Beyond the Search for Freedom

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:01:15

So I said I would like to cover four areas in this introduction: what we are talking about when we talk about enchanting and re-enchanting, why it's important, the context and basis for giving these teachings, and also a little bit about how to relate to retreat, the practices, and the teachings. It's probably clear from what I said so far that these four are not actually separate—they're woven together.

But let's continue and perhaps open up a little more about the question of why this might be important, this re-enchantment, why offering these teachings might be important. This is also tied in very much with the whole context of these teachings and these ideas, and also the bases. So these two tie together.

Why is it important? Well, one aspect—and we're going to be saying more about many of these reasons as the retreat goes on—but one reason why all this is important is because of the environmental crises we face, because of the situation that humanity and other species now face globally on our planet. I'm not going to talk that much about that on this retreat because I've talked about it elsewhere several times in relation to the imaginal and enchantment, and also written about it. So I won't be talking that much about it on this retreat, but in a way it's implicit—I hope that that is a fundamental reason and a strand that runs through the whole of the teaching and what we're doing here.

But even that—it's only for some people that this re-enchantment of nature, of the cosmos, of the world, is actually necessary, or what will transform their relationship to the world, to nature, to the planet, to the earth, to other beings in a way that is more ecologically viable. The psychological and psycho-spiritual reasons behind the huge fix we're in as a species and the environmental crisis—there's too much complexity there. There are different reasons why people act or don't act, or are involved or engaged, or turn to or turn away from, or are interested or not interested. So to think that one thing is going to do the trick for the whole of humanity in terms of changing the relationship—I think that's naive.

But certainly for many people, the disenchantment that has come partly as a result of the Western Enlightenment, partly as a result of industrialization, consumerism, and all kinds of things that are so prevalent nowadays—for many people this re-enchanting is going to be pretty central. And for people who are already involved, activists who are already involved, another level of depth can be opened up there that gives support and strength and equanimity and forbearance in relation to their activism.

Like I said, I've talked about that all before and written about it, and I'm not going to dwell too much on it this retreat. What I want to open up instead, or as well as that, is the whole relationship of the movement of re-enchantment through image with the whole question of freedom—freedom from suffering and happiness. What is the relationship between re-enchantment and happiness, or easing suffering, or

freedom from suffering?

This is actually a very complex question, which is why I want to go into it, and something we'll return to as the retreat goes on, opening up different aspects of it.

Some of you may have heard of Matthieu Ricard. He's a French-born monk in the Gelug Tibetan tradition, and he's written a number of books. But one of the reasons why he's well known is because some scientists found him and were doing brain scan readings of people's brain activity, relating that to happiness. Whatever their measures in the brain of happiness were, they found that most people—the hundreds or thousands of people they tested—were grouped within a certain range. And Matthieu Ricard was completely off the scale. He was like the happiest person that any of them had ever encountered, by far, in terms of what his brain waves were showing.

So I have a question—and it really is a question. Assuming we can trust all that measurement business, how come he's so happy? What's going on there? He's a Tibetan monk, quite busy doing stuff, writing and traveling. And if you know that tradition, it's not very meditatively intensive.

The question I have is: Is his extreme happiness, his unusual level of happiness, a result of what we could call mental technologies—of mindfulness, for example? Learning to see a thought as a thought and let go of it, of staying in contact, of being aware and keeping the attention on the nexus of vedanā and craving without, through the mindfulness, letting it go into the next stage of clinging and causing dukkha—is his happiness a result primarily of those kinds of mental technologies?

Or is it a result of the fact that in that tradition that he's in, he has somehow managed to really fully inhabit a myth, a fantasy of the bodhisattva—of being born through countless lives and dedicating those lives and one's whole existence to embodying his own enlightenment for the sake of other beings? He is, in other words, inhabiting a myth that is huge, enormous in its temporal and spatial scope, in its range, in what it means for the whole being, in its orientation, in its meaningfulness. And it's enchanting.

perhaps he has entered into a whole different way of seeing the cosmos. So the Tibetans basically inhabit a different cosmos than we do in the modern West. They live in a cosmos that is enchanted, that is sacred—a sacred cosmos. It's not this flat, materialist, meaningless, soulless cosmos that we typically live in in the modern West. It's pregnant with sanctity, with mystery, with depth.

So of these two factors—and I'm sure he practices some mental technologies of mindfulness and all that—of these two factors, the mental technologies or the inhabiting of an enchanting myth and the inhabiting of a sacred cosmos, which is more powerful for him? Which is more powerful in bringing happiness and freedom? I have a real question about that.

But pursuing this a little more, what we could call mental technologies—these are really important. Of course they are. I wouldn't teach meditation if I didn't think that. But the function of these mental technologies is often, probably mostly conceived nowadays in limited and limiting ways.

We can learn these technologies of mindfulness and seeing thoughts as thoughts, staying in contact, all that stuff. But what they really are, what they're really seen as—and this is explicitly or implicitly communicated—is that what we're really doing is coping with reality. We're meeting reality, or so-called reality, and coping with it through these mental technologies, learning skills to cope with the reality of our minds, our bodies, and our situation.

And even if those technologies and the teachings are extended to the three characteristics—the Buddhist three characteristics of dukkha, of unsatisfactoriness, of the impermanence of all things, and of the absence of a true self, of a real self—even if the teachings and technologies are extended to those three characteristics beyond just simple mindfulness, still, what's happening there is a kind of endless and repetitive coping with reality.

So the three characteristics are just really seen as existential truths. They're part of the reality we cope with, moment to moment, again and again, and that is the path. The path is just learning this endless, repetitive, so-called meeting with reality, which is really coping with reality.

But this reality—who we are, what our existential situation is—this is regarded as truth. Now philosophically nowadays it's become very unpopular to use words like truth, so people either within Buddhism, within secular Buddhism, or outside in some modern philosophies, try not to use the word truth or poo-poo it. But whether they use it or not, it's still implicit there. They take for granted that these are existential truths or realities. Sometimes modern philosophers use the word facticity—a very unusual word, but basically they don't want to use truth. So they use another word that hides the fact of what's being assumed to be true, unquestionably.

The function of these meditative technologies that we can learn can extend way beyond this kind of coping with reality. It can, and I would say I hope it does extend for us, into an opening, a deepening, an enriching of our sensitivity—the sensitivity of our being, of our seeing, of our knowing, of our dwelling in the world—so that the whole sense of sacredness opens up through that sensitivity. The sensitivity that we grow opens up, reveals for us in many different ways, the sense of sacredness in our lives.

The function of those technologies can extend into really seeing the possibilities of fabricating less perception. So still that teaching of fabrication is there, implicit, even if it doesn't use that language, in typical mindfulness teachings, typical insight meditation teachings. But oftentimes the depth of possibility or the range to which that extends—this possibility of learning to fabricate less perception at times, and what that then reveals, what that opens to us—that possibility is severely truncated. But actually we can extend it. It's enormous.

We can really see the centrality and the possibility of fabricating less perception, learning how to do that and what it implies and what it opens. Because it opens for us the possibility of vastly different perceptions. Whole mystical perceptions of existence open up that are essentially less fabricated. We talked about this with perceptions of different kinds of oneness. And ultimately with perception of the

unfabricated, what is completely transcendent—beyond space, beyond time, beyond all notions of subject and object and conventional perception—that the Buddha pointed to repeatedly.

This journey into fabricating much less opens up when we don't constrain it by assumptions of the reality of what we're having to cope with. When we view the path as this exploration of fabricating less and less perception at times—can't live there—we also reveal the emptiness of all things, the emptiness of all perception, the dependent arising of all perceptions at a very deep level, at a deeper and deeper level. Massively significant.

And this in itself opens up for us, or through that, both as process and as result, our skill, the art of the flexibility of moving in and out of a whole range of ways of looking. And part of that, we develop the skill, the art of cosmopoiesis.

Cosmopoiesis as a way of looking—or as ways of looking, plural, as I said, they're infinite—becomes more and more available to us as we extend these techniques, as we don't limit them and the way we're conceiving of them and what they're for.

So tied in with all this is what is the point of practice? What is the point of the path? I don't just mean what's the point of this retreat. I mean the whole path, the whole Dharma. What's the point?

For me, if I'm just honest, for me this extension, expansion, deepening, opening of the sense of the sacredness of everything—everything—the opening of a sense of beauty, the extension of the sense of the beauty that goes with that, the opening of the range of soul-making and the sense of soulfulness, the expansion of possibilities for engaged, creative participation in perception, creative participation in our perception and sense of existence, self, other, world. And creative participation in our interpretation of existence, in the hermeneutical dimension and aspect of our being. How are we interpreting self, other, world, life, existence, being? And all the art that goes with all that that I've just talked about.

That to me, if I'm honest for myself, that's become the point of practice, and maybe it always was for me—I don't know—more primary than anything else. And with that, of course, the wonder, the awe that opens with all that, the deep bowing of the whole being, the sense of blessing, again profound and universal almost, that opens with all that.

This, for me—maybe it always was, but it certainly has become more and more the point of practice, if I just share for me the point of the path.

Happiness, or an increase in happiness, an increase in peace, an increase in or decrease in suffering—these are definitely results of this deeper, more widely conceived path. But in a way, maybe they're side effects.

So I want to tread carefully here, and I don't want to impose any view on anyone. I really have to say I respect anyone's choices around all this, for the most part. So you decide: what is the point of your

practice? What is the point of your path?

And some, for a while at least—this is very, very common—some for a while at least, this decrease of suffering, increase of happiness, of well-being, it has to be, or it will be, the primary aim of the path. For a while at least for some, of course. And I respect that. I respect that even if it doesn't change.

But I have a question for you. What is your aim? What is your direction? How are you really holding your sense? How are you holding what is the point of the practice and the path for you?

So this is a real question, and actually I want to push it a little further with you. Because if you answer, as of course people will, it is the reduction of suffering—so I've talked about this in other talks, sometimes a lot of people, the ending of suffering just seems too much like a pipe dream. You say it's the—I'm not going to go into that now, but you say it's the reduction of suffering, at least it's the ease of suffering.

Again, I would, as I said, want to just push that a little further as a question. If that's what you answer, I would just say: is it really, really? Look again. Take your time with this. I don't mean right now in this moment. I mean in your life. Is it really that that's what you most want? It might be. Of course it might be.

Or is it somehow that we've just adopted an idea or a certain languaging or a certain framework from Buddhist teachings and talks and books, and we've just, in a way, kind of been indoctrinated by that? And in that, are we perhaps failing somehow—either because of a lack of confidence, a lack of inner authority, or just through habit, or through laziness, if that word even means anything, I'm not sure it does—but somehow we're failing to ask that question of ourselves more probingly, to ask ourselves: what do I really, really want in the core of my being? And even more: why? Why do I want what I really want? What do I really want and why?

So I really want to emphasize with this: it's your choice. Of course it's your choice. You're free to choose. I mean, actually, that freedom is constrained by conditioning and all kinds of things. But essentially, let's say, or as far as I'm concerned, I don't want to impose or bully anyone at all.

Your choice. But at least ask the question, you know, with some probing, with some force, with some openness—not constrained by what might actually be a strange kind of subtle indoctrination.

So there's a spectrum here where your answer might land. There's one end, and we could say, if you like, the more radical end, the more unusual end, certainly in today's context, would be: what if the path and the goal of the path, the aim, the orientation of the path, is not less suffering, but actually the goal, the aim, the path is an increase, a deepening, an opening, an enriching of the sense of the beauties—beauty is plural—and the sacrednesses, the senses of sacredness of existence. Self, other, world, events, facts, cosmos—all of that.

That would be replacing the goal of less suffering with the goal of the opening to beauty, the prioritizing of the beauty and the sense of sacredness. That would be quite a radical position, quite unusual, and one end

of the spectrum. It's quite unusual for people to actually come out and say that or admit it to themselves. And maybe it's unusual as a position, I don't know. But there's a spectrum here, and your choice.

If one did move to or admit that one lived on that more radical end of the spectrum oriented toward beauty, then some of you listening to this might get a little nervous and just say, well, is that even Buddha Dharma? Is that Buddhism then, if that's the orientation? And then get very... yikes. What are we doing here? What's he teaching? Because the cardinal orientation in Buddhism is towards less suffering. It's how everything is framed.

I've talked about this before in other talks. I'm not going to dwell on it too much. Part of what I said in other talks was we have a fantasy always when anyone is involved in the path to the extent that they love it and it's part of their life. Whenever we love something there's a fantasy mixed with that loving. I've talked about this before.

So we can imagine, or rather we image and fantasy our relationship with, if you like, inhabiting this position of replacing the aim of less suffering with the increase of beauty. If we're doing that, we can fantasy it in different ways. We can see the self and the dharma and the whole project in different ways. It could be that we see ourselves going outside of the Dharma, could be that we see ourselves extending it, could be that we try and engage a kind of historical fantasy and find evidence for "actually the Buddha was always saying that."

So there are different ways we fantasy the self, the tradition, the Dharma, all of that, the goal, and so forth. Always fantasy is involved and there are different positions, different fantasies that we can take with that. I've talked about this before; I don't want to go into it now.

But I would repeat a question that I think I brought up in other talks on another retreat, which is, if this comes up for you—is that Buddhism? Is that what the Buddha taught? Is that the Dharma? Again, I would ask a question: why is that so important to you? Why anyway is that question so important? What's going on for you that this sort of allegiance to something called Buddhism—which clearly means very different things to different people, even here at Gaia House—what a range there is in the way that the teachers, even the core teachers, conceive of what is the Dharma, what it's for, what it does, the history, all of that.

Why is this allegiance to some kind of constructed notion... You have to admit that whatever we call Buddhism is constructed by us through our fantasy, through our selective emphasis on different aspects of the history or tradition, through our understanding as it's limited in the present. And so we construct this Buddhism and then we feel this allegiance to it. What's going on there? And how has that allegiance eclipsed what may be even at a deeper level that I haven't realized yet, more important to me? What's going on psychologically, spiritually, and so forth?

Certainly we're conditioned to approach practice and the path and our conceptions of it in certain ways and with certain assumptions. Even the Four Noble Truths—it's right there. It's core Buddhist teaching

that talks about suffering, the end of suffering, the way to the end of suffering. So right there, this primacy of reducing suffering, at least, is given to us through core Buddhist teachings, the Four Noble Truths.

In the mindfulness world, it's very tied to a medical model. Stress reduction, pain relief, cognitive behavioral therapy for depression. These are the roots of the way mindfulness is taking... So the threads of the way mindfulness is taking root in the culture is on a medical model. And of course, a medical model has to do with getting rid of suffering. That's what medicine does, right? Gets rid of physical suffering.

So here I talk about how mindfulness is presented, thought about, and actually sold, if you like, through a medical model which has to do with less suffering. The huge projects that are happening in this country, in the States—the funding for those projects would never be available outside of a medical model. If I say to the government, "I want to increase the sense of beauty," competing with someone else who wants to reduce suffering, who's going to get the funding?

And not only that, there's the attraction of presenting the scientific paradigm of the medical model to most people in modern culture because, again, it fits the dominant mode of understanding that science is important, and so forth. But even more than that, you know, I was flicking through a sort of new age spiritual magazine, looking at blurbs for different retreats or ads for this or that, and actually various magazines, and almost everything—almost everything in the blurbs and ads for courses and retreats and practitioners—has to do with healing or flourishing, this word that's become very popular nowadays, human flourishing, or self-empowerment or deep rest. It's all, in other words, different ways of languaging or approaching this idea of reducing suffering, increasing happiness. The focus is not on this opening of beauty, making that primary—the opening of beauty and the senses of sacredness.

Notice too, by the way, how healing, flourishing, self-empowerment, deep rest—all of these, in a way, are products of or reactions to secular modernism. The whole way of thinking, human flourishing, self-empowerment—we're going to come back to this—they're products of a sense of self that is conceived within the paradigms and through the constraints and through the tunnel vision of secular modernism. We don't see it because we are not aware of the historical construction over hundreds of years of that kind of sense of self. But these kinds of thrusts of these retreats are also products of secular modernism or reactions, if you like, to modern lifestyle.

So if I'm honest, I really don't actually care that much if through practice you're a little less stressed at your computer keyboard at work or in the kitchen or whatever it is, or if in those activities you're more mindful. I can't say I passionately care about that. Or maybe I should say it differently. I do care about that, but mostly I care about it in proportion to the extent that stress and lack of mindfulness blocks and veils our deeper seeing, our deeper sensibilities, our possibilities to know and open to the senses of the sacred. Our possibility of knowing and opening to a sense of things and self and other and world as being more than this, and this meaning more than the flat secular modernist version or story of what things are and how reality is.

So I care about all this to the extent that stress and lack of mindfulness block and veil the depth that's possible to us, the sense of divinity in whatever ways that might come for us and open for us. These things block and veil seeing emptiness deeply, the possibility of opening to the unfabricated, the possibility of re-enchanting our existence and our cosmos. This is what I care about—I'm just being honest here.

Of course, if I'm sitting one-on-one with someone in an interview and what they care about is their stress at the keyboard, and that's what we're talking about, that's what I will, to the best of my ability, help them with—tools and approaches that can help with that kind of stress. But to be honest, it's not what I'm going to devote my work and energy and existence and thought to. But again, that's just a personal confession, if you like.

Going back to what's in the context of our spiritual culture and psychological culture, what I often feel is that if someone writes a book or is presenting something, and the language of that spirituality or psychology or psycho-spirituality seems to be seeing self and self-expression as theophanies, as faces of the divine, as expressions of the divine. Sometimes I get the sense as I read more, listen more, that actually it's not very full or deep, that truth, that transformation to really seeing self and self-expression as theophany or the divine. It's not that full or deep. There's not really a great shift from the kind of self-centeredness, literally a self-centered view.

So all of this—I might use that language, and often in the Jungian traditions and related traditions they use that language of the divine coming through in relation to the self and self-expression. But somehow there's something in it that just seems like, yeah, but not really. It's somehow still the self at the center that's being prioritized. Or there is a shift, but very quickly it slips back, just slips back to the self being primary and central, and the divinity, the orientation towards divinity rather than self, is secondary and kind of nominal.

Now all this is complicated. This is complicated and something we're going to return to—both Catherine and I talk about this a lot, hopefully on this retreat. So I want to really make clear that the self, self-views, and the personal relevance of whatever it is that we're dealing with—our dukkha, our difficulties, our stuckness, our challenges, this or that event in our life, these images and fantasies that come—the personal relevance of all that is vital and necessary to include. I'm not interested in dismissing the self and all the particularities and the personhood. We need, at least in the way that we are conceiving of re-enchantment and working with images, to include all that in our relationship with images and with our life, the image of our life, the images of our life and ourselves, in the views that we have about all that and in our explorations.

But there's something about the balance of the importance of self and divine in the governing concepts, in the concepts that govern our path. I hope this is making sense. It's like the background assumptions relative to images. What is the purpose? Am I doing this as a kind of self-growth, my process, healing myself, having less suffering? Valid and important as that is, but what is the relative balance of doing it for

me or doing it, let's say, for God? All this practice, all this effort, all this inquiry, all the sessions in therapy or whatever it is—if really something inside shifts, this is for God. It's for the sake of God. It's for the sake of, if you like, God's fulfillment. We'll come back to these ideas. That's a pretty radical, and in our Western culture, very rare transformation of position of priority.

But there's a balance. Or rather, what I want to highlight is that there will be relative weights of self—what we could call self-orientation, or orientation based on self, or towards self-healing, self-growth and all that—and divine orientation. This comes in all kinds of ways, also in relation to the notions of causality. We'll come back to this, and we'll dwell on it now.

But depending on that balance between what we could call the intentions of self or self-orientation and divine orientations, our life and our practices will unfold somewhere on a spectrum of immature enchantment—what we're calling that immature enchantment on this retreat—and, if you like, mature, more fertile enchantment with greater soul-making possibility. So the more the orientation and the conception, the weight of priority is given over to the divine instead of the self, the more mature and fertile and soul-making is the enchantment that we're talking about.

As I said, all this is complex. It's not simple. Because a person might hear about this possible shift of view and intention to prioritize beauty and the sense of sacredness over less suffering and hear and say, "Yes, that's great, it sounds beautiful. After I've sorted myself out a bit, and there's less stress in my life, and I'm a bit more free." And there may be, of course, some real wisdom in that kind of response. It's like, "Yes, I'm really attracted to that, and I've got some work to do beforehand."

But as I said, this is complex. The relationships here between these two sort of thrusts are very intertwined and not simple. The relationship of self-view and freedom and the relationship of all that with the prioritizing of beauty and increasing the sense of sacredness is complex.

Now, it's true to say, I think, generally speaking, that the depth, the degree, the breadth, and the range of seeing beauty, sacredness, etc., generally, it's dependent on the degree, the depth of seeing emptiness and seeing the unfabricated. So to the degree that we understand and have realized and absorbed in the depth of seeing emptiness and less fabrication or even the unfabricated, to that degree our openness, our perception of beauty and sacredness is opened in all kinds of ways. That's the flip of saying what I said before in a way.

When—or in the moments, in the times when there is more stress, when we're more bound in self-concern and sort of imprisoned by certain self-views, imprisoned by self-views—in those moments, when that is strong, then generally speaking, there is less of a sense of depth. There is less of a possibility for transcendence, for perceptions that are transcendent, less of a sense of, or the availability of theophanies of beauties and sense of sacredness, generally speaking.

But still, it's complex because what is the effect of reversing priorities? If from the priority of self-growth

and healing and more freedom and less suffering, from that constellation of priorities, if I reverse and I transfer it to my priority as deepening, extending, enriching the sense of beauty and sacredness of all things, of existence, what is the effect of actually reversing those priorities on the very sense of self, the inadequacies of self, and on freedom itself? Because that reversal itself, just the reversing of the priorities before anything else has been seen or opened to or insights had or whatever experiences, just the reversal itself may in itself be immensely healing and unburdening.

So this is, as I said, complex. The relationship here is complex. But the reversal itself can have an effect, an important effect.

And it's also possible that the self can, in its delusion, its habit of contracting and grasping, can easily grasp onto anything and twist it to its own purposes. So even if I do reverse the priorities, I can twist all that and the project of that into just being a reflection of my—or supposed reflection of my progress in doing that. How well am I doing at seeing beauty and seeing sacredness and all that? So a person might even hear about this shift of priorities and orientation and then maybe right away even, the response is, "But I can't do that. Others will be able to do that probably, but I'll fail at it." And the whole thing has become about self again. Self's just grasped hold of something, made it about self, not the divine. "I like the idea, but somehow I just turn it into self again."

So complex, not easy this question, but I want to open it up and just point out its complexity, because I think sometimes we're too quick and too simplistic in our approaching these questions. And, you know, the whole question of the order that I alluded to earlier—do I need to heal psychologically and get a bit freer in my life, a bit more well-being before I can approach all this imaginal stuff and enchantment? Good question, but not simple.

It seems to me that in the world that certainly I move in, the assumption is often, yes, that I need to do that before I can do this. I need to heal psychologically before I can entertain these far out teachings about enchantment and the imaginal. But again, sometimes it is, sometimes it's not, sometimes it's just not simple. Most of the time, the whole question is much more complex, and we bring to it a lot of assumptions that are conditioned by all kinds of things, but contemporary teachings and contemporary psychotherapies.

This is something we're both going to return to later on the retreat, so we'll talk more about this later, fill this out more. It's very important and integral to everything that we're talking about.

But I want to say, I want to point out that for some people—I don't know what proportion, but for some people—soul-making, soulfulness, beauty in all its range and surprising manifestations and the sense of sacredness and the sense of art, the art of all that, the art of perception, what we're talking about, the living as art—and I'm going to talk much more about that soon on this retreat—but all those things, soul-making, soulfulness, beauty, sense of sacredness, the art, these are necessities to their being. For some people, these are absolute necessities, more than a decrease in suffering.

For some people, these elements represent more than mere preferences—they are absolute necessities, more vital than a decrease in suffering or an increase in the peacefulness and comfort of their existence. For some people, art—and I mean that in the very broad sense I employ when speaking of beauty and sacredness—matters more than anything.

We could certainly argue that there are dimensions of soul that all human beings possess, dimensions that need nourishing. We could say that this soul-making, this soulfulness, the sense of beauty, the sense of sacredness, the engagement with the art of existence—of creative existence—is universal to all souls, representing aspects and dimensions of our being that require nourishment and space to grow.

But attractive as that might be as an idea, I don't want to foist that position, which is far more radical and rare than many people might be comfortable with, on everyone. Too many teachings, psychologies, and spiritualities—whether they use such terminology or not—try to present what they're offering as universally applicable to everyone. And if their approach doesn't apply to you, well, you must simply be deluded. I'm not interested in foisting any particular vision or orientation on anyone. I return to what I said earlier: all this is your choice—your choice of where you land or how you move along the spectrum, back and forth, or how it evolves for you over time. Your position regarding these orientations, these intentions, the balance, the weight—all of this remains yours to determine.

But what I do want to ensure is that those who are often not addressed—those people I just alluded to, for whom these aspects of beauty, the sense of sacredness, the soul-making and soulfulness represent actual necessity, for whom art is primary, for whom the art of existence is what matters most, or for whom art in existence matters more than anything else—I want to address and include these people who are often overlooked in spiritual and psychological courses, teachings, and books. I want to include them and ensure that in the range of teachings and emphasis, that radicality of orientation is addressed, because so often it's not.

All of this is complex, but to add one more piece—and we're still exploring the why and the context—all of this is wrapped up with a whole other dimension having to do with meaningfulness. The entire question of meaningfulness in our lives and the meaningfulness of our lives, our sense of individual meaningfulness, is interwoven with everything we've been discussing.

The sense of meaningfulness goes inherently with imaginal work, with fantasy, and with enchantment—particularly with enchantment, because meaningfulness is not merely individual or personal. Our sense of meaningfulness in our lives relates, yes, to individual orientations and movements through life, to aspirations and directions. But it's also related to the meaningfulness or not of the cosmos itself. Again, this is something we're going to return to later in the retreat: the self and meaningfulness, and how that's wrapped up in imaginal work and in the whole notion of enchantment.

This forms part of our fundamental inquiry: why are we practicing? What's the point of the path? Why is it important to offer these teachings? And there's also a relationship between meaningfulness and

freedom—again, we'll return to this.

Just a couple of observations for now. When there's a sense of meaningfulness in life, it often involves a sense of duty—some kind of duty. I know I've talked about this before in other talks. Where an image is alive, where a fantasy is alive, when enchantment is alive, and when meaningfulness is alive and operative, wrapped up in that is not only a freedom that it opens, but also some kind of duty. I mention this now, but we'll return to it.

And one last thing for now: if we do, or to the extent that we do, aim at or orient toward opening up, enriching, deepening, widening the sense of beauty, the senses of sacredness, soul-making, meaningfulness—all these aspects and dimensions of being—to the extent that we orient and aim at those things, the path becomes open-ended.

What's the limit of beauty that we can feel and appreciate and be moved by? What's the limit to the sense of sacredness? There is no limit to soul-making. These things are open-ended. And so when we take them as central to the aim and orientation of the path, the path itself becomes open-ended.

Now actually—and I've said this somewhere before, I can't remember where—when we go really deeply and without simply unquestioningly accepting received tradition or dogma about what freedom from suffering is or where it's limited or what it means, when we actually begin in our thinking and in our path itself, in our lived and practiced path, to open out different kinds and dimensions of freedom, we start to discover that freedom is not one universal, monolithic thing. There are aspects, kinds, and dimensions of freedom, and these are discoverable, achievable. We can sometimes break out into whole areas of freedom—something shatters, and we find ourselves in an entirely other territory of openness, of freedom, that we hadn't even realized before was available, or that we were imprisoned and not free before.

So when we actually start to think about freedom in more probing ways and start to practice in certain ways, the whole question of freedom also becomes open-ended. Freedom is not a finishable project, really. And to me, that's beautiful. Rather than being depressing or a burden, it's actually beautiful. It's open-ended, and that's lovely. It's glorious.

But neither open-endedness is usual, whether it's the open-endedness of more and more, deeper and deeper, richer and richer, wider and wider beauty, sense of sacredness, soul-making, or whether it's the open-endedness of kinds and dimensions of freedom. Neither is the usual concept of the path—it's not usually conceived in that way. So again, this has to do with the context of these teachings and why they might be important.

Let me finish with a few quotes by Carl Jung in relation to this open-endedness that, to me, is very beautiful and very much inevitable when one starts questioning in certain ways and practicing in certain ways. Certainly, as I said, once one gets into the whole realm of the imaginal and the unavoidability of

fantasy, and also the whole question and practices with enchantment.

There's something his long-term assistant, Aniela Jaffé, wrote, and then some quotes of Jung. She said: "The goal of individuation—the realization of the self—is never fully attained. Because it transcends consciousness, the archetype of the self can never be wholly apprehended. And because of its boundlessness, never completely lived in actual life."

This is really what I want to emphasize: because of its boundlessness, it can never be completely lived in actual life. Successful individuation, Jung says, is never total. Jung goes on to say: "But it is just the impossibility of this task that makes it so significant. A task that is possible—that is, solvable—never appeals to our superiority."

So there's something about... something in us that needs something open-ended. Something in us needs something impossible. We don't usually think this way. The ego—or the contracted self, without unpacking all these words right now—gets upset when something feels impossible. But something in us needs something impossible.

Another place Jung wrote: "The serious problems of life are never fully solved. If ever they should appear to be so, it is a sure sign that something has been lost. The meaning and purpose of a problem seem to lie not in its solution, but in our working at it incessantly. This alone preserves us from stultification and putrefaction."

So again, a different way of conceiving of the path, but one I think that when one enters more into the territory of imaginal work and this work of re-enchanting, and when one shifts the priorities—or to the extent that one does, or as I said, even when one really opens out the questions of freedom—this open-endedness, the beautiful open-endedness of the path becomes a fact that we start orienting to and opening ourselves to.

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