The Nature of Enchantment

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 52:52

Welcome, everybody. Welcome to this retreat, to this course, whether you're here in the room tonight or listening at home, to the teachings, the offerings. A very warm welcome.

Both Catherine and I would like to speak a little to introduce the retreat, to get our bearings and get the ball rolling. So I'd just like to speak a little now and really to cover four areas, or to begin to go into four areas.

First, the what. What are we talking about when we talk about re-enchantment in the poetry of perception? What is meant by that? I'll say a little tonight about these four areas, and they are things that we'll come back to and fill out much more. So just touching on them tonight by way of introduction, but as the course goes on, we'll fill them out more.

So what do we mean by re-enchantment? What are we talking about? What are we pointing to? Secondly, why? Why is this important? Why offer a retreat like this? These kinds of practices, these kinds of teachings? Thirdly, just a little bit tonight about the context of the retreat, the context of these teachings, and also the bases. What forms the bases? What are the bases for these offerings, for these teachings? So what, why, contexts and bases, and lastly, a little about some pointers or maybe suggestions, offerings about how to relate to this retreat, how to relate to the practices and the teachings.

Like I said, we'll touch on this now, and these are themes that we'll return to, fill in, elaborate as the week goes by.

Just a reminder, or a statement at least, that the content of this retreat—both the themes and the practices and the orientations—in a way emerge for me organically out of, as an organic expression or extension really, of teachings that both Catherine and I separately have been giving in the last few years. If you like, some of it is an elaboration of that, a further exploration of those things. Some of it is slowing aspects of those previous teachings down and filling them out a little more.

As we hopefully have made clear, we're assuming a familiarity for you, on your part. This is what we asked for. And by familiarity, I mean an understanding, a conceptual understanding, but also a meditative facility—an ability, skill, art in the meditation. So assuming a familiarity with, certainly, all the usual insight meditation teachings that we're familiar with, that are very common these days, but also with teachings and practicings related to the imaginal, and also emptiness.

By emptiness I mean also quite a particular way of approaching it that has to do with the fundamentality of the concept of ways of looking—practicing different ways of looking on the one hand, and also the

concept of fabrication and the fabrication of perception. So emptiness from that avenue, and going deeper and deeper into the richness and the fullness and the fruits of using those concepts of ways of looking and fabrication.

I'm assuming some understanding at least, and some measure of facility with that. The deeper that understanding and skill with emptiness in particular, the easier all this is. All this talk of imaginal and enchantment and cosmopoiesis that we'll be going into—it follows naturally and very organically and becomes, as I say, much more easy, much more obvious in a way, much more accessible, the deeper our understanding and practice with emptiness is.

So assuming some familiarity with the imaginal, with emptiness practice, but also some meditative skill working with one's emotional life, both difficult and lovely, some skill too with samādhi, samatha, the resource of well-being in the body and mind, and also with practices like mettā and loving-kindness. There's quite a lot we're assuming familiarity with.

All of these, especially the last three—the skill with the emotions, the samatha and the mettā—we're orienting around those practices, using the energy body as a kind of foundation, as a vehicle, if you like, for developing those skills and practices. So we're assuming all that.

I don't know how much the material in this retreat will make sense without that familiarity. It may to some people, but for others it really may not. Personally, I'm not going to repeat much of those kinds of teachings at all, because we've asked for those foundations to be there and that familiarity to be there. So on this retreat I won't be repeating much, except things or teachings or concepts or points that, in my experience teaching, actually tend not to land with people. People hear them or actually don't hear them. It just goes in one ear and out the other.

They don't seem to see the significance of them or how radical they are, how much they change the whole basis and the whole fabric, tenor, and orientation and possibilities of what's happening. So those things I might repeat later.

One example would be—and this is something we'll touch on as time goes by—what does it mean to have emptiness as a basis for the whole path? Not as a goal, not as some distant thing, certainly not as some option later, but some understanding, some deepening understanding of emptiness as the basis, putting the whole path and the whole conception of anything to do with the Dharma on the basis of this understanding of the flexibility and availability of ways of looking and the notion of fabrication of perception, those two interwoven concepts. Something that's so important, makes such a difference, and yet is extremely rare, and quite often people really don't hear that or understand yet the significance of it. It doesn't really land as a sort of root and fundamental concept, a ground for what we're doing.

But let's get into these four areas I wanted to talk about. So the first is the *what*. What are we talking about here when we talk about re-enchantment and all that?

I found an article in the Guardian newspaper a few months ago that might help us highlight some of what we're talking about and also make some differentiation. It's written by a guy called David Ferguson—I don't know who he is—but it was in the Guardian a few months ago. So I'm just going to read you some of that. It was an article about trees in cities.

He says: "Scientists say that when human beings see the color green and interact with nature, our bodies manifest chemical and psychological signs of reduced stress. One Texas company is trying to quantify, to calculate for cities, the dollar amounts that trees are worth in their combined capacities as air scrubbers, noise pollution reducers, neighborhood beautifiers, and natural stress relievers. Less cortisol, which is a stress hormone, is given off when you see green," said iTree founder David Nowak, who continues, "We want to develop an index of how much green you can see from any given point in a city, how your body reacts to it, and what the economic value is."

Then David Ferguson continues and points out how trees make the climate cooler in the city. They cool the city down. They absorb pollution, making it less polluted, so there are fewer respiratory problems for city dwellers, commuters, and so on.

But then he says: "All of that aside, and as well-intentioned as Nowak may be, there is something absolutely unquantifiable about the benefits of living near trees." And he continues: "I love to visit New York City and London and some other cities, but after about a week or so, all the noise and grimness and the grey concrete all start to get to me. I begin to ache to run loose in the woods like when I was a kid, in the long free hours between the end of school and dinner. Back then I learned to tell time by the angle of sunlight slanting through the pines. I can still smell rain twenty-four hours before it comes in the soil around their roots."

And he goes on: "Maybe it's that trees live longer than we do. Maybe it's that nothing ever seems to bother them enough to make them yank up their roots and leave. But even now, as an adult, there are times when my thinking gets too sped up and scrambled, and I need to wander into the woods behind my house, shimmy up a tree and sit in its branches. Up there, I can slow down my ricocheting mind, breathe in that sweet green smell, and just think long, slow thoughts."

And then he finishes: "I challenge all the legions of bean-counting accountants in the world to put a dollar value to that. I don't think you can."

So why am I picking this article to share? I really feel he makes some very necessary and good points, David Ferguson, and I don't want to take anything away from what he wrote. But I want to ask both what is hidden within what he's saying and what is missing. What is hidden within it and what is missing from what he wrote.

This is by way not of criticism, but critique. Critique means asking questions like that: what's hidden, what assumptions and orientations are hidden, and what is missing there. It's not about criticism; it's critique.

So first thing: notice for him and the way he talks—both David Nowak and David Ferguson—there's a kind of recourse to basically modernist values and cosmologies. The values that he presents and highlights, and also the cosmologies, the way of assuming or perceiving what the world is, are quite modernist. They're quite—we take them just completely for granted. They're part of our culture.

In terms of the values, there is an appeal in what he writes and the kind of sweetness of it.

There's an appeal to the idyllic memories of childhood and this need for and desire for less stress, for not working. There's a kind of idealization and nostalgia of childhood and of not having time pressure, and the whole orientation of slowing down one's thoughts that he talks about.

So these are very familiar. They sound so familiar, and maybe they're so appealing, just because we're saturated with those kinds of values in our society. They're very modernist values, if you like. They belong to our society at the moment.

But secondly, with the cosmologies, notice the absolute absence of what we might call any dimensionality or depth to the whole perception and conception of nature, of trees or cosmos. So in what David Ferguson writes about what's important to him, there's an appeal to what we could call the purely or the flatly sensual. Nowhere involved at all in what he says or even hinted at is any kind of sense of nature being anything more than material and pleasantly sensual or helpful.

This depth and dimensionality—and we're going to speak a lot, hopefully, about what this might mean for us—is just absent from the discourse of both Davids. When, on this retreat, we talk about re-enchantment, re-enchantment needs to have that aspect, needs to involve and invoke depth and dimensionality. And we'll talk, as I said, more about what that means. So any kind of re-enchantment without depth and dimension cannot really be very full or deep at all as far as what we're talking about is concerned.

Now following on from all that, notice the parallels. I'm not going to say much about this now, but just notice the parallels between what the iTree founder David Novak says, and also the kind of claims of unquantifiability that David Ferguson makes. Notice the parallels between all that and the way they speak and write with the dominant paradigms—what have become the dominant paradigms in a lot of meditation circles and mindfulness teachings. Health, less stress, slowing down thoughts. The idealization of simplicity, childhood simplicity, a kind of innocence. Notice the parallels. I'm not going to say more about that at this point.

And again, related to all this—something we'll return to periodically in the retreat—is what we could call the creep of, since the scientific revolution, the creep of what we might call scientism. Not science, but scientism.

What's that? Scientism is a kind of religion, really, including the belief that science can eventually, or will eventually, explain everything. Everything there is to know about life will be or can be eventually explained either already or eventually by science. And that science is the truest, best and most

trustworthy explanation of anything. Also involved in this kind of religion of scientism is that science deals with what is ultimately true and deals in real entities, entities that are real.

Again, part of scientism is something very central about measurement and including the measurement of value. So actually, a lot of what David Ferguson claims is not quantifiable. I think some scientists say, actually, we can measure values now in different ways. But this measurement is very intrinsic to scientific belief—the importance of measurement, the necessity of measurement. The measurement and value then get put together so that something is actually only valued if it is measurable. And preferably, if it's physical, then it's taken as real. And preferably if it's physically measurable.

So scientists can measure values by giving people questionnaires about their values, about their feelings, about things. But much better from this point of view is if we can find neuronal changes to measure or biochemical measures to change—cortisol levels and all this. And those measurable benefits then constitute more scientific evidence. So all this and more is wrapped up in scientism, and the article, the debate in the article really highlights indirectly some of that coming through.

Lastly, just about this—she doesn't mention re-enchantment. It's not really a notion that's in the article, certainly not the word. But what would it be then to re-enchant the city? Do we need necessarily a sort of return to nature? Do we need to demolish or abolish cities? Or does the re-enchantment of the city come only by having more greenery and trees? Central to our theme: what might re-enchantment mean and involve?

When he points out in the article how he begins to feel a week or so after he's been in New York or London, he's actually expressing and sharing a kind of sensitivity of attention to his surroundings and to what he's perceiving. So this is actually quite central to the practices and the orientations that we're going to be developing. Because it's in developing a subtlety of awareness and attention, a sensitivity that's so much a part—a dimension, an aspect for me, if I think about it—of developing, growing, deepening in meditation practice.

I'll say this again later and re-emphasize it. Subtlety and sensitivity are almost more than anything—more than mindfulness or concentration or this or that or quietening the mind—subtlety and sensitivity are really core and integral to developing, growing and deepening a meditation practice.

So in relation to what he's talking about, can we notice more and more subtly the energetic, psychic and emotional effects in the moment of what we encounter in the world through the senses? And as always with these things, there's a spectrum of subtlety pertaining to what we can notice of the effects on us, on our being.

More or less gross, relatively obvious, or more subtle in terms of what we can feel and observe in the effects that are palpable on the emotions, on the energy body, etc.

For example, at the more gross end, what happens? How does it affect us—the emotions, the energy body,

the being—when we see directly or in pictures vast swathes of land devastated and polluted by tar sands oil extraction? We feel the effect of that on the being. Or when we witness a great expanse of clear-cut forest, or just litter, everyday litter, whether it's in the city or in the countryside. Noticing these effects—some quite palpable, quite obvious.

Or when we are in a place of more pristine nature, or even a photograph of more pristine nature—whatever it is, grass, trees—there's a different effect on the being. The effect of, also the different effects of open spaces: desert or plains or whatever it is, mountains, and more closed spaces like woods.

And then more subtly—it's possible perhaps to notice the different effects on us of different materials. For example, in the city that we see or encounter. So encountering concrete versus stone versus steel, or plastic versus wood. This is happening all the time, of course, when we're moving around, the senses are open, but actually there are noticeably different effects in the heart, in the resonances, in the soul, in the energy body. And part of this subtlety, this sensitivity that we're developing, that can be developed, is to notice all that.

This is actually palpable, certainly on the gross levels, but also on a very, very subtle level. How the being is affected by what it perceives—it always is, and it has to be. But this opens up this possibility and recognition that how I'm affected also depends not just on the material of what I see, of the perception, but it actually depends on the way of looking, which opens up the door to the fact that re-enchanting the world is partly, maybe even mostly—I don't know—in the way of looking, in this flexibility of ways of looking, in the exercise of skill and the art and the poetry of ways of looking.

Let's explore some of this a bit more. When we use that word *enchantment*, you know, I'm aware—Catherine and I talked about it before the retreat—that word can have so many different meanings and implications for people, and people use it in different ways, etc. So we were talking before, and we thought, well, we can at least delineate four kinds of enchantment, at least for us right now. I'm sure there are more.

One we could call a kind of—for want of a better term, there probably is a better term—we could call *imm ature enchantment*. And that's when we're a little bit obsessed with something, but also with the self in relationship to that something. We can tell an immature enchantment with something or someone because the mind and the being contract around that thing or in reaction to that thing. There's clinging, a kind of gross level of clinging involved. Something closes in the psyche. You could say the psyche, the range of the psyche closes. Something is also reified, made real. Okay? There's a kind of realist belief wrapped up in there. And the self is more important than the divine. Again, this is something we're going to come back to. The self and the intentionality, the orientation of the whole enchantment—in the orientation and intentionality of the enchantment, the self actually has more importance and there's more focus on it than the divine. We'll fill that out. So that's the first kind of enchantment, immature enchantment.

Second kind we might call *cultural enchantment*. And this is, for instance, something like our enchantment with science and technology, which in themselves, of course, are extremely useful, but there's something in the way that we're a little bit blind, not just to the effects, but also to the assumptions that are operating there. We don't realize that we're trapped in certain views, certain quite narrow views. If you like, we're kind of captive, just as we are in an immature enchantment, we're kind of captive within an enchantment.

Then there are two kinds of what we could call very positive enchantments. One is, if you like, the enchantment—a kind of spiritual enchantment—but that has a universal or impersonal orientation or basis. So for example, someone doing *mettā* practice after a while and really deepening and opening, and they begin to experience a sense of cosmic love or cosmic compassion. It's a quality that's woven into the fabric and the space of the cosmos, of the universe. And there's a love of that. There's an enchantment with that perception. And also with the capability of opening to that perception. But that love is universal and impersonal.

And also in that, one's own personality, if you like, gets a little dissolved. As it goes deeper, we start to see, I am not separate from this love. I am this love. It imbues me. It's my fabric as much as everything else is. So everything—self, other, world, things, nature, all of it—their uniqueness in a way gets dissolved because their true nature in this perception is universal love and impersonal universal love.

The same thing could happen with awareness—a person doing different practices where awareness is kind of central. Then there's this beautiful opening, mystical, precious openings to a universal awareness, and people give it different names, and it comes in different flavors, etc.

But again, there's a dissolution into the impersonal. There's an enchantment with that. Beautiful, necessary, I think, on the path. Lovely, healing, all of that.

But then there's a fourth kind of enchantment, and this is the one that we're mostly emphasizing and focusing on in this retreat. This is the one that we want to nourish and stoke the fires of on this retreat, partly because it's less talked about, less encouraged.

And that is, again, for want of better words, a kind of mature enchantment that involves the imaginal. So it involves images and the use of the imagination, but also implicit in all that is the sense of what we are perceiving and what we are enchanted with—whether that's the whole of existence or some particular aspect of self or other or whatever—is not perceived and conceived as one-dimensional, as flat. There is a vertical dimensionality to it. There's a plurality of dimensions there, multidimensional. There are levels, if you like, to perceptions.

And wrapped up with that, there's a sense of divinity. Somehow there's a sense of the divinity of what we are enchanted with. I'm going to come back to this because I know it's a loaded concept for some people.

And then also there's a wisdom aspect to this that we have used this phrase before: see image as image. This is an image. And with everything that that means and that implies, we're not reifying, we're not lost

in the image that way.

All these aspects are necessary: the imaginal, the non-flatness, the multidimensionality, the verticality, the divinity, and the wisdom that sees image as image. All that is necessary to this kind of enchantment that we're emphasizing on this retreat. It's mature, if you like, but involving the imaginal.

Actually, in experience, in practice, these four kinds, they arise in mixtures. So I might have a mature enchantment involving imaginal going on, but there's some, perhaps, immature enchantment wrapped up in that. I'm not quite free of the clinging or the contraction that goes with a certain amount of reification or belief or whatever, or it's wrapped up with cultural enchantment or with the more spiritual enchantment of universality, etc. So really, we could talk about a continuum of degrees of involvement of these different kinds of enchantment.

But all of them, or at least the last two—at least what we're calling the positive ones—they lead to, if you like, different kinds and directions of opening. And that's why I'm highlighting this, partly. Different kinds of opening to beauty, different kinds of beauty, different kinds of meaningfulness, different kinds of sense of sacredness, and different kinds and directions of soul-making. So the kind of enchantment leads and opens up in different directions.

And these lead to and bring with them different kinds of freedom. Different kinds of freedom. So freedom is not a simple sort of monolith. It's different kinds of freedom. And each kind of enchantment, direction of enchantment, brings different kinds of freedom and also different kinds of knowing are made available. Again, these are concepts we're going to come back to.

Just a brief example. Someone was asking me about my health situation right now—being very ill and the possibility of death, an early death and not too far away—and asked me about that because I'd said something or written something about how even that was perfect.

So this idea of perfection, as an illustration of what I was just talking about: something like that, a circumstance like that, can be felt and seen and perceived as perfect from one perspective, which is that all is one. All is one cosmic awareness or is one cosmic love or whatever. So even this illness and even this death, it is one.

There is, if you like, the spiritual perception there, which sees the universality. So everything, no matter whether it's good, bad, ugly, beautiful, it all has the one taste, the characteristic of this one. Its truer nature is this one, whatever the one is. And then you can have different kinds of one depending on your perception. So that's beautiful and so helpful as a perception that's available and cultivatable through practice. Mystical spiritual perceptions available through practice.

James Hillman talks about distinguishing spirit from soul. So I'm not too keen on that, making them separate things. But we could call that more spiritual perception, in contradistinction to what we might call a soul knowing, that has to do with amor fati—the love of one's fate or one's destiny—in and including

all the particulars of the events that happen to me, the way they happen, all the particulars of my unique personhood, of my life.

So in this soul knowing, in this soul perception that opens up that's possible, there's a kind of—let's call it perception because—a recognition of, if you like, my soul's coherence with divinity, or rather with a divine intelligence, with the world soul, in and through the events and the particularities and the uniqueness of my personhood and my life.

So it's important to differentiate these kinds, but I don't want to separate them as Hillman tended to do—this spiritual and soul.

But this differentiation is important.

So again, just to recap what I said before about what's essential and integral to the kinds of enchantment that we want to feed on this retreat and explore together. There's this non-flatness to the perception, to the sense and the conception of things. The idea that's so prevalent in modernist conception and perception is that everything is just matter. Whatever arises emerges from the interaction and combination of atoms or whatever, and eventually gives rise to consciousness and human beings. But essentially, everything is just matter. That would be the typical modernist sense and conception of things.

What we want is not that kind of flatness, not that kind of unidimensionality where everything is matter, differing only in the hierarchy of complexity in the organization of that matter. We want something that is not flat, something that involves an unflattening. Wrapped up with this is some sense of divinity, some conception of divinity—even if that sense and conception is very vague, very nebulous in terms of what divinity means. But it has to be there, because in an imaginal-based enchantment, the imaginal—at least what I mean by imaginal—already needs to include a sense of depth and divinity to the images and the fantasies and to their origins. In other words, we somehow recognize or conceive of their origins. These images have their origins and roots in divinity.

But all this is not a matter of belief. We don't want you to believe anything. I don't want to sell this to you as a belief and certainly not as dogma. So what are we talking about when we talk about enchantment without belief?

We're talking about what we could call a poetic state—a state, a stance, an attitude of *poiesis*, which means creative making, artistic creation. It's an attitude of artistic creation with respect to the self, to others, to the cosmos, to the *citta*, the mind, the heart, the psyche, the soul, to being and existence itself.

This enchantment really means inhabiting a poetic state, a state and attitude of *poiesis*. It's dynamic, open, creative. We're not talking about something static, and we're not talking about something formulaic. There are no prescriptions here, apart from the most general ones we've discussed. It's more like an art, and that's something we'll return to—this idea of the art of it all.

That word *cosmos* is actually a Greek word, related to our word *cosmetic*, which indicates the original connotations of the word as opposed to *universe*. It has an aesthetic connotation, this word *cosmos*—origin ally having to do with ordering and forming and fashioning, with ornaments and decoration. In other words, it's creative, it's artistic, it has to do with beauty.

In our practice, what we're endeavoring to do is move in and out of this poetic state, whether deliberately or spontaneously. There's a movement in and out of this state of *poiesis*, or states of *poiesis*.

Now in relation to all that, doubt arises. Almost certainly for everyone, or most people at least, doubt arises regarding notions of reality, regarding the status and the trustworthiness of images, regarding the whole idea of having conceptual frameworks that are non-realist—that do not assume reality or truth about what they conceive or perceive. Doubts about employing ways of looking that are not scientifically endorsed, or even worse, ways of knowing that are not scientifically respectable at the moment.

So doubt around all these things—I would expect it to come up for you. Actually, I would say it's a good sign. It shows that the being is engaged with all this, with these ideas, with these practices. It shows that you're not just believing something in a naive way, or as is somewhat popular these days, trying to return to a kind of primitivism—as if the solution to all our crises now is to just have everyone go back to living in some prehistoric way.

That primitivism is not ours. After modernity, after the Western Enlightenment, after the scientific revolution, after this emphasis on—or belief in—being able to know objectively, where the known must be independent of the knower, after all that, and with our culture so saturated in all that, we can't just turn the clock back. Somehow we have to absorb all that and move beyond it, forwards. But doubt is going to be part of that process—not for everyone, but for many people. And that's fine and important.

Related to all this, something perhaps a little different from what many of us are used to in teachings is that much of the way we will use words could be said to be more poetic. Words like *soul* or *divine* or *God* or even *enchantment*—we're using them poetically, as a different way of using words. We're using them primarily to stimulate soul-making and stimulate *cosmopoiesis*, this creative transformation in the perception of the world. So we're using words to stimulate soul-making *cosmopoiesis*, not just for you, but also for us, for Catherine and myself.

We're not just using words in this clarificatory capacity. In this kind of teaching, we don't gain that much, really. In many cases, we don't gain anything from tight, neat definitions. Certain differentiations will be absolutely necessary, and we might at times say, "When I use that word, I definitely don't mean this, or I don't mean that," to steer us away from certain well-trodden and not-so-helpful paths in this context. Certainly we might make suggestions of what a word might open up in experience and concept. But this kind of teaching and this approach is not Abhidhamma, if you know those teachings.

Sometimes people get so pleased and self-congratulatory when they can define things very neatly and

tightly, and there's a kind of illusion of understanding something. "Okay, I've put everything in a box," but how helpful is that? Occasionally it's helpful, and we think we've understood, and it's all very neat and great, but really, how often is that actually just an illusion that something has been understood and that something is helpful?

It's quite a rare wisdom in regard to practice to actually know, to have a nose for, to sense, to intuit what is actually helpful. In all this availability of teachings and information and concepts and practices, what is actually helpful? What is really important and what is very much secondary? And what leads where? This is quite a big thing, a huge chunk of wisdom, and it's actually quite a rare one.

So we're using words, as I said, poetically, to encourage certain kinds of opening. We're not basing it like Abhidhamma on a realist assumption: "This is this, and that's that, and that's really this, and that's really that." These things—we're not dealing in the realm of truth or reality, we're dealing in the realm of poetry.

Within that state of poiesis that we talked about, integral to that, unavoidably within that, we are entertaining and experimenting with ideas, conceptions, some of which are actually theologies. The conceptual framework, or the logos—I'll be using that word—the conceptual framework or logos that we entertain is dynamic, is elastic, it can stretch. Again, this is something we're not really used to in our way of approaching things, in our way of thinking.

Sometimes concepts will be making very fine discriminations, very subtle discriminations between different aspects or dimensions or directions. And sometimes the conceptual framework will be much more nebulous, much more cloudy and vague. Sometimes it will be very logical and sometimes much more poetic. Sometimes it will precisely circumscribe a certain area, and other times it will be much more open. It's almost like I can't really find the edge of this concept.

But always, always, always, the conceptual framework, the logos, needs to be and will be connected with experience and connected with what we might call phenomenological investigations—our investigations and experimenting with, our practicing with experience and different ways of looking. Always the ideas and the concepts are connected to that. We're not talking abstract philosophy, abstract meaning removed from experience, removed from the possibility of actual investigation. We're not talking about theoretics that's removed from that.

Sometimes when people have very tight conceptual frameworks that either explicitly or implicitly—even if they don't use the word "truth"—are claimed as truths, which is almost all conceptual frameworks that you'll find in the Dharma and philosophy, poke enough at that, whatever that conceptual framework is, and you will uncover contradictions or unjustified, unjustifiable assumptions.

So what happens when the whole way of holding ideas in relation to practice is looser, as I said, more elastic, and not so-called truth-based?

In all this, in this poiesis and the art of it all, there are infinite possibilities. There is not a limit on the

possibilities of experience, of the kinds of cosmos that we live in, of the experience, the perception and the sense of self, of the divine, of other, of the world.

Sure, we might make suggestions, we will make suggestions for different ideas, but really the idea is not to follow that too rigidly. It's not prescriptive, as I said, it's not formulaic, except generally as before, that this kind of imaginal enchantment involves the imaginal, it's not flat, it's more than the usual modernist perception of things. It invokes and involves divinity—whatever that might mean, all the possibilities that might mean—and it also has the wisdom of seeing image as image.

But except for those generalities, there are infinite possibilities. Rather, within the circumscription of those generalities, there are infinite possibilities available to us as experience, as life-changing, being-opening experience.

I think it's from the Jewish Kabbalah—I'm not sure exactly who said it—but there's a dictum that says, "In the messianic aeon, when the Messiah comes, each and every person will have her own perception of God." Each and every person will have her own perception of God.

But implicit in that statement, and implicit even in the traditional Kabbalistic teachings, the messianic aeon is really, I feel, an opening, a shifting and opening of ways of looking. Shifting of the way of looking now, here. That is the messianic aeon. It's something that happens in the heart, in the consciousness, in the soul. And then each and every person will have our own perception of God.

I would actually make that plural: we have our own perceptions of God. There is this infinite possibility for all of us.

So here we have what is usually considered a traditional religion, with all its dogma and established structures, actually containing a level of teaching that is completely radical in its openness—very postmodern, if you will. Not at all dogmatic.

This speaks to something profound about the nature of authentic spiritual teaching. Beneath the surface forms and conventional presentations, the deepest wisdom traditions often carry seeds of the most revolutionary understanding. They point toward a reality that transcends their own apparent limitations, toward possibilities that their own institutional forms might seem to constrain.

In this recognition, we find not contradiction but completion—not the dissolution of tradition but its deepest fulfillment. The messianic consciousness is not something that arrives from outside to replace what came before, but something that blooms from within, revealing the infinite potential that was always present in the heart of authentic seeking.

This is the beautiful paradox of genuine spiritual inquiry: the more deeply we penetrate any authentic tradition, the more we discover its essential groundlessness, its fundamental openness, its invitation to direct and immediate knowing that belongs to no single path yet illuminates them all.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.