek word for end or goal—is open-ended.

The soulmaking never ends because the psyche, the image, keeps expanding, getting deeper, getting richer, getting broader. And the eros, the movement toward that, grows with that.

This telos is part of where we're headed, or the sense of goal, of end there. It's part of the meaningfulness in all this. Part of the meaningfulness. Nietzsche, I think it's in *Twilight of the Idols*, says or writes at one point: "If we possess our *why* in life, we can put up with almost any *how*." No matter how difficult or challenging something is for us in our lives—whatever it is, in any realm of being—if we have a why, if we possess our why in life, as he says... if our why is serving something greater, if our why, in Corbin's words, is the individuation of the angel, if this path and this practice and my life is for God and not myself, then that's a big why. It's a big part of the telos and the meaningfulness. And then all kinds of things are possible. We can put up with almost any how, he says, Nietzsche.

To come back to what I threw out earlier: What does healing mean then? When we open up the framework this way—and I realize, I hope this makes sense, I realize it's quite perhaps difficult to understand, especially if you're new to all this and talking about emptiness and things—but what then, if we open up this kind of conceptual framework as a loose conceptual framework, not a belief, not a rigidity, but a loose conceptual framework to be entertained... what then does healing mean?

Who's getting healed here? Is it me? Is it the angel? Is it the soul? Is it God? Is it the healing of perception and cosmology? Healing them from being conceived of as individual and inflexible. Healing them by allowing a flexibility into perception, an opening of perception, a flexibility into cosmology, an opening of that. Rather than this rigid narrowness of "this is true." This what I perceive is true. This one, not that one. Not anything else.

Who is getting healed here? What does healing mean? Me, the angel, soul, God, perception, cosmology—all of those? Are they even separate?

Are they even separate?

Just to finish, we can feel, in relation to demands and the demands that we sometimes sense or feel from an imaginal figure—from an angel or daemon—we can feel a kind of individual demand particular to that daemon. It's quite unique. But in a way, coming out of all this, we could also highlight or draw attention to three more general demands that emerge from imaginal practice. They're connected, they're not really separate, but let's just highlight them.

One is actually the demand to open the psyche to the imaginal realm, to open consciousness to that realm—the realm of the imaginal—and to value it. The more we practice with images, the more we sense that there's that kind of demand to open consciousness to that realm and to value it. Wrapped up in that is a demand to open up consciousness and our sense of value beyond a sort of narrow singularity of view, of conceptual framework, of logos.

Through practicing with the imaginal in the ways we've been discussing, there's a kind of invitation to

move beyond any view—but especially the dominant cultural view nowadays, which is a sort of simplistic materialism, a flattening of everything. Everything is just matter. Consciousness emerges as an epiphenomenon of matter. Leave matter alone long enough, and it will eventually form primeval swamp soups, and out of that life will come, and out of that life consciousness will come. There's nothing but materialism—there's nothing but matter. Everything can be reduced to the movements of matter in space and time. That's what neuroscience attempts to do—explaining everything about our human existence through the assumption that everything can be explained in purely neurological terms, neuroscientific terms, as just the movement of matter. We can just find the right neural networks, discover what gets fired, and that will explain everything. Everything can be reduced to that, and through that to just matter.

I'll say more about this tomorrow. It's very potent as a view, and wonderful things have come out of that. But first, it's limited and limiting. Second, for now, it's a singularity of view. And it's that singularity of view that's problematic—the singularity of conceptual framework. Something problematic there.

So again, drawing on the Kabbalistic tradition where many streams—not all, but many—point to the infinitely interpretable nature of teachings and sacred texts. They don't mean one thing. They're infinitely interpretable, as we've said a few times. But also the world and everything in the world is infinitely interpretable. There's a stretching rather than just a singularity of conceptual framework and perception—an opening to different possibilities of conceptual frameworks, not regarding any of them as simply the truth. With that comes the opening of perception, the range of perception, the malleability of perception, the availability of different ways of perceiving.

Zen teacher Joan Halifax wrote a book on shamanism many years ago. I'm quoting Robert Avens now, writing about Joan Halifax's work. In shamanistic rituals, the neophyte—the novice—becomes a soft man being, a kind of androgyne, neither male nor female, whose essential mission is to be an intermediary between the cosmological planes of earth and sky. Can you see how that parallels what we're talking about? This essential mission to be an intermediary between cosmological planes involves the shaman in the constant practice of transformation, as if moving from one point of view to another provides the experimental ground of understanding, of wisdom, of true perspective.

That's what I want to highlight—this moving from one point of view to another, from one way of looking, from one conceptual framework, one perception. Moving from one point of view to another provides the experimental, the practical ground of understanding, of wisdom, of true perspective. That's part of the demand, the general invitation of imaginal practice.

A second demand, very related and not separate from the first, is the invitation to open to the multiplicity of images and mythoi and fantasy—rather than being locked into one. How easily, as human beings, without even realizing it, we buy into one fantasy or one image or one myth without seeing that we don't have to be locked into it. Being locked into it and taking it literally creates all kinds of problems. There's no freedom there.

In classical mythology, Orpheus was torn to pieces by the Maenads—wild disciples of Dionysus—for his sole worship of Apollo. Because he worshipped just one god, one archetype, one image, they tore him to pieces. You can see the fragmentation there, the tearing apart.

Jung was fond of saying that gods have become diseases. When we don't open to the range and multiplicity of gods or archetypes or myths or fantasies or images—whether in terms of the self or awakening or anything else—that limits us. Particularly regarding the self, the gods we have neglected, the archetypes we have neglected to honor, to recognize, to give place to, will manifest as some kind of psychological disease, or sometimes organic disease. Maybe it's not just individuals—maybe traditions can also suffer from this shrinking of archetypal range within them, this shrinking of the sense of what is divine, and how that limits and causes problems.

So the opening to multiplicity of image—that's also one of the general demands or invitations of imaginal practice.

Thirdly, again connected, and I have mentioned this before, is the invitation or encouragement that comes out of imaginal practice to begin to realize, to recognize, to acknowledge that image, fantasy, mythos saturate life already. Our life is saturated by image, fantasy, mythos. Wherever there's love, wherever there's meaningfulness, wherever there's that richness and sense of soulfulness—there, there is image, fantasy, mythos. It saturates life.

We could go further and say that not realizing this is a kind of ignorance. If I don't realize the presence already of image, fantasy, and mythos in my life, there's a kind of ignorance there.

When I begin to realize this—that image, fantasy, and mythos are already woven into how I see the Dharma itself, how I relate to awakening—then my entire conception of ignorance must expand. Since awakening means the end of ignorance, this understanding needs to broaden to encompass this recognition: that image, fantasy, and mythos saturate everything, including my ideas of Dharma, of myself, of awakening itself.

I've explored this elsewhere and won't elaborate extensively now, but this realization offers us—or perhaps imposes upon us—a fundamentally different ground for our being. We discover that we are, in essence, grounded in imagination, grounded in mythos. When we truly realize or feel this, our entire life rests upon different foundations. The Dharma itself rests upon different foundations when we come to this recognition.

These, then, are some of the broader demands or invitations that emerge through imaginal practice—not merely techniques or methods, but fundamental shifts in how we understand the very nature of our existence and spiritual path.

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