A Sacred Universe: Insight, Theophany, Cosmopoiesis (Part 5)

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So re-emphasizing a few general points we've already mentioned, but taking them in a slightly different direction regarding conceptions of divinity in relation to the imaginary in particular.

One of the things I pointed out about concepts and conceiving is that it's always going on. By concepts, I don't just mean big conceptual structures and philosophies that need articulating and words. I also don't equate the word conceiving with thinking. By conceiving, I mean the whole spectrum, all the way from big, complicated conceptual structures like some of what we've been talking about, to include thinking, to include just the subtlest conceiving that's woven in with perception.

The idea sometimes of bare attention or non-conceptual awareness and this kind of thing is often quite uninvestigated. Those concepts are very attractive and sound very simple, but they betray a lack of fully exploring the nature of perception and of fabrication. Wherever there is perception—remember I'm using the word perception synonymously with experience and appearance—means whenever there's any experience at all, any appearances at all, there is subtle conceiving woven in with that. I don't mean we're walking around thinking or labelling everything all the time. It doesn't need to be verbal. But it's wrapped up in perception itself. Conception, perception, conceiving, perceiving are wrapped up together inseparably. No conceiving, no perceiving. And any perceiving involves some conceiving.

Another point I want to emphasize now has to do with vagueness of concepts. We might use words like sacred or not sacred or profane. Such words involve conceiving, of course they do. And usually they involve conceiving in a vague way. Or if it's not vague, it's at some level contradictory or circular or rests on assumptions.

So we might say a conception of sacred or divine. What does that actually mean? Even having gone through all this for hours now, it's like, well, still, what does it mean? It's hard, as I said, without being circular, to be really clear and defined and arrive at some kind of final, polished, demarcated definition or conception. The conception of divinity is vague to a certain extent, has a degree of nebulousness to it.

But here's what's important—so does the conception of matter. If I say to you the word matter or materiality, what does that mean? Just as one might ask hearing the word divine or God or gods, "What does it mean?", we can turn around and ask the same question about matter. We touched on this before. Through modern physics, what do you mean by an electron? What is it? What do we mean when we use that? And if I'm talking about experience, what do I mean? Solidity? A sense of solidity? What exactly do I

mean? A perception? When we go into what does matter mean, what is matter, just as we might go into this question of divine, it ends up being really quite a vague concept. Mathematical equations, in the most abstract mathematical equations, might describe behavior of some matter under certain conditions when it's looked at in a certain way—actually describe probabilities of behavior.

Basically, we take for granted that our concept of matter, or we know what matter is, but actually, if we go into that, we see that it's really quite vague. We do have, of course, an experience of matter, even though if we poke our concept of matter, we quickly realize it's actually quite vague and not very deep at all, unless you've really studied a lot of physics or philosophy. But just as we have an experience of matter, undeniably, that we're familiar with, we can have experience of the divine, and the concept remains vague.

Implicit in all this is something I've said before. As well as involving conceiving concepts, divine or sacred or not sacred or matter—these are all perceptions. And this is the important thing. What we're talking about when we say sacred is a perception, or rather a sensibility, a way of looking. As such, the way of looking can be trained, developed, refined, enlarged, deepened, intensified, empowered. This actually is what should occupy us—this training of perception. And regarding conceiving, we want enough maneuverability and flexibility with the conceiving, and enough conceptions and conceptual structures to sanction a sacred cosmic oasis, a seeing of sacredness in the world.

So regarding perception, this is the important thing—the training of perception. We need enough conception to allow that to grow and to support it.

And we need to train the perceiving, the sensibility. That training of perceiving is what I would say, in a nutshell, meditative training is. Meditation is a training of the flexibility of perception.

In the training of perception there is an opening of the range. We've talked about that so much on this retreat, emphasizing that this is what we're wanting to do—open the range for the sake of soulfulness, for the sake of the beauty of that discovery, for the sake of freedom, for the sake of investigation. The conceptual frameworks need to support that opening of the range. And the opening of the range of experience and perception feeds back into the conceptual framework.

The range, by definition, is multiple. We can have so many different experiences of the divine, especially when we're talking about the imaginal divine. There is not one correct perception of God, so to speak, which we might tend to think. What's the right way that God is? What's the real way that God is? We can talk about one authentic experience, if that's even the right word, of the unfabricated, of the Godhead—the deitas absconditus, the hidden Godhead. But not of the faces, the expressions, the aspects of God, the dimensions of God, because in a way they're infinite. And it's about experience here, and there are infinite possibilities.

Sometimes in spiritual circles it's very easy for people to latch onto and cling to and chase one kind of

experience: "Oh, that's it, that's it!" Or the teacher says, "There, that's it, you had it!" Or a person is aiming for or has a sense that there's one kind of ultimate experience of the divine: "I tasted it and now I've lost it."

Yes, perhaps there is singularity when we talk about the unfabricated, but not when we open it up into the realm of the imaginal and the fabricated.

Again, to quote the Kotzker Rebbe, but perhaps taking another spin on it: he said, "Where is God to be found?" And he answers, "In the place where he is given entry." You could read that as "Well, he's everywhere," but we don't see divinity everywhere. But it's also saying something about this infinite possibility of the expansion of the range of perception, of experience into all the different faces of the divine and sacredness, the sacred cosmic oasis.

We're talking here about emptiness, divine—again, imaginal divine. And the recognition that we're talking about perception; we're never talking about anything other than perception. Everything hinges on perception and the fabrication of perception, understanding that and training the flexibility, training the sensibilities, the range, opening the range. The conceptual frameworks support that. There's this reciprocal feeling, as we've emphasized many times.

The second thing I want to elaborate on is this: it's very possible for a conception of the divine, or an image of the divine, to have deeply powerful effect on the being, even when we don't believe—as I said—that this is real or true, and we concretize it and literalize it as a belief.

I remember decades ago, I think I was in my late twenties, living in the States. Quite unexpectedly—because I had not grown up at all in a Christian household or education—despite living in a culture where Christianity was present, though on the wane, in England, I'd never really understood the whole thing about Jesus and the cross and Christ. I was kind of sheltered from that in my upbringing.

Then quite unexpectedly, in my early twenties, I fell in love with Jesus. Very unexpectedly and very beautifully—the whole opening of the heart and the soul in devotion, touched so deeply. I began to enter into that and to explore it. I would go, sometimes more than once a week, to different churches in Boston where I was living. I would usually just visit these different churches, sit and stand at the back during the services, and I would be so moved—moved to tears, standing in the back.

Sometimes it was the old parson or priest, depending on the kind of church. Maybe some of these churches were really on the wane—three people there, all in their eighties or nineties. And I would stand at the back and just be sobbing, so moved by the hymns and by the mythos of Jesus and of Christ, the parables and stories and healing stories.

Talking to people and getting a little involved in that world in different ways, they would say, "Why don't you get baptized?" But I never felt I could, because actually I could not credo—non-credo. I could not say, "I believe this." And it was a barrier.

There was something operating through the mythos, but it was not about belief. And yet it was extremely powerful, deeply powerful—this sense that emerged, the mythos of the divine, of God, in this case through particular Christian mythos and Christ, deeply powerful and important without any clear theology. The belief wasn't there as a sort of literalized, concretized grasp of "I believe this to be true and real." The theology, the conceptual frame, was not clear, was vague. The mythos was alive, though, and this is important.

Somewhere along the line, books came out following scholars' research. The scholars of Christianity formulated this document called Q. Some of you will know this—Q, which they said, "Based on our scholastic and historical research, we can definitively say these statements Jesus actually said." Then there was a group of statements where it was probable or possible that he said them, and then statements where he definitely didn't say them.

Following this publishing of Q, there were several books. One that moved me a lot was Stephen Mitchell's book, I think called The Gospel According to Jesus, among others. But I also felt, personally, that there was this attempt to portray a historical Jesus—that this guy really lived. And oftentimes with a lot of the books that came out, there was something saying, "Basically, this guy actually lived, and he was another kind of radical, free, liberated being. In fact, he was a lot like Lao Tzu and a lot like various others—all these guys were kind of similar. And he lived with a great open heart."

I'm being a little flippant because it actually did move me.

But something in that way of casting the figure and the story of Jesus fell short for me somehow, in a soul sense. It was not that interesting or powerful for the soul. In other words, he's a liberated human being. He's a guy who's realized something and is then living from that realization, so he's not a god or the son of God. That kind of story presents him as like any other liberated human being, and in fact suggests that all liberated human beings are pretty similar.

That narrative, attractive as it was, fell short for me as a soul story. It was not that interesting and powerful, as I said. And note as well that it's presented as literal and concrete, or at least probable historical fact—this story itself of Jesus as purely human, a kind of liberated guy with a big heart, like a lot of other liberated people with big hearts, is not portrayed as imaginal. It's not conceived or admitted as imaginal.

So there was that kind of angle or fantasy floating around, not admitting itself as imaginal, sort of portraying itself as humanist, in a certain sense. And on the other hand, I was exposed to this dogmatic kind of Christology that originated, I think, with St. Paul. Pauline theology is this structure of the Son of God and the Trinity, and in its overwhelmingness and its complexity and its arcane structures, it was attractive to me in that it offers itself to the imagination. That kind of structure, that kind of verticality of dimensions, and the rich, complex, multilevel and textured movement of eros-psyche-logos can enter into that and relate to it and enrich it.

At the same time, that dogmatic Christian theology was unattractive to me, especially if I felt I needed to sign up to believing it and say a credo. But again, with that theology, it's presented—just as the humanist version is presented—as fact, as truth. This is a credo that this is true, this Trinity and all the rest of it, and not as imaginal.

Something was operating in me, very powerfully. I couldn't, or did not want to go to one side or the other really. And I could not articulate something back then that I can articulate now. Years later, what I realized—perhaps intuitively then, but could not articulate or realize fully consciously—is this: the Jesus that matters to the soul is not so much the Jesus of matter—the flesh and blood, so-called historical Jesus—but the imaginal Jesus or the imaginal Christ.

The Jesus that matters is not so much the Jesus of matter, the historical flesh and blood Jesus, but the imaginal Jesus, the imaginal Christ. Perhaps something in me realized that, but not quite fully consciously. So I just dwelt in this in-between world, and it was lovely and beautiful. But again, to say: we are interested in the imaginal divine. That's what we're talking about—the imaginal divine.

One last thing on this point, then we'll stop. I'll give you an example that also has to do with vagueness. I was sitting in meditation a little while ago, tuning into the felt center, the whole energy body, as we've been emphasizing on this retreat. There was a little bit of samādhi around, and then suddenly I heard quietly in the inner ear, so to speak, the word tzedakah.

Tzedakah is a word I knew from my childhood. It's a Hebrew word for charity—I think it means charity, or perhaps it can mean giving. Perhaps it's equivalent to the word dāna. But I heard that word tzedakah, just that word arising. And then, with that word, or sparked by that word, came the subtle image, sense, and idea—all wrapped into one—of my being. The sense of my being was completely wrapped up with the sense of the energy body at that time: the subtle image, sense, idea of my being as a gift from God.

That word, and then my immediate knowing of its translation, sparked a certain image-sense, a certain conception in the being. Very, very beautiful. Totally wrapped up with the energy body. My being as a gift from God. And then correspondingly came a sense of giving my being to God as a reciprocal gift. So there's receiving the gift of being and giving my being to God as a reciprocal gift. Very, very beautiful and very subtle. I lost it several times and then found it again.

Actually later, in a meditation the same day—I was on retreat at the time—this sense arose again but attached itself to a person. There's again the sense of the image spreading, but interestingly spreading from a more general sense of divinity to divinity through a person. Usually it's the other way around: we see a person in a certain theophanic way, and that begins to spread to the surroundings, the cosmophosis.

But just to say a few little things about that subtle imaginal sense or opening. I'm mentioning it because I want to draw out just a few points—some of them I mentioned before when we were giving instructions—and to highlight that this image didn't seem to involve any inner physical sense. Rather, it

was just a sense in the other meaning of the word: an intuitive way of knowing. It was simply a sense of being as a gift from God and of giving one's being through God to God.

So it wasn't really a kinesthetic sense, though it involved the energy body. It certainly wasn't a particularly visual sense, although it did involve an awareness of the nature around me. And was it auditory? No, it wasn't an auditory sense. The word "sadaka" that I heard inwardly was more a trigger, something that ignited. Hearing that word spontaneously functioned as what we call a poetic spark.

Now, we've touched on this before, but just to spell it out in terms of instructions: when a spontaneous word arises in the mind during usual mindfulness meditation, I would simply recognize it, perhaps note it, then let go and return to the breath or whatever else. But here, in this practice—this kind of imaginal practice, or practicing of opening to at least the orientation, the potential of cosmopoiesis—some things that enter the mind can be taken up and function as keys. Keys that open the being and the perception and the conception in certain ways, that we can then tune to the mystical perception, the image, the mythos, the cosmopoiesis that emerges from that.

So it wasn't, as I said, particularly in any physical sense, nor was it only affective—only a heart thing. The heart was involved; there was a beautiful, subtle emotionality in the heart, but that wasn't the primary aspect either.

More important for our purposes right now is that as this sense opened, the sense of the divine was not located spatially, nor was it specifically defined. Again, we're really emphasizing this vagueness. What is this God or divinity that was so central and integral to this image, this sense, this conception? It was vague. There was not a worked-out, clear, demarcated philosophy or conception of God or divinity. Rather, it was open, amorphous, ambiguous.

Similarly, in practice, when I might use the word "angel," sense another as an angelic presence, or see them as angel—when they appear to me as theophany, as angel—what does that mean? What does this word "angel" mean? What exactly do I mean? What is an angel? We've been through all this elaborate conceptual structure, but still, I don't know. I can be affected beautifully and open in perception and conceiving by all that, but it remains an undefined meaning—not less powerful for being undefined or not clearly defined.

Perhaps it's characteristic of our personalities, maybe our time in history, I don't know, but we can tend to elevate specific, clear, or apparently clear, demarcated knowing of something that's defined, or at least definable. We tend to think this is better if it's clear, demarcated, and definable—preferably, or at least possibly, definable. We tend to elevate that. That's good, that's what we like, that's what we feel comfortable with usually.

But is there a necessary place for kinds of knowing that need to remain open and not very defined? In other words, sometimes we have experiences, and wrapped up in those experiences are conceivings

where the knowing is much more open and amorphous and less defined—not clear and not demarcated.

Also, just in terms of that example, in the practice of it, the attention was not really focused on a particular object or particular sense. It was more global, rather general. The sense of divinity was everywhere—different than vast awareness that seems divine in this universal way. This image sense very much involved my personhood. The sense of God and the divine was not very particular, but it definitely involved my personhood, my life, my being. Not just universal—it involved me. There was a sense of self there, and God. The God was more vague but nonetheless powerful for that.

And if this isn't clear, we can tend so much in Buddhist circles to elevate experiences that are more dissolutions of self, or seeing the emptiness of self, experiences of no-self and all that. But knowing the emptiness of self thoroughly, we can then open the door for a whole other range and realm of dimensions of experience that do involve self—which is not taken literally and hardened into reality. This whole range of experiences that involve personhood and particularity is so important.

I'm now repeating what I said before, but despite not being focused on a particular object or particular sense—being global or general—the tuning in the meditation was very precise, very specific, even if it wasn't quite definable. As we talked about before, it was tuning to a particular wavelength or sensibility.

So we talked about this in the instructions, but the image here is more a kind of mystical perception—it's an intuition, a sense, more vague in terms of objects, but the precision in the meditative tuning and steadiness of the attention is on, if you like, this certain wavelength or this certain sense of things, sensibility.

Hopefully it might be helpful to perhaps give a few more examples of theophany and particularly of cosmopoiesis in imaginal practice to illustrate what I'm trying to get at and what I'm trying to open—a field, a door, a window, a portal that we can move through. A door, really, that we can move through, and a territory that can open up. So hopefully to illustrate and fill out a bit of what we've been talking about with a few more examples.

Actually, when it comes to theophany, and particularly when it comes to cosmopoiesis, one of the most potent and rich and fertile classes of examples of imaginal practice involves the erotic and eros—particularly pertaining to loving another and sexual feeling and eros in the bigger sense of the word towards another, whether that's a purely imaginal figure or someone we know seen through the lens of mythos, of image. There's something partly to do with what I talked about before, but something about the eros that potentizes and opens things up in the imaginal in a way that spills over.

So I could actually give many examples where the erotic aspect is actually foremost in relation to an imaginal figure or a figure seen through the imaginal lens, so to speak. But actually I'm not going to because it's such a huge subject in itself, and hopefully we'll be able to do that another time, another retreat or another place.

So I'll give some different examples. There's eros in all of these, but not in the narrower sexual, romantic way that we tend to think of when we hear that word "erotic." But eros pervades all of these anyway, as it does any deep work with the imaginal. It's part of the territory. It's what fertilizes it, as we talked about earlier.

Many of these examples involve music, and I've talked about music and musicians and given examples. So there's a connection between some of them. Rather than the erotic, there's a commonality of music here. It's not that significant—I'm just picking these out to give some examples of cosmopoiesis.

Some time ago, it was dusk time, the evening coming, at Gaia House, and the birdsong of the evening dusk, the birds singing as the evening draws in. Hearing that music as a cosmic music—the bird song echoes, expresses a kind of cosmic music, suggestive of other cosmic levels. Again, there's that vertical dimension implicit in the hearing, in the imaginal hearing. In the very sense, somehow again quite vague, but this sense of all that as music as cosmologically interwoven. Then that had a personal component for myself, remembering my life as a composer for some years, something I really gave myself to very fully, and feeling the soul function of the composer as kind of serving that connection between the cosmic music and what comes through on a human level—or rather seeing that there is a connection and wanting to serve that, and seeing that they ideally reflect each other.

A lot of that is actually quite subtle and hard to put into words. I gave that other image much earlier, the music that matters. It's the music that matters, but music in that sense was something more broad. Here it was still more broad than actual what we think of as music, but not as broad as it was in that other example.

And quite similar examples—actually, this is something I get quite a lot for myself, this particular sense of listening and sound and hearing it as sacred music. I was sitting, reading in the vegetable garden at Gaia House. It was a beautiful, sunny spring day. And I was sitting on the bench there, studying, reading. And I actually heard music—meaning I physically heard music. At a certain point I realized that it was the water pipe at the other end, perhaps fifty or a hundred yards away. At the other end, it was the tap—sort of old, probably fairly on its way out—of water that was running because it was into a hose watering the garden somewhere.

So this music that I heard was actually the sound of the water through the tap and the pipe at the other end of the garden. But it really sounded so beautiful, like some very complex and skillful and exotic kind of jazz through a reed or flute instrument, like improvised. It reminded me of a musician I love, Dewey Redman. He died some time ago, and he used to play an instrument called a musette, a fairly rare instrument that sounds like some kind of Asian reed instrument, and he was a master playing in very free and creative and subtle and complex ways.

So the sound that I was hearing from this tap was really compelling as music. It sounded so creative and fantastic—its sound, its structure, the kind of melodic fragments and so on. There were other sounds that

seemed to accompany this. It went on for some minutes. And listening to that and opening to that and the delight in that and the beauty of it—through an actual sound, the sound of the tap—through that, then listening and opening in this way, the whole garden, the whole vegetable garden became sacred, became as if it had... it became a theophany. The garden itself, the sight of it, the whole surrounding of it became a theophany.

There was as if it was seeing it at a kind of more subtle level, seeing a more subtle dimension of the existence of the garden, of the being of the garden. And of course it was filled with light anyway because it was a sunny day, but this sense of other levels of creation, a sense of other worlds, other dimensions of this world present there. The sense too of this world—if we echo something Corbin said—this world as the imagination of God. That was all kind of implicit in this hearing, and then the whole sense is opening to this other garden, so to speak, in or behind or with or at a different level of the garden.

So there was not so much a transfiguring of the physical perception of the garden as we could say a transubstantiation. It appeared to be of a different substance at a different level. Really very beautiful, that kind of cosmopoiesis or opening perception of a different dimension.

There was a quality that was genuinely heavenly, or divine. When I use such words in this context - when something feels like heaven, when this garden feels perceived as a kind of heaven - I'm not speaking metaphorically. This isn't the casual "Oh, it's heavenly" or "It's simply divine" we might say about a beautiful sunset. There's truly a different sense here of a vertical dimension, interfused with the physical, perceivable in and through the physical.

Another quite similar example occurred during standing meditation outside near the large trees in our front garden as the morning sun was rising. Again, it was triggered by birdsong, though really the whole scene participated. Despite having my eyes mostly closed, there was an awareness of the nature surrounding me - I knew the scene, knew what it looked like - but it appeared very strongly as if that whole world, that entire scene with its birds and their song, was angelic. An angelic world.

These experiences are difficult to describe, but something about the whole thing - the nature there, the birdsong - was felt, was perceived as luminous, as diaphanous to something coming through it, transparent and translucent to divine light streaming through divinities. Sacredness pervaded everything, and there was a sense that everything was praising. Certainly I was praising all of that and the different dimensions present, but the world itself - the birds, the light, the trees - they were angels praising the divine. They were divine, faces of the divine, and they were engaged in praise.

Let me offer another example, one I want to elaborate upon partly for instructional purposes, to indicate how these experiences might actually evolve. Someone listening might think these things happen suddenly - which sometimes they do - but we've discussed how we can create conditions and relate to the flow of what arises in meditation with a different kind of responsiveness than we might bring to other practices.

I want to walk through this example to highlight the ways imaginal experience, or in this case cosmopoiesis, unfolds supported by and dependent upon our ways of responding and allowing what emerges, our ways of seeing what arises spontaneously in meditation.

I had been reading a book on Jewish mysticism earlier that day, or perhaps the day before, and this had triggered what I can only describe as a Jewish feeling. This isn't something that arises frequently for me, but it exists within my psyche. I was raised Orthodox Jewish, then left all that well behind - first as an atheist, then through my entry into Buddhism. Yet it remains alive in my psyche as soul-world, as soul-image, part of the entire history and ethos that constitutes a living imaginal landscape.

The point I want to emphasize is that I was conscious this feeling had been triggered by simply picking up and reading a book on Jewish mysticism. So someone might say, "Oh, dismiss that - it can't be authentic soul material because it was triggered by something external, something you read." Not so. There's no problem with such triggers.

This Jewish feeling was present, and I was simply aware of it, allowing and holding and feeling it within the meditation. As I did so, a point of white light appeared at my solar plexus - like a star in the night sky appearing at my solar plexus. Remaining aware of the whole energy body while focusing somewhat on that white light, some samādhi arose.

This samādhi energy spread through the body, and I felt my sense of both the physical body and energy body as a vessel waiting to be filled. The Jewish feeling continued pervading everything, along with a particular mythos alive within the umbrella of what Jewishness means to me - drawn from my past, from my reading, from soul fantasies.

Specifically, the idea of a tzaddik emerged. Tzaddik translates as "righteous person" - essentially the Jewish equivalent of a bodhisattva. Someone wise, incredibly compassionate, pure, saintly, utterly given to God. The resonances of this entire soul-image - what that word means for me, all the images that accrue to it, the fantasies and mythos - remained quite vague but very potent, extraordinarily fertile in my psyche.

With all of this present - allowing it, feeling it, aware of it as image, as mythos operating in the psyche at that moment, connected with the energy body in some degree of samādhi - the birdsong outside my window became beautiful to me, but beautiful in a specific way: like a sacred text.

I heard the birdsong as sacred text, a text that was inexhaustible - inexhaustibly deep, inexhaustible in its depth and beauty. This very notion of sacred text and its inexhaustibility in terms of depth of possible meanings, infinite interpretations - this too is a Jewish idea, or rather, an idea I encountered through my studies of Kabbalah, or more precisely, through reading about Kabbalah.

So this entire image-sense and the cosmopoiesis involved - the birdsong as sacred text - carried something not completely translatable, this text.

It's not even in a specific language. The details are not important in that sense. But there's, again, the precision of the tuning to the reverberations, the echoing, the feeling, the mythos there that's important.

This image or fantasy, this cosmopoetic sense of the birdsong as beautiful, sacred text, inexhaustible, came, if you like, on the back of all those other micro-stages of the meditation, and relating to them in a certain way. Had I shut down, or dismissed, or judged as unworthy, or just as a distraction, or papañca, some of those earlier stages—the Jewish feeling or the Tzaddik thing or whatever, body as vessel—maybe that sense of the sacred text, of the birdsong as sacred text, would not have arisen, would not have had the way, an opening would not have been made for it.

So again, in that sense, the image sense of the birdsong is not visual, but it's subtle and rich and pervasive. It was auditory. But on opening my eyes, then the world around me—and again, this is the spreading that we're talking about—the world around me took on this quality too. Here's an image, here's a theophanic image, and I'm focusing on that, and it has a certain boundary to it. In this case, the birdsong. But opening my eyes, often then the world around me and my body too seems to be sacred text, also seem to be sacred text.

So there's this spreading of the theophany to a more cosmopoetic sense of everything. The whole world and my body, too, seem to be sacred text.

Maybe a couple more examples. Some time—it was over a year ago—I had a day off and I spent it studying mostly in my room. I was reading different things. Again, I might have mentioned this one before, but then I meditated, and I was exploring imaginal practice deliberately, but no images arose. This is quite a while ago. I was looking for an image as something other than the world or my life, something that appeared to me in meditation like that. No images arose.

But then actually, the image or memory, if you like, of the day spent studying—so me sitting at the desk, studying, if you like, the sense of, in that, of pursuing what is meaningful to me, of trying to absorb, to learn, to open horizons and paradigms, to make connections. I mentioned this before. That was the image. That memory, that seeing of myself as me, as that memory was the image, infused with certain mythos and fantasy, but the image or symbol, if you like, was me studying with everything, all the richness imbued in that.

But that too had this sense of echoing higher levels. Again, this vertical dimension and this—the image of me studying felt like a theophany, felt like it was expressing a face of the divine in and through, in this case, the particularities of me, but also the particularities of a certain activity in life were expressing other levels. And the sense of theophany was through and in something very particular—certain activities of life and the self.

Now, I wonder—I don't know if I've mentioned this earlier in the retreat—but sometimes when we sense life, I wonder sometimes if we sense life more imaginally in that way. We have that sense of life as image,

if you like, we have the sense of theophany and cosmopoiesis in life, then it may be that strange images don't need to arise so much. So that's a conjecture, a thought, something I wonder about sometimes.

It might be for some people that the literalization of life, really believing this or that so much, and the clinging that actually forces images, strange images on them in dreams and other places, you know, in meditation or whatever, or just wherever, because there's an over-literalization. When life is seen more imaginally, then the imaginal comes through and it's not squeezed out of life. There's a broader range for it to come through.

But again, in that image, there was a spreading in terms of the breadth of the image because the surroundings started to be included in the image. In that case, my room that I was sitting in, the whole world of that started—not just me, not just the activity, but the whole surrounding started to be filled with this sense of theophany, the sense of sacredness and the different levels present, if you like, in the world, in and through the world, the different dimensions of the world.

I'll leave out the other example I was going to give and just finish with one. It's actually, in a way, the most complex and perhaps for some, maybe the strangest. It may be quite hard to relate to. Again, it's musical, what has to do with music. So I'm aware it might sound quite strange for some, especially people who don't have a musical background. But I'm choosing it partly, again, to illustrate something about meditative process, about picking up on cues, relating to them in certain ways, working with difficulties, and how that opens theophanic sense, also in this case the cosmopoetic sense up in particular ways. Also, again, to illustrate when we use words like divine, God, etc., that it's really quite broad, infinite, in fact, the range of what might be meant there. It's not the narrow preconception that we might immediately assume when we hear those words, God or divine.

I had a teacher—I didn't have that much contact with him years ago at the conservatory. He was a jazz saxophone player, really, really amazing.

I loved his playing. I didn't have that much contact with him—just one or two classes over the years. On a whim, I googled him and found a short article explaining the basics of a certain musical concept for improvisation. It's quite technical and complex, having to do with advanced jazz improvisation.

Reading this article prompted my mind to improvise lines in moments when it wasn't busy, and even sometimes in meditation—musical improvisations informed by what I'd read, by this harmonic and melodic concept he was describing. My mind was doodling or daydreaming spontaneously music on the guitar, which was my instrument. In the imagination, quite a lot was just coming and coming. I could have stopped it, I suppose, but it was really quite persistent, and I was interested. There was something pushing that, if you like.

That night, or the night after, I dreamt of a jazz guitarist dressed in a colorful jester's shirt—big square patches of bright colors, smart but interesting, arty-looking, very striking without being overly

flamboyant. He was playing a guitar solo on a stage, playing the most amazing, creative, original music—very strong, very striking, with this powerful, clear sound. I don't see an audience or anyone else in the band, but he's definitely on a stage performing.

In the morning, I felt something emotionally that visits me from time to time over the years since I gave up being a musician. It comes occasionally—a feeling of grief, of loss, of missing being a musician. Sometimes it's very specific: missing being a jazz musician, missing the trajectory of a jazz life. Sometimes it comes as just a whisper. Other times it comes and I get pulled into it a little bit, and it's difficult not to take it concretely and literally.

So it came that morning—quite strong, actually. Subtle, but quite persistent. It wouldn't go away; it was sticking a little bit. I didn't quite know how to handle it or approach it in practice. The question is always: what's needed? What will be helpful here?

Looking at it, exploring, investigating this constellation of emotion, I realized it's not all jazz I miss. It's something to do with those two images—the image triggered by what I'd found from my teacher and those doodle-daydream improvisations in my mind, and the image of the dream.

There's something about the loose, complex sophistication of the saxophonist's style—his sound and way of articulating, certain harmonic things that have to do with being on the edges, playing in and out of the boundaries of tonality, being liminal. That characterized all of it.

The dream image was more about a sense of almost otherworldly brilliance of intuitive or even channeled music—improvised music when it almost feels like it's from another world, as opposed to the more loosely intellectual, mathematical component of the saxophonist's approach, though that too is very fluid and edgy. So there were really two images there, and they were drawing me. They were so attractive in my soul.

Looking further, exploring more deeply, I realized that much of the pull, much of what was keeping this sadness, this grief, this sense of loss around, had to do with freedom of expression.

This is interesting because in sharing Dharma—in teaching or giving Dharma talks or writing about Dharma—I feel I have a responsibility to be as clear as I can. I aim mostly for clarity because I'm trying to instruct or teach or make things clear. That aiming at clarity, that didactic aim, means I am responsible to you as a listener, responsible to the students, responsible to the Dharma. All of that puts quite a lot of constraints on my freedom of expression.

There are also constraints I feel because of the whole Dharma ethos. There's a limit to how wild my expression can be, a limit to how much wildness can manifest or express when I'm giving a Dharma talk. It's actually very limited. What can happen in the Dharma Hall at Gaia House or another retreat center—the whole ethos is quite constrained in terms of freedom of expression, particularly in terms of wildness and intensity.

I think anyone who listens enough will recognize there's quite a lot of intensity in some Dharma talks and writings. But it's still constrained or held back or modulated for the sake of the listener and for respecting a certain restricted range of the ethos in the Dharma world.

The permission of the stage as a Dharma teacher—when I sit at the front and give a talk—is very different from the permission of a jazz musician on stage. Especially some of the jazz I was into was really very high intensity, wild, what they call "out there" and experimental. The permission of the stage is quite different. It has to do with freedom of expression, with intensity, with libido, with all these things.

So I was exploring and realizing what was involved in why these feelings of grief and loss were there. The mind—it's subtle, but it's not a huge, terrible emotion—was churning a little with this, throwing forward lots of jazz images and feeling this subtle pain.

The question became: how to deliteralize this? I'm taking these images too literally. Again, exploring and looking at the whole emotional constellation there, the constellation with the images...

And I realize at times coming in and out of all this, I feel a real gratitude for these images existing and also for the actual musicians I love. I've talked about this before and the music. Deep, deep, deep gratitude there in my soul, in my heart. And this turned out to be key, because then it turned into a kind of reverence, a devotion, a prayerfulness. And that felt lovely, felt beautiful. There's still a shade of pain, of grief in it.

But then I started reflecting. Actually, this is image. So jazz musicians that I knew personally, well, they were people, and people are not simple, and they're disappointing, and they're actually—the image that I have, say, of the teacher or the dream guitarist who's sort of reminded me of someone else—they don't actually exist in that way. In other words, the actual teacher is much more complex, more aspects of his being that I'm not too keen on, et cetera. So, oh, image, image. Don't get it too confused.

And somehow the reflections and the gratitude liberated just enough space around the images without rendering them less powerful. So all this is quite subtle. It's not that I'm in a great contraction or sobbing or anything like that. So we're talking about quite subtle things here and working quite subtly with them in different ways. And that's really what I want to illustrate in this long example.

So there was more space around those images, but without rendering them less powerful. And then, actually, this is one of the really interesting pieces, is that then they were able to be kind of absorbed. Those images, those two images of jazz and jazz musicians and jazz music and jazz life, et cetera, were somehow able to be absorbed because they were less constricted around, there was more space around, and they were able to be absorbed into the texture of my life, the image of my life as it is now, the actuality of my life now here as a Dharma teacher, et cetera, and doing what I do and all the different stuff that I do, which mostly is not music anymore.

So somehow it's like the ethos, the image of that, of jazz—it's actually hard to put that in a nutshell, what

that actually means. I've talked about it before. It means more than improvising, just how you improvise Dharma talks or you improvise in interviews. It means much more than that. But the whole mythos of that was actually able to be translated, and not, again, not in totally delineated ways. There's still a lot of vagueness there. It was absorbed into the texture of the image and the actuality of my life, the way of feeling and sensing, seeing my life. So that was interesting.

But in terms of cosmopoiesis, this is the piece I wanted to emphasize. So I found all this interesting. So I go outside and I do some walking meditation. And I'm interested in this whole question of cosmopoiesis. And so I'm pleased to notice, when I do the walking meditation, that subtly these images, these jazz music images and jazz musician images that I described, they do spill over and spread into a cosmopoiesis, into a sense of the world around me and the nature and the walking and everything. And it's absolutely beautiful. It's absolutely delightful. And joy comes with it.

Again, hard to describe, but it's like the world is music somehow. And that was the sense of it, that at another level, if you like, at another level of the vertical spectrum of the imaginal, the world is music, its nature is music, its essence is music. So I know that we can hear that in different ways, and people talk about it in different ways. So certainly I can hear certain sounds as actual music, but it's more than that. Actually, all the senses were involved so that what I see and the forms that I see, the shapes, the colors, the sensations in my feet as I walk, the whole of nature and the whole structure of nature was music.

Very hard to explain here, and also hard to form a clear, defined sense of. It's quite subtle, yet very wonderful and very powerful. So again, there's the vagueness and the non-delineated and clear conceptual structure, yet still the depth and the potency of the opening. Really another dimension to existence.

And when I was tuning into that, but then the mind loses it, the perception loses it. That happened many times. But what I found was just remembering those two images of the jazz saxophonist, and that whole harmonic melodic approach that he described, just the image, very lightly, the image of that, and the image of the dream guitarist playing, and just remembering them, letting them be there very lightly for a second or two, and then they started again to act as triggers to infuse the perceptions of the world somehow and those images. Then those two images might linger there or one of them might linger very subtly in the background where the foreground attention is on the cosmopoetic sense, the world as music, or those initial images could disappear either way.

But either way, I stay tuned. I can stay tuned into the sense of nature as music and hold that, tune into that, hold that steady in the attention and open to that.

There are other parts to this I'll just mention briefly. So this is all over a period of a day in and out where I had quite a lot of free time to be practicing and pondering these things and working with them. Later, again in the afternoon, again the mind drifting repeatedly into this sort of imaginal doodling along the lines of this harmonic melodic approach on the imagined guitar in my imagination.

And within all this, I sense another image emerging—one much more personal. A being of white, of blue light: a puer. *Puer* means boy in Latin, and it carries rich associations within Jungian psychology. An eternally young figure—a young man, perhaps a teenager—but what puer really signifies in archetypal terms encompasses a whole confluence of qualities: enthusiasm and spirituality, vitality and eros, and much more.

This puer of blue light appears as an image, somehow mixed with me, or perhaps it is me at seventeen, discovering those harmonic melodic possibilities that weren't actually available at that age, exploring them, knowing how to develop and practice them. The excitement of that discovery, the endless puer enthusiasm—for enthusiasm comes from *entheos*, meaning the entering of the divine (*theos*) into being. What characterizes puer is precisely this kind of enthusiasm, this eagerness, this sense of infinite possibility.

In this image—partly radiant being of blue light, partly myself, partly me at seventeen, all fused together—there's the enthusiasm of discovery and creativity, of exploring this jazz world and developing new dimensions, sensing the infinity and open-endedness of possibilities. All of this forms a kind of gestalt, a constellation present as image, triggered by the same daydreaming and initial images.

With this comes tremendous bliss, much happiness in the energy body—*sukha* filling the energy body along with the sense of this blue light. One option certainly would have been to veer toward samadhi, focusing on the happiness in the energy body, letting it fill completely and absorbing into that. That would certainly have been possible at that point.

But there's this whole imaginal constellation moving from cosmopoetic sensing at one point into something more personal again, yet liberated from the contraction of tight identification with personal history—the literal "this happened and that happened" of one's actual life. Instead, there's a more imaginal sense of one's existence that transcends even time, because I'm certainly not seventeen anymore, and this didn't happen when I was that age. I wasn't into jazz then. But there it is: moving from the cosmopoetic to the imaginal personal in a liberated and liberating way.

Even later in the day, a sense of praise arose for the endless fountain, the cornucopia of music from the psyche—not just my psyche, but the psyche itself. The soul gives rise to music; humanity gives rise to music, endless in its possibilities, like a fountain from the deep soul, the deep mind. Praise for this human dimension, and also praise for that other dimension, that other level: the music that is the cosmos, the cosmos that is music. All the while knowing that this sense of world, of cosmos, and that perception is not separate from mind.

To conclude, when we speak of cosmopoiesis, we recognize—or rather, I'm stating as an axiom—that the soul wants poetry and enchantment. These are essential to soul-making and soulfulness. The soul wants to live, to know, to see, to experience poetically, wanting the enchantment of poetic existence.

In terms of cosmopoiesis, what we're really discussing is this sense of range. We're not asserting that the cosmos is definitively like this or that. We could take cosmology as defined by current science—and that's fine, actually very enchanting and beautiful to me as one vision, one knowing, one sensing of the cosmos. I love what modern physics and cosmology reveal, as much as I can understand it.

But something in the soul wants and needs an endlessness of creativity, a range of ways of feeling, sensing, knowing, seeing, living—sensing ourselves, others, and the world through cosmopoiesis. The psyche wants to expand; the imaginal world wants to expand. Eros wants to expand, with this movement of fertilizing, this expanding tendency of Eros, Psyche, and Logos together, fertilizing each other, the whole constellation growing, expanding, going deeper, opening other levels, other visions, other experiences.

Holding all this lightly, one wouldn't want to assert that this cosmos is real and that one is not, or vice versa. That would be falling into clinging too tightly and concretely to either view—scientific reductionist materialism versus some new-age perspective. This idea that the cosmos is music is a poetic idea, a poetic sense of the cosmos. It's not even metaphor in the way we commonly use that word, and certainly not literalism.

Because the soul, because Eros and Psyche want to see, feel, know, and live poetically, this movement of cosmopoiesis—this opening up of the range of perception of self, other, and particularly world—becomes necessary to the soul. Because Eros wants to expand psyche and soulfulness, and psyche wants to be expanded, soulfulness wants to deepen and be enriched and nourished. Soul-making needs to happen, and it's important for our soul that this soul-making occurs.

Soul needs images in all kinds of ways—a whole range, an infinity of images of life, of self, of others. It needs images that pertain to life, and it may well need images that seem to have nothing to do with life—what James Hillman calls the underworld, images away from life that seem to have no bearing yet are important for the soul. There are the many and plural images of life, and there are images away from life.

But soul also needs this sense of other dimensions, this vertical spectrum of the imaginal. This is what happens when soulfulness is enriched, when soul-making occurs: that vertical dimension opens, and there's also the spreading into the world in cosmic ways—the ensouling of the world.

So to repeat what we said earlier, soul needs multiple seeing. To quote William Blake again: "God help us, or God save us from single vision." We feel this as we live more deeply—we feel it as a necessity of the soul, as something that fertilizes our life, our soul, our experience, our sense of being. This multiplicity is what happens when there is such fertilization.

As I've emphasized many times, a great deal of what I'm emphasizing is this wanting to open doors, to expand the range. Through these examples and through these talks, through this retreat, I really want to

give some possibility to open doors, to support possibilities, to suggest possibilities—but these are possibilities of perception, of experience, of sensibility, supported by the conceiving, supported by the practice.

So opening the range, as I said much earlier in the retreat—opening the range of perception, of experience, of sensibility. That's the thrust, the movement that is, I think, so important. Because in that opening up, that meditative journey of opening up the range of perception or vision, if you like, of experience, we are opening the soul, the psyche. And this opening of the soul is what the psyche wants and needs. It is soul-making, as we said.

We're also opening up the range of possibility of practice and of adventure. More fundamentally, we're opening up through that exploration the sense of existence itself—the range of the sense of existence, sense of being, of what we are, what the world is, what another is. Self, other, world—the whole sense of that, the whole experience of that has much more range. So we're not living in a world that's constrained, constricted.

And with all that, we're opening up, as I said much earlier in the retreat, the range of our sense of beauty, of deep beauty, the possibilities of beauty.

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