The Movement of Devotion (Part 1)

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We emphasized earlier how we are encouraging on this retreat the exploration of different orientations or directions in practice and how they can work together flexibly and synergistically, allowing us to move between them. Those practices include the orientation to samadhi - cultivating that harmonization, that sense of well-being in the energy body and mind, the awareness of filling that out and enjoying it, resting in that alive, bright field of different energy qualities.

We talked about developing sensitivity and skill in relation to the emotions in the moment, using the energy body for that work, with various possibilities there. And we're obviously discussing imaginal practice, again anchored in the energy body, and the expansion of that into cosmopoiesis. So let me say a bit more about these various practices and directions to fill that out further for your practice.

I want to start with something we touched on already. Oftentimes that word samadhi gets translated as concentration, and then carries so much baggage - so much pressure and heaviness and narrow-mindedness in various ways. So often a person practicing, sometimes for years, sits down with their primary objective being to try and have fewer thoughts. If they could ever have no thoughts, that would be fantastic. The whole objective, thrust, and direction - as well as measurement - of their meditation revolves around how much thought there is, with less being better. Unfortunately, this can very easily breed frustration and self-judgment.

If I think of meditation this way, even if I don't quite realize that's what I'm doing, if having fewer thoughts becomes the primary purpose or aim of my meditation and the measure by which I judge my practice, this is a mistake. Even when I'm doing samadhi practice - when that's my orientation and what I'm cultivating in the moment - if that's how I'm thinking about it, it's a mistake.

It's much more important to consider the relationship with thinking, the relationship with a thought in the moment, not the presence or absence of thought, or even how thick and dense thoughts are, how much of a mental thicket they create. What matters is the relationship with any thought that is present.

Is the awareness hooked onto a thought? Does it hook into it and then get dragged along? We're actually grasping at a thought. Even if it's a thought I don't like and want to get rid of, there's a kind of grasping. We become hooked and dragged. Is that what's happening? Is that the relationship? Or is there less hooking? A thought can arise and pass. This is a spectrum - how much hooking, how little hooking, how tight is the hooking? There are other aspects of the relationship with thought involving belief and what we believe about thoughts, but it's the relationship that's primary, not so much the presence or absence of thought.

Secondly, making the reduction of thinking or even the absence of thinking a kind of holy grail that we're chasing would be a mistake for several reasons. But there's a second reason I want to emphasize, which I mentioned already: we want to allow a subtlety of attention.

Now, we're not making a hierarchy here. It's not only about subtlety, and we're not trying to be subtle all the time. There's no hierarchy. But what we don't want to do is prevent subtlety of attention. Very often people practice in ways without realizing that actually prevent the awareness from becoming more subtle, so it just stays at one level. This can happen through the way they're breathing, or paying attention, or the direction they're trying to pursue, or how they're holding their effort - many factors. But very often people prevent a deepening in subtlety in the moment.

Now, by subtlety, remember, I don't mean a microscopic focus of awareness. I don't mean being able to see all the atoms and moments of sensation very quickly or finely. All that's okay and useful to a certain extent - to a limited extent. It has a downside in that it reinforces certain perceptions. If I emphasize it too much, if I have a way of thinking about practice and the path that emphasizes those kinds of perceptions too much, it will tend to reify those perceptions as reality - "this is the basic reality" - and also tend for the mind to keep seeing that way. We've touched on this.

So when I say subtlety on this retreat, what I really mean, as I said already, is subtler, more refined vibrations, energies, qualities, emotions, resonances becoming available to consciousness to notice, to feel, to discern between. A subtler attention is able to receive, perceive, and navigate all that.

When there is less thinking - at those times there is less thinking in meditation - there is the opportunity for an increase in subtlety. It's not a guarantee because I still have to tune to that subtlety, tune to what is more subtle, more refined. We talked about this a little bit.

But when there is less thinking, there's the opportunity for a deepening, an increase in the subtlety and refinement of attention, and then what can be perceived that is more subtle. So many of these things, the causality works both ways—there's a mutual dependency. When there is more subtlety, there tends to be less thinking. But that's a side benefit. The less thinking is a side benefit. Again, it's not the goal.

I would say, especially for this retreat and for many of the practices we're exploring—whether it's a samadhi retreat or a metta retreat or an emptiness or an imaginal retreat—it would be the subtlety that, as I said, we're wanting to allow. Without creating a hierarchy, we don't want to be doing something that prevents that. But we need, as I said, to tune, to incline to the subtlety sometimes of perceptions.

Be careful of the aim, because we don't want to replace subtlety as the goal. That's what I get frustrated about: "Oh, my mind is so unsubtle. I'm so gross. Why can't I...?" We don't want to cling too tightly to whatever aim we have, whatever direction we have in practice, and we must be careful of making too much of a hierarchy there, or any hierarchy, really. We don't want to do that. If we put it this way, we want to have access to subtlety, as well as the not-subtle, the gross, the obvious, and all that.

Now, as I've said before, concentration as focus is not our interest and goal on this retreat. It has its place to be able to keep the mind steady on something, to investigate it, to tune, and so forth. But it's not really the goal. What I'm more interested in is this kind of agility of the mind to switch ways of looking, even for a few moments sometimes. And trusting that and wanting that to become more accessible in one's life—in the busyness of one's life, in a working life, in a life with lots of demands, on the street, in the city.

So it's this agility, this flexibility, these ways of looking we talk so much about, rather than how much can I stick my mind to one object and keep it there with a minimum of thinking and movement. Yes, of course that has its place, but it tends to get way overemphasized as we've talked about.

And secondly, on this retreat, rather than focusing and closing down on something, in a way we could say openness is a big part of what we're interested in. There's a lot to say about that word and its relationship with samadhi. I just want to touch on a couple of things here.

We're interested in an openness of view, an openness of mind, an openness of perception—is my range of ways of looking open?—and also an openness of heart. This is something we'll come back to. The openness of heart is very important for what we're doing, and very important obviously in one's life and in practice in general.

We can also wear open eyes. Now we tend, in this tradition, for people to practice with the eyes closed. You sit down, you close your eyes. In other traditions, they keep them open. If you want, experiment with this on this retreat—eyes open, eyes closed.

You might start a practice with the eyes open, because it might be that there's some kind of cosmopoiesis there already. Already. And we don't notice it. We just shut the eyes. We don't notice that already the world or the people around me—look, I'm sensing them differently. I'm sensing them through the lens of some particular cosmopoetic lens. Then I open, I tune into that, I feel it, I enjoy it, I relate, come into a relationship with that and let that affect me. And then maybe I gradually close my eyes, see if I can take that in with my eyes closed, keep it going with my eyes closed. Or the other way around—I start with my eyes closed, something strong happens with an image or something like that, and then maybe I want to open my eyes and see what effect that has on my perception of the world, see if there's a cosmopoiesis spilling over from the image or the perception of the energy body. Or often, similarly, with emptiness practice—this is very important.

Here at the beginning of the retreat, we've got the open schedule, so people are coming and going, and it might be just too much at the beginning of a sitting to start with the eyes open if there's a lot of coming and going. But see what's helpful.

Be careful here of restlessness. You know, I'm opening eyes, I'm closing them, I'm opening them, and actually what's happening is it's just a movement of restlessness in the mind. So always the question: what's helpful? And the attitude, the stance of experimentation and really seeing what helps. If it's

restlessness, it doesn't help to just act it out. It would be helpful to just choose one—eyes open or closed—and just stay with it for a while. Let things settle a while.

When the eyes are open, it's still possible to have what we might call purely intra-psychic images.

My eyes are open, I see the room, but in my mind's eye, so to speak, I'm seeing something else. If I say "intra-psychic," it seems to imply a rigid belief in a division between the psyche and the world, and in a way I'm really not implying that—but I can't think of a better word. Intra-psychic—you know what I mean—just within the mind.

So even though my eyes are open, it's still possible to have intra-psychic images. And with my eyes open, of course, it's possible to see and sense others and the world in some kind of cosmopoiesis or through some kind of cosmopoietic lens. And with closed eyes, just the same.

In other words, both avenues are open, whether the eyes are closed or not. With the eyes closed, of course, I can tune into an intra-psychic image, a purely intra-psychic image, but I can also sense the world around me. Maybe not visually, but I might have an inner visual sense of it, and I might be hearing and feeling in my body and smelling. And that sensing of the world may be a cosmopoietic sense, a cosmopoietic sensation, perception.

So eyes open, eyes closed—avenues are open here for what can happen in either way.

To really have an experimental approach to practice doesn't just mean flipping around between things. It means adding the question: what makes this or that work right now? Or what is preventing this or that from working? And this is a whole other level of question—actually understanding, if you like, the mechanisms of practice.

If my eyes are open and I'm trying to encourage a cosmopoetic perception that's not happening, do I understand why it's not happening? Sometimes it's not possible to understand these things, but oftentimes it is—oh, it's not happening because of this. Or if something is happening and it is working well, what are the factors that are actually supporting that in the moment?

So there's a kind of meditative research going on that's actually really important. The Buddha talks about this in the Pali Canon when he talks about hindrances and factors of enlightenment. He's also talking about a real active, engaged interest in the experimentation, discovering what feeds what—to use his words—and what starves what. The same thing with all these more extended practices. There's really this interest in the question: How come this works now? What's missing? What's needed? What helps?

One of the things that's significant in making an imaginal practice work, or working with a particular image at any moment, or with a particular cosmopoiesis, is the relationship with the object sensed. If, for example, my eyes are open and I'm trying to gently encourage this cosmopoiesis or allow what seems to be there, and I reify too much—either the object in any way, what I'm looking at or sensing, taking it as

real, taking this perception as real—or if I'm grasping at it because it's so attractive or it's repulsive and there's too much gross grasping, pushing or trying to cling on, keep the experience or chase after it—this reification and gross grasping will tend to dissolve, destroy, inhibit the cosmopoiesis, destabilize it.

Or again, if I have my eyes open, looking at the world, sensing the world around me and trying to gently encourage a cosmopoiesis, and I lose contact with the energy body and lose the sensitivity with the energy body, again, it probably won't be helpful. If there's any kind of even subtle leaning towards whatever is, so to speak, out there—even subtle—that subtle leaning is a kind of grasping, and the imaginal realm will fade, the cosmopoiesis will fade because of these factors. It's a relationship with what's being perceived.

We're interested in openness, and another kind of openness has to do with the sounds that surround us in the course of the day in a meditation. The sounds of others, of humans—are they sounds or are they noises, which often has a more negative connotation? Are they seen as distractions from my meditation, my concentration? Again, something's shrunken in the whole view there. That whole view is quite tight, quite impoverished, actually.

In the course of what we're doing—and we'll talk about this more and more this week—I hear the noises of human beings around me or far away over the fields or in the street, and rather than try to exclude them to preserve my concentration, so one's in a battle with those sounds, is it possible to encourage this openness to include the sounds?

There are all kinds of ways of doing that, but on this retreat, where we're focusing more on this kind of imaginal-based re-enchantment, can I include them but actually shift the view of them to hear, sense these sounds differently? So these human noises are the sounds of angels, or the sound of the divine speech, of mantra. Can I actually shift that view and include them?

Maybe that becomes then the focus of the meditation—this shift in view, this enchanted view of these sounds and of these people, whoever they are. I don't even know who it is making these sounds. Seeing them, sensing them, playing with their conception and entertaining the idea that they are angels. What does that mean? I don't know. Does it matter? No. What matters is you can feel it come alive. You can feel it change the relationship. And that enchantment come in and that beauty and that sacredness and the openness and the softening.

So there are all kinds of possibilities here, and there are possibilities that don't have anything to do with the kind of enchantment we're talking about that are also very skillful. But there's something about the openness there—opening to include and opening the view, or rather shifting the view. More generally speaking, there's a kind of openness. As we've already emphasized just in this talk, we've taken this flexibility of practices and flexibility between practices.

The energy body is always the kind of touchpoint, the aspect of things, the dimension of our being that we don't want to really ever lose. We want to keep in touch with whatever practice we're doing. But we can

move between just focusing on the emotions in different ways, working skillfully with the emotions—both the beautiful ones and the difficult ones, and even very subtle ones that are neither. We've talked about this in other talks that you've listened to already from the other retreats, but there are ways that just staying with the emotions, whatever's happening there, working skillfully with whatever's happening—gross, subtle, painful, difficult, whatever—can be really, really fruitful practice in itself. So that's one avenue, that's one kind of practice.

Imaginal practice, cosmopoietic practice, the direction of samadhi—all of that. We can move flexibly and sensitively and find out what's helpful at any time, moving between these practices. Sometimes one of them is just not a helpful thing to be trying to do. We're bashing our heads against a brick wall or getting too tight with it or something or other, and actually we need to shift to one of the others.

But at this point we can open up—at this point in the retreat we can open up a little bit to allow more images, and then move flexibly between practices, always noticing the energy body and sensitive to the resonances. If we are working with images, we stay sensitive to the soul-making, the qualities of soulfulness, emotion, and so forth, particularly in and through the energy body, but also really in the whole psyche.

So let me say a little bit about imaginal practice and cosmopoiesis. A friend of Catherine's, who's a Jungian analyst, was talking with Catherine, and he had said to her that what they call the practice of active imagination—which is somewhat similar to what I might call imaginal practice—he said, if I remember rightly, that it's just a grace. It's a grace when that happens. It happens spontaneously. In other words, there's nothing we can do to kind of make that happen, this kind of entering into the imaginal realm, if you like.

But this is something that I don't agree with, and I'd like to encourage a different attitude to that. Because sure, the images arise spontaneously and we enter the imaginal realm, so to speak, spontaneously. Cosmopoiesis can also arise spontaneously. But definitely also we can practice deliberately. We can engage imaginal practice deliberately and cosmopoietic practice deliberately. We can incline the psyche and the perception, the way of looking, and there's the possibility of finding attitudes and factors and things that we can do that actually support the opening of the door, let's say, to the imaginal realm and the crossing of that threshold into the territory of soul-making.

We can actually support a shift in the mode of being and a shift in the ways of looking to open into imaginal practice and cosmopoiesis. When I reflect on this and kind of notice carefully what's going on, I see that there are—we could talk about or highlight four aspects or four factors that support and enable this more deliberate opening of the door of the imaginal and the cosmopoiesis. They're not completely separate, as so often with these kind of things. They feed each other. They're mutually dependent. They're dependent arisings. But it's helpful, I think, to separate them and say a little bit about each.

So the first is fabricating less—a decrease in the moment, in other words, in that stretch of practice for

some period, a decrease in the fabrication of perception in general. And that can come out of samadhi practice, which—the way I would think about it is almost by definition involves some degree of less fabrication. It's not the way most people think about samadhi practice, not the way most people think about practice, period. We've touched on this. But it could come through metta, it could come through emptiness, it could come through the imaginal, it could come—basically it comes from less clinging. I'm using clinging in a broad sense here. When there's less clinging, there will be less fabrication of perception in that moment.

And that movement into less fabrication kind of makes everything soluteo, liquid. It loosens everything. And that loosening allows a number of other factors. So some degree of less fabricating is a factor involved in and supporting this opening the door of the imaginal realm and cosmopoiesis—some degree. That's the first one.

The second one is what I would like to call very loosely synesthesia, which is a word that some of you may know. I don't mean literal clinical synesthesia. What it really means is a kind of mixing and blending of the senses so that it can sometimes seem like I see sounds or I hear a bodily sensation or feel that in the body. There's a mixing of all or some of the senses. Actually, as it gets deeper, all the six senses—mind, sight, smell, taste, touch and sound, body sense—

all those six senses, they kind of gather more into one. So it's almost like to think is to feel the thought in the body somehow. To hear a sound is somehow to see. Six senses become one. You can't even separate between what one thinks and hears or sees or feels in the energy body field.

This is a continuum and gradually, this will happen anyway as fabrication gets less. Six senses that seem so separate, each with their own domains, sense fields, etc., gradually become more sort of one in the same sense field. And eventually, when there's really very little fabricating, the senses do not arise. Sensation does not arise. There is the unfabricating of vedanā, sensation, and perception.

But it also happens in imaginal practice, this synesthesia, a little bit, or a lot.

Okay, so first, lessening fabrication. Second, a degree of synesthesia, what we might call synesthesia. Third is a stance and posture, if you like, of the heart. So this is, again, involved in and supports. So it's a factor of, but it's also a contributing factor of imaginal practice and cosmopoiesis.

A posture, an attitude of the heart of, I would say, receptivity, but also some kind of humility and even surrender. I'm going to say more about this, but this heart aspect is very important. So heart is not soul. Soul, if you like, includes heart. That's what I'm saying here. Soul needs to include heart. But heart doesn't always mean soul or soul making.

Sometimes people ask themselves, what do I really want? What do I really want? And they come up with the answer, love or something. And they mean... what do you mean? Do you mean just a heart quality? Because we're not used to thinking in this way. We don't think, actually, what I also want is soul. When I

say love, I probably don't just mean a heart quality. I mean a soul element of that love as well. I've talked about it elsewhere, so I'm not going to come back to it.

But a third factor here, a third aspect, is an attitude or a state or stance of the heart. And the fourth is imaginal perception itself and tuning to imaginal perceptions, which I've talked about on other talks, other retreats. These four aspects.

Now, of these four, the first and the third are things that we can do. We can actively trigger them, engage them, move in that direction. That might, for some of you, sound like too much of a pipe dream or something that's not accessible now. So let's say we can learn as we develop practice to do these, to fabricate less and less. We learn that skill, if you like, and similarly we learn how to open the heart in the moment, just shifting something so that the heart opens, so that there is humility, surrender, receptivity, openness, that posture of the heart.

And that those two movements of fabricating less and opening the heart in the moment become easier for us as we develop in practice. For some of you will know that, and for others it's something to realize, take it on faith or whatever, that that's the case. But these movements, fabricating less and opening the heart, if you like, in receptivity, in humility, we can do these.

And that doing of those two allows the opening of the imaginal, the fourth factor, in ways that affect the soul more deeply, that are more soul-making. In other words, if there's too rigid a fabrication being clung to and if the heart isn't open, the imaginal won't open so deeply and won't affect us so deeply.

But these two factors, the lessening fabrication and the opening of the heart, also will, especially the lessening fabrication, will allow some degree of synesthesia. And what I'm calling synesthesia is this mixing and inter-relating, almost like blending and communication of the senses, if you like. And that so-called synesthesia functions then, at that time, as a different mode of knowing.

In other words, the modes of knowing that we know are the six senses. We figure something out through thinking, or we intuit it, or whatever, or we see it, or we know it through hearing because we've heard it, whatever. But in a way, when there's a synesthesia, we can talk about a different mode of knowing.

So, just to give an example, you know, with being so ill and having, well, most of the...

I have this illness, I have cancer, and sometimes when I go to practice and sit, I begin with an attitude of humility. When my illness becomes part of my meditation theme—perhaps I'm not feeling well that day—I start with a felt, deep acknowledgment in the soul of humility, a stance of humility. I recognize that I cannot cure myself of cancer, and it's very possible the doctors can't either. There's a sense that I cannot do this on my own. It's not something within my power.

In that recognition, there's an acknowledgment of humility: I do not, I cannot do this alone. From that humility, a step further emerges—if I'm doing imaginal practice—an openness and surrender to what I'll

call God. I'll put it in quotation marks if you prefer, because there is this seeing of image as image, this looseness and non-fixation, this non-reification of any idea of divinity that we're exploring throughout this retreat.

But out of the humility comes a further movement, a gesture of psychic attitude: openness and surrender to a god or angel or deity—something numinous and other, some imaginal figure. This needs to happen first, before that image or sense of that deity comes alive. This openness and surrender includes and involves a deep, deep acceptance of surrender to what will be, to their will, to use a certain language.

It's not a technique to try and fix or guarantee some kind of deal to get what I want. It's more about a profound opening of the entire being—heart and soul—to that deity and to the way it permeates my being and affects my life, the events of my life and my death. But again, the humility and then the openness and surrender to the figure need to come first. They give it aliveness. Not always, but often.

And then all kinds of things are possible. From that openness of the heart, that stance of the heart, when the imaginal has come alive, maybe the synesthesia comes. For example—and I could give many examples here—I hear the birdsong outside, and the heart, the soul hears it as blessing. Blessing the cosmos in all kinds of ways. We'll talk a lot, hopefully, on this retreat about what that word even means: blessing.

But an element of the blessing is that they are healing me. The birdsong has some kind of divine or angelic function as healing. It's as if the sound, the beautiful sound of the birdsong—I'm open to it and it somehow feels, with the synesthesia, that the fragments of melody are reweaving or restructuring through sound. They're restructuring my energy body.

So I'm hearing it, but I'm also feeling that. I'm feeling it as healing. I'm feeling some kind of re-sculpting or rewiring or reshaping, reweaving of this energy body, and opening to that—to the beauty of that and the blessing of that and the divinity of it and the preciousness of it. There's a kind of synesthesia then between the sound and the body sense. They almost feel the same thing. The sound is the reweaving of the energy body, something very beautiful. There are many examples one could give.

Similarly, some of you will be familiar with tantric practices in other traditions—working with the yidam, with the tantric deity, Tara or whoever you're practicing with. It's a similar thing. The devotion, the surrender, the openness, the humility are vital and indispensable aspects or factors in that practice if you're working with a tantric deity. Usually they need to be there first, these qualities of the heart. That's what I need to take care of first—not always, but often.

I need to actually feel them, feel what that feels like: the devotion, the openness, the surrender in the heart, in the energy body. And then a door opens. That's part of opening the door. In the Tibetan tradition they talk a lot about preliminaries or prerequisites. It's a similar thing here. We're talking about something in the heart that actually needs to open, soften, shift.

Without that, a door into the imaginal as something alive will not open. Without that genuine aliveness

that comes from the heart opening, those kinds of practices just become exercises in visualization or concentration, focusing the mind on visual images. They become quite dry and barren and actually unproductive.

So the heart and its attitude or posture in the moment is crucial. In that moment, it's crucial, literally—it takes the practice this way or that way. Crucial from crux, cross. This applies equally to working with the imaginal figure of love we explored in our meditation the other day, or any imaginal figure that's loving you, from whom you're receiving love, any flavor of love there, any character of love.

Remember, the appearance of that imaginal figure may be very ethereal. It may have a body of light or a particular colored body—red or blue or whatever. Or it could be very human in its appearance. It could be animal, could be a deity. It could be very solid as opposed to a body of light. It could be someone I even know—a friend or lover—or someone I don't know, if it's human. Maybe the features in the image are clear, maybe they're more vague. But what's clear, and even if it's not, it could be not visual at all—remember, it could be just a sense. But what's clear is the character, the qualities of presence that this particular imaginal figure has.

Their being, their particularity, their personhood is sensed, even if the features are not clear visually. That's what characterizes imaginal practice—a sort of uniqueness of personhood, of character, if you like, in the image.

When these four aspects, four factors are there—the lessening fabrication, what I'm calling synesthesia, the attitude of heart, and the imaginal perception and tuning—if that's all there, then a lot is possible. All kinds of avenues of experience, directions, become possible in imaginal practice, cosmic oasis, tantric practice, whatever.

So in repeating a mantra, for example, or working with a tantric deity yoga, or any kind of imaginal figure as we've been talking about, or cosmic oasis practice, we could delineate three gradations. Cautious of this word hierarchy, let's discern three possibilities there.

First, there can be, in the mantra reciting or chanting, or in the tantric relationship with the imaginal figure of the tantric deity, a kind of invocation that is a supplication. As I'll talk about in a minute, what that means is asking, a kind of praying, an opening to the other, opening to this other who is, yes, larger than me, more powerful. There's a humility there. There's the beauty of that invocation, supplication, opening to what's larger.

Then as one stays with that, perhaps with that image, with that cosmic oasis even, or with the mantra—this is particularly the case with devotional yoga to an imaginal figure or a tantric deity—there can be a harmonizing of one's being in that moment with the qualities of the deity invoked. So for example, Avalokiteshvara—one harmonizes with the compassion that that imaginal figure embodies and emanates and radiates. Or just by holding them in one's imaginal gaze, one starts to harmonize one's

energy body, one's emotional body starts to harmonize with those qualities. We absorb them through a harmony that comes about through the sustained imaginal perceiving and sensing.

Or it might be, if we talk in terms of traditional Buddhist tantric deities, Yamantaka has this sort of fearless power to destroy what must be destroyed, whether that's illusion or certain unhelpful structures or even death—the destruction of death through the knowing of the deathless, of the timeless. In meditating on Yamantaka, it's the fearlessness and the power and the creative destruction, if you like. These are the qualities that we harmonize with, and our being gathers and comes into relationship. It comes into relation with the deity and with those qualities and harmonizes with those qualities. So there's a kind of sympathetic resonance going on.

But even fuller or more complete or deeper than that, there is a real sense of fusion or union with or becoming the deity, the imaginal figure, so that we experience our body as divined. We look at others and look at the world through the eyes of that divinity, through the eyes of that imaginal other. We see and know and sense with their vision, with their perception, with their sensibility, and hear things as they hear. We feel and know as that deity.

And because the deity sees us, in a way lives in a different world—meaning they perceive a different world—through that, we actually transform the cosmos in doing so. It turns into a cosmic oasis and reinforces that cosmic oasis that may be already happening.

So the practices of imagining yourself as a deity ultimately involve more than just imagining that you have a red body or imagining that you're powerful or whatever. One actually feels that one becomes that deity. One enters into that deity's experience of body, of world, of matter, of time, of other, all of that.

So all of this is possible. You could say when these factors are there, all these doors are possible and in many different directions as well, not just levels but also directions. And it can happen in many different ways.

For example, when there are all these factors—these four factors happening—less fabrication, synesthesia, the heart stance, the open, humble, receptive heart, and the imaginal perception and tuning. And in all that is implicit that we're with the energy body and the whole space of the energy body that will, in becoming less fabricated as the first factor, the energy body may become lighter or more kind of liquid, if you like.

And sometimes in this imaginal practice, it can actually become one with, as I said, the deity or the qualities or the energy or the essence of that imaginal figure, or even one with the theophany of the cosmos around you, one with the cosmopoiesis. It's as if there's a communion—if we borrow that word—a communion, an influx of those energies and essences, so that actually the body and the being merge with that cosmopoiesis, very particularly, or with that imaginal figure.

Often this happens quite spontaneously when these four factors are present, when there's energy body

awareness and one's opening and tuning to the imaginal. One of the things that can happen is this kind of communion or union. Sometimes it can happen very suddenly, in a flash. Something's transformed or opens out into this union in almost what feels like a split second. Other times it can happen much more gradually, one transitioning into this more merged state or state of communion with the cosmic theophany or the figure.

And as I said, in doing that—either becoming one with the imaginal figure or one with the cosmic theophany—there is this transubstantiation that happens through our perception. The world, the cosmos feels, is sensed to be different. We have an altered image of what is there.

I'm thinking actually now about Holy Communion or the Eucharist. In the Catholic churches and some of the other churches, this is regarded as a transubstantiation of matter. It becomes divine. This bread, this wine becomes divine. What we're saying, we're putting that in the realm of perception, but there is a Holy Communion with that imaginal figure and also with the cosmos made divine in the perception, just as in something like the Eucharist or other rituals. It's a transubstantiation through communion that's happening through imaginal practice when we take care of these aspects and factors that feed that practice. It's one of the possibilities that can open for us. Very beautiful.

Just to make clear, we don't have to grasp at any of these experiences that I'm talking about, or so-called stages or levels, or force them to happen. In a way, I'm just mapping territory. If we just practice and open, all kinds of wonderful things will happen. We don't need to grasp particularly at this or that, I don't think. Take care of the conditions and the path in its fullness, in its wideness, its breadth and its depths will open for us.

All kinds of surprises, I think, in imaginal practice. We don't really have to engineer this or that experience. Do this for a little while and you will be very surprised and very pleasantly surprised. It's not easy to predict exactly what will happen, but there are things we can delineate and point out as part of a map.

Thank you for listening.

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