The Gift and the Artifice of Self (Part 2)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:13:58

So just to sum up what we've explored thus far, disenchantment arises partly from the pervasive flattening of either biological or psychological reductionism—reducing everything to neurophysiology or past historical events—or sociological reductionism that reduces everything to social conditioning. There's a profound flattening in that reductionism.

There's also an inhibited capacity for enchantment that emerges from certain spiritual emphases, whether in the Buddhadharma or other traditions like Advaita Vedanta. These teachings overemphasize the universal: the self as process, the self as nothing, always regarding the self as empty. This oneness orientation, whatever form it takes, emphasizes teachings or levels of perception that highlight the universal versus those that emphasize and include the particular—the particular person, what is my individual personhood.

The alternative is a regarding of the particular through all the events of my life as divine, and even more than that, as necessary to the divine, necessary to God. My particulars, my person, your person, your particulars, your struggle, your dukkha—all the aspects, the infinite aspects that make you up—are somehow necessary to God. God needs you to go through this because in a way, through you going through that, he, she, it goes through it. It's part of the growth of the being of God.

There's also disenchantment from what's less obvious, more insidious: this relative balance between self-aspiration, self-orientation, intentional self-serving orientation in terms of healing, psychological growth, self-empowerment, or self-expression. It might use the language of the divine, but it's actually about self, or mostly the leaning is about self, rather than leaning more towards the divine. The purpose, the intention, the aspiration, the reason for practice, for healing—one is really grounding it and orienting it towards the divine. The balance is more toward that than toward the self.

We could use these as if they're two separate things, or as a way of really integrating the two. But oftentimes a person might think that's what's happening, or want to think that's what's happening—that it's really about God, and they use that language. But so quickly it slips back to a self-project. Or there's not really the fullness in what was sensed in the orientation in the first place; it really was always just about self, just a self-project. This is very common.

These are some of the reasons that constellate and condition and hold in place a disenchantment of everything, but in this case we're focusing on self and other.

Given all that, we could ask: what needs re-enchanting? When we say to re-enchant the self, what do we

mean more fully by that? What aspects or dimensions of the self need re-enchanting?

I would say actually all levels of the self need re-enchanting. Let me explain what I mean by that, because I mean it in two different but related ways. All levels of what I've called the vertical spectrum of the imaginal—all the images of a self or other. I might feel myself or see myself through this image or through that image, and it's as if they exist on a spectrum. All of those images need re-enchanting and need seeing and feeling as divine. We need to see and feel them as divine.

Practice, for example receiving divine light or love—some of the practices we've touched on in this retreat—this receiving of divine light and love is received by all images of the self, anywhere on that vertical spectrum of images of the imaginal. All levels on that spectrum, and all levels on the spectrum of the fabrication of self-sense.

Sometimes the self is fabricated and tense, feels very solid and very contracted. Sometimes the self feels like an atomistic process—that's fine, that's slightly less fabricated. Sometimes a self is a much more universal, cosmic self. Sometimes a self is a nothingness. Sometimes a self is experienced as barely there at all—barely fabricated, very ethereal, very unformed, very tenuous, refined sense of self. And sometimes the self is felt and sensed, whether imaginatively or because of the degree of unfabricating, as already divine and already light.

But all these levels, whether the imaginal levels or the levels of different degrees of fabrication on the spectrum of fabrication of the self-sense—all of it needs to be both... We need to play with, in practice, seeing and feeling all of these different levels as divine. Or we could say practices where we receive light and love from the divine. Again, all the different levels, both imaginal and fabricatory. All of them, from the most solid and the most painful and contracted to the most blissful and divine and barely there at all.

Again, this is one of those things where the more one has played with emptiness practice and seen in practice this spectrum of fabrication, played with unfabricating and moved up and down on that spectrum and really seen the degree of range of the fabrication of perception of self, the more flexibility there is in moving up and down these spectrums and seeing it all as empty and playing with it in these ways.

Somehow or other, and in time, all these levels need to get included, seen as divine, felt as divine, and receiving divine light and love in order to re-enchant the self.

So all levels, but also all aspects of self and others. Our emotions need re-enchanting, our desire needs re-enchanting, our dukkha, our suffering needs re-enchanting, our imagination needs re-enchanting, our mind—and I mean mind in the broader sense, citta, heart-mind, soul—our creativity needs re-enchanting. Our meaningfulnesses need re-enchanting. By that I mean they all need to be given legitimacy.

Because of this confusion we've discussed about different cultures, not all our emotions are given legitimacy, and not all our desire is either. By "given legitimacy," I don't mean acting out or being lost in

them or anything like that. Given legitimacy means recognizing that there is something here that is a treasure. There is something sacred. It might be emerging in a way that appears contorted. It might not fit the picture I have of what is legitimate or holy. But all of this needs to be given legitimacy. It needs to be given permission. It needs to be given space to grow and expand and move into—again, not constrained by a certain conceptual framework of what it is or what's allowed, or a certain image of what it must be or what's permitted.

All these aspects of self need to be, as we said before, seen as divine in their roots—if you like, their origins. Not necessarily their origins in time, but their roots—that's a better word. Given legitimacy, given space to grow, to expand, to move into, and seen and felt as divine in origin. So that's the work of both the conceptual framework and also of practice, practicing ways of looking.

We can touch on a few of these perhaps now. Desire—I mentioned desire as one of the aspects of self, one of the elements of self, if you like. I've talked about this in other talks in the past, and I hopefully will talk more in the future about this in much more detail, the possibilities there. But Henri Corbin, for example, talks about longing as being—I can't remember the exact word he used—but almost like the driver, the engine of the human being. There's a kind of nostalgia, if you like, for the divine. He doesn't mean this nostalgia as in the past, as if we were with the divine before the Big Bang or something like that, but a non-temporal nostalgia. Something in our being knows a closeness with the divine, and we long for that again.

Jacob Boehme, a very influential mystic writer from I think the sixteenth century, used words like "purity" and "innocence" because in a way he was surrounded by a culture that put so much emphasis on the impurity and the fallenness of humankind. So he used words like: there is in us still a purity and innocence, and it longs for, it desires what he called "the holy" or "the paradisal element." It longs for holiness and paradise, and that holiness and paradise is inner—it's within us, if you like, the core of our being—but it's also outer in the world. This world as heaven, this world as Buddha realm, as we've talked about. So there's a desire for that. We have a desire that is holy. We have desires that are holy, that are divine in origin, that need to be legitimized and given space.

As well as that, and I've talked about this on other retreats, there is, if you like, the desire that comes from the daimon—desires that we see in ourselves that don't fit the usual Buddhist or, for example, Christian pictures of what it is that we should desire. They seem darker, or we easily confuse them with greed, or we think they're deluded, or that's just clinging or whatever. I'm not going to go into this now. I'm mentioning these as, if you like, two different kinds of desire: this transcendent desire, if you like, that Jacob Boehme was talking about—something in us that is transcendent, that yearns for the transcendent—and also the desire from the daimon.

The whole question with all this, and the question of desire, is the question of eros. This, what I've been defining in other talks and retreats, is eros as the desire for connection. And that having, again, a quality

of inexhaustibility, a quality of always wanting more—what the Greeks used to call pothos within the eros—always wanting more, always wanting more connection, this movement, insatiability, if you like. Very easily, we just put all of that into the camp of craving and clinging and greed, et cetera, in a kind of Dharma language.

So are they the same? How are they different? Maybe one is a treasure. One is the pearl of great price, or part of that, and other ways of relating to that actually make it problematic for us. Certainly the relationship is not simple between eros and clinging, craving, whatever, greed—whatever word one wants to use. So important for us as human beings to really actively ask these questions and not just to receive, as I said, something from a culture, which then becomes stultifying, constraining, actually does not work—certainly for enchantment, but does not actually work in our life.

So Gregory of Nyssa, one of the fathers, I think, of the Orthodox Christian tradition, said: "The thirst of human souls requires some infinite water. How could this limited world suffice?" The thirst of human souls requires some infinite water. How could this limited world suffice?

So again, the thirst of human souls being the seeking for the transcendent, for the oneness with God, but also this desire for the daimon—whatever it is, sexual or something else—so easily seen as ego or lower nature or this or that or clinging, craving, put into a bad camp. But maybe both kinds of desire, both, if you like, the transcendent and what comes through the imaginal and the erotic in that way... If I have a limited worldview and a limited self-view, that won't be enough for us. We require infinite water.

So there's this need for respect for our desires, for changing the view of our desires, for re-enchanting the desires, and also within that, recognizing that there's a kind of infinity to the desire as well. It desires the infinite, but there's an infinitude to desires as well, in terms of what they are in a deeper sense, what they're conveying in a deeper sense.

I said also the mind needs re-enchanting. So aspects of a human being—our mind, and again mind meaning heart, psyche, citta, mind.

We talked about in another talk how some views actually regard the human and the divine mind as being, if you like, on a continuum. So the human mind at its core, at a deep level of the human mind, is actually one with the divine mind. And certainly the human imagination is also on a continuum with the divine imagination. But if we say mind, then it includes our emotions, our imagination, our creativity. It's certainly that idea that all of this at its core is divine. We are impregnated with the seed, with the word, with the logos of the divine.

Although it's on a continuum with the divine, that is a metaphysical concept. But it's one that we can actually entertain in practice, if not one that we can intuit through practice, actually have a real sense of. Again, we create it, and then we see what happens when we entertain it, when we employ it, engage it as a way of looking. But we can also intuit it or discover it. It feels like, "Yes, I sense that to be, in inverted

commas, true. I sense that I'm discovering this perspective or this metaphysical fact, if you like."

So these ideas—that particular idea—exist in many different traditions. For Corbin, there's really one fundamental creative matrix for all experience and all sensations, and that is this divine mind, and particularly the divine imagination. Because humans partake of that human imagination, especially when it's trained—what he would call imaginal—it is on a continuum with the divine imagination. And again, in certain ideas of the world soul, very similar, or certain versions of the Buddha nature teaching in the Dharma.

So this seeing of various aspects of our being, of our self, of our humanity—our mind or whatever it is, aspects of mind—this seeing them as divine is different, I hope this is clear, from seeing them as anattā, as not-self.

Many of you will hopefully know that there's a whole practice of regarding the mind, or regarding thoughts, or regarding aspects of mind, elements of mind as not-self, as anattā. It's a very, very important and skillful practice, really an avenue into a lot of depth. So when we regard things as anattā, when we adopt that way of looking, there is this dis-identification, not identifying with this or that, with the mind as a whole, with aspects of the mind. There's a dis-identification and the freedom that comes with that. But there's also something else that happens, which many of you will recognize. There's a kind of prying loose of our automatic tendency to value things, to believe in our thoughts and also what they say about us.

So when we regard them as anattā, we don't tend to believe them so much, and we also tend to not identify with them and not take them so personally in terms of what they mean for us, about us, about what's going on with us even. More largely...

So this is a practice, this seeing things as anattā, this work or a way of looking. To always do that, to always see every aspect of mind as anattā, would be a little silly. It's a practice, it's a way of looking. Again, we're back to this flexibility idea. We go in and out of that as a potentially skillful way of looking, and it's potentially extremely skillful, extremely fruitful. But the question is, when is it helpful? When is it actually the wrong thing to do to view things that way?

To try and view that way always would be silly. We move in and out and it brings much deeper insight regarding emptiness. It doesn't only bring a dis-identification in the moment and prying loose of the valuing and all that. It also brings deeper insights. But still, we move in and out of it according to our sense of when it's helpful, when it's skillful.

Just the same, just the same with this way of looking or playing with conception of the divine origins of the self, of the mind, of our images. We move in and out of that view. We need to navigate that movement in and out. We need to navigate our way, find our way with this flexibility. It would be silly and probably, you can imagine, pretty dangerous to always regard everything that moves through my mind, any element of myself or mind, as holy and divinely inspired and all that. So there needs to be some

pragmatism and wisdom here, and sensitivity is really important.

There's another issue connected with all this that has to do with, if you like, the order of what we regard as divine, the order in which we regard different aspects as divine. What is light and what is good—it's easier to see that as divine. But seeing what is dark in us and what is, quote, bad or seems bad, to regard that as divine—would it be safer to really cultivate the good and see the divinity of that and develop what is light and pure, so-called, and then actually, on that basis, with that resource and having cultivated that, then to begin to learn to see and to practice seeing that which is, if you like, darker or the bad in us as divine?

Certainly Carl Jung thought so, that this was the order in which it was quite important that things happened. But still, he emphasized the importance of seeing the divinity of darkness, to open to the dark gods. So he wrote, I think in "Answer to Job": "The guilty man is eminently suited and is therefore chosen to become the vessel for the continuing incarnation"—it's kind of old style language. I hope you can get the gist of what's being said here. "The guilty man is eminently suited and is therefore chosen to become the vessel for the continuing incarnation, not the guiltless one who holds aloof from the world and refuses to pay his tribute to life, for in him the dark god would find no room."

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If we're truly to re-enchant the dark gods, they need to find room within us. They need to be re-enchanted—those aspects of ourselves that we would usually shut out of a spiritual view. "Now, that's not spiritual. That can't be divine." They need a way in.

But Jung's emphasis is that the good needs to be seen as divine first and actually cultivated first. We need, in his language, the development of the Christian virtues. We could say the paramis of the bodhisattva—generosity, patience, compassion, love, and so forth. But we also need insight, insight into emptiness, so that we don't start identifying too rigidly with all this, concretizing it, reifying it, making it real, shrinking around it, clinging to it as a fixed reality.

Many people hearing this will need to spend quite a bit more time developing what is light and so-called good—the classic Buddhist paramis and qualities—and cultivating insight into the emptiness of self and the emptiness of those qualities themselves. At some point, the being, the soul, and the understanding have the capacity and skill to start regarding much more beyond what is obviously light, obviously "good." They begin regarding all of that—the dark, what seems bad, what seems greedy—actually starting to find the divinity in that.

Sometimes it doesn't happen in that order. Mostly I would say that linear progression is one of the things that allows it to be stable and safe. But things aren't that simple for everyone. Some people do things in all kinds of orders, or it's just not so linear.

Wrapped up in all of this is the relationship with the view of the possibility of re-enchanting or enchanting

our suffering, our dukkha in life. This is a delicate question. We have to tread delicately, sensitively here. It's complex. In the totality of the teachings of this retreat, from both Catherine and myself, we'd like to present different perspectives on this and give due respect to the complexity here.

Let's go into it from certain angles. Again, I hope you can hear some of this in the context of a response to at least what I perceive as the dominant paradigms existing.

One thing about re-enchanting the self and re-enchanting our suffering: judgment and enchantment do not go together very well at all. When we judge ourselves, or when we judge ourselves for suffering—seeing repeated patterns, still doing the same thing, still making the same mistakes after all this practice, still having the same problems—and there's judgment of that and self-blame, then the possibility of enchanting the self and enchanting the view of the suffering is obviously diminished. Similarly, it works the other way, as many of these things do through mutual dependence: the less enchanted we are with the view of the self and the suffering, the more likelihood there is to judge ourselves and judge the suffering.

When there's judgment, it's hard to see—almost by definition—the depths of beauty of the self. This piece about judgment and self-blame becomes quite interesting when we explore views of self and suffering and healing and the enchantment of that.

Sometimes a person has strands of suffering in their life that seem to last a long time, seem to be painfully persistent over years and decades. Then they're exposed to some psychological paradigm or work or idea, and they come up with what they believe is an explanation for their suffering, for the persistence of those patterns in their life. It might be certain wounds in their history, in the family—causal factors. Maybe a situation or an event caused even a change in neural mechanisms.

Now they have an explanation. This person has an explanation for their suffering, and more than that, for the persistence of their problems or patterns or failures in life. So that explanation is believed, and the believed cause of the suffering is no longer the self. It's because that happened. It's because of this event, or this ongoing set of conditions. So the cause is moved from self-blame to something that's not me—something other that happened to me, that was forced upon me.

There's less self-judgment, less self-blame. And then they find themselves feeling better. The problem's loosening. The pattern's loosening. The problem's alleviating a little bit.

Does that mean that explanation is necessarily true? Is it necessarily real? Or is it that what's happened is just the shifting away from the self as what is to blame? The alleviation of self-judgment is what is actually healing there—that is actually the element that's causative in healing. What's actually going on?

Because the self-judgment, the self-blame, can lock—can be part of a kind of cyclic mechanism that holds the whole patterns and dukkha and problems and persistent failures in place. It's the self-judging.

And by whatever explanation, that's relieved and something begins expanding and moving. There's

essentially a restoring that happens, a re-storying, an alternative narrative. Instead of "I'm hopeless, I'm a failure, it's my fault," etc.—which may even be implicit, almost sub-verbal—there's a re-storying of the past, away from self-blame, and this is actually what liberates, maybe. What's going on there?

And these restorings, you know, in different cultures can be vastly different. I remember years ago when I lived in the States and I was studying music, and I used to go around to a friend's house. Hikaru was a Japanese from Japan who was also studying jazz guitar. And we used to play together. We used to jam together for hours.

My Japanese was completely non-existent, but his English was really not very good at all. So our conversations were quite limited. But one day—he was generally a very buoyant personality—and one day I went over in the evening, and he was clearly really down. And I was trying to understand: can I do anything? What's going on?

And in his English—he did have some English and it wasn't that bad really—but in his English he said, "It's my ancestors." And he didn't mean it's my family or something that happened to me in my childhood. It's my ancestors. He was talking from a whole different paradigm, a whole different set of beliefs that was clearly still used and operative in Japan. "It's my ancestors," he said.

But that view of it was clearly something that enabled him to get a little distance from it, to not self-blame, to make him okay with this dukkha that was there.

So are these different views of what's causative for my suffering and my patterns or my difficulties—persistent difficulties—are we talking about truths? I explain it like this, and then that helps. Does that mean it's true? Or are we actually talking about the power of beliefs, of interpretations? Are we seeing how the view and the interpretation of something has an effect, which is part of the theme of this whole teaching, teachings that we're given? What's going on there?

Restoring is part of healing, is a big part of healing. And we can have a naive understanding of what's happening there: just believe now I've seen the truth. Or actually a more sophisticated and I'd say honest understanding: restoring, re-fantasying, re-imaging. Recognizing that this is necessary and part of our humanity, part of enchanting, part of our psychology. And certainly part of healing.

And even when we see—you know, for example, this person, I can see them, or they tell me about how now they're caught in this painful triangle with a friend and an authority figure, and then they report something in the past of how a similar triangle, a painful triangle, with a sibling and a parent, and then the current situation, the pain of that, seems to be replicating past family relationships and triangles and difficulties, etc. Seems to be replicating.

And we easily think, "Ah yes, the cause is there, the cause was in the instance in the family, in the past." But actually not necessarily. That's not proven. It's not proven that implies that the family, the prior family, historical one, was the cause of the thing that happened later in time.

What about this notion, you know, when I use this phrase of something—some element of ourself or something or some image—having its roots in divinity, having its origins in divinity? I don't mean its temporal origins.

What about archetypal causes as an idea? Not the cause, or not the only possible way of interpreting things, way of explaining as the cause is in the past human history. Maybe the cause is archetypal. Maybe this triangle is archetypal. Now, of course, that's the whole Oedipal—well, one version is the Oedipal thing, but I'm not necessarily talking about that at all.

But it's putting—or entertaining the idea that the causes are not purely human and historical and concrete in origin from the past, etc. If I don't allow that kind of causality, then I will be fixed only on a certain range of possible causes, because that kind of archetypal causality is simply not in my frame.

The image is primary. That as an idea. You've maybe heard me say that in other talks, other retreats. If I exclude that idea, then my frame for possible causes can only contain so much. And I automatically make an assumption, an explanation. And it seems obvious.

Years ago, I remember this psychology class or something—this photo that psychologists took and showed to people, asking them to say what they thought was going on. The photo was a street clearly in London in the seventies, or not necessarily London, but what looked like a UK city in what appeared to be the seventies. The photo showed people on the street, a busy high street or whatever, relatively busy high street.

Within these people walking around and shopping were two figures. One was a black man running in a certain direction down the street through the people. Behind him, about ten or twenty yards—I can't remember exactly—was a policeman in a police uniform, a white policeman in uniform. They asked, "What do you think's happening in this photo?"

Most people said, "A policeman is chasing a criminal."

Part of the thrust of what they were trying to get at was this sort of implicit racism, but also something about frames. Because it actually turned out that what they said was, "No, actually what this is a photo of is two policemen—a black plainclothes policeman that you see there in front, by ten or twenty yards, of a white uniformed policeman, chasing a criminal who is not in the picture. He's out of the frame."

So a certain causal interpretation of what's happening is constrained or conditioned by the frame. By frame here, you can see that it's perceptual as well as conceptual. Similar dynamics operate in relation to suffering and healing and causality.

Of course, we can see that the images that arise for us have their origins in the past as well. They're not completely out of the blue, autonomous from beyond, with no relationship to our life. Any exploration of imaginal practice will see that this is the case too. But if I only regard images as being a result of the past,

then that won't give them that divine dimension that we've been saying is so important.

Could I see, could I extend that? Yes, of course images arise from the past. But not only. And maybe even extending it further—an even more radical idea—maybe my past also has its roots in divinity, its roots in archetypal causes, if you like, its roots in archetypal images.

So this person who seems to be replicating an early family pattern—it's not that that early family pattern was the cause of what's being played out now in other contemporary relationships, but both are actually mirroring an archetypal cause. Where is the causality here, and what's going on? This is the whole opening up of our whole sense of existence. So not just images are archetypal, but actually the events of our life are archetypal, are divine in origin. They have their roots in divinity.

That's a much more radical and far-reaching idea. Something of the divinity of everything is much more deeply integrated into the view. So we can talk about a mirroring there, maybe not even a causality. Causality in the divine is more like a mirroring—the archetypal, the early family, and the contemporary. All these events and experiences are mirroring each other. Where is the causality here?

This is interesting if we just stay with this idea of causality now, because it actually has a tremendous bearing on this question of re-enchantment of self and dukkha and other aspects of our being. We could say there are three or four notions of causality that are possible.

We can, of course, have a sense that the past—something in the past, some event or some set of conditions—causes the present. The past causes the present. Of course, that is the most common, if not the exclusive understanding that we tend to have of causality. Past causes present. Of course it does. What else does? Past experience, past event causes present event, present experience.

But there's also a notion of the present causing the present that's possible. Now, I mentioned in another talk this idea of non-locality, this instantaneous fact discovered experimentally that even over vast distances, astronomical distances, two particles can actually affect each other instantaneously. The present, if you like, causes the present. That's not the kind of thing I'm talking about right now.

More I want to talk about or emphasize the understanding that's necessary for a Dharma practitioner to understand how views in the present fabricate the perception in the present. The conception and the view, the way of looking in the present, in this moment, fabricates the perception. This is not something that happens in time.

It's a dependent arising. We understand the teaching of dependent co-origination, as the Buddha said—how the present causes the present. We start to wonder about that word "cause." That's the second way of understanding causality.

A third possibility is the idea that the future causes the present—a future event, something in the future, so to speak, causes the present. Again, there's a parallel in modern physics. John Archibald Wheeler

proposed certain experiments where you could actually see this possibility, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking more about the idea of telos, the Greek word telos, of what Corbin called "the angel out ahead"—this image that we have that's calling us to something, that's giving us not so much a foretelling of the future, but calling us to our destiny, to our future, to our fulfillment, to our living out and embodying of an image, our individuation.

So causality from the past, causality from the present, causality from the future. And that as a notion or an idea... We could also talk about—I mean, the fourth option is kind of overlapping with the third, but just kind of atemporal causality. So what exists in us, but also for us, but exists beyond time, atemporal, and exists for us as blessing and as challenge. Beyond time, it exists in us and for us.

If we pay attention to our lives, the gifts that we have also bring with them challenges. We need to learn to grow into, to develop skill and art in relating to the blessings and the gifts that we are given, because they also bring particular challenges with them. But what exists as a kind of cause atemporally, beyond time—the integration of that and the consciousness of that happen in the linear time and through the linear time of our lives and our consciousness unfolding. But they come from or they exist beyond time.

So there are three or four possible notions of causality. But the causality from the past is by far the dominant idea, almost universally accepted. So if I hear a Dharma teacher give a talk about how the past, perhaps trauma in the family, causes the present, how the difficulties, the dukkha we have from the past, or even intrauterine, or in the struggles of the embryo, sometimes even in the struggles of the sperm to reach the egg—all of that is a cause of what happens later. The past causes the current experience, and there's a way in that explanation that supposedly is an understanding, and there's a kind of liberation that comes with that. It's a certain view of causality and of dukkha.

I think this is very significant. What do we do with causality and time, and how does that affect our understanding of time? What does that affect in terms of both our sense of suffering and liberation from suffering, but also the enchantment, or the possibility of enchantment, of suffering and of self?

Probably since Freud, and nowadays most psychoanalysts or psychotherapists would, in their relationship both to dreams and to images, construe them as coming from the past. They have their origins in the past. So the dream is conveying something, some pain or triggered by something in the past, whether it's in a purely mundane kind of uninteresting way or something deeper from the past. And that goes for dreams and images. The origin again—causality is in the past, maybe the past as it runs into the present, but from the past.

I just wonder what happens, as in so much of what we're talking about, what happens if we just can have enough wiggle room, enough space inside the consciousness and flexibility to actually suspend that assumption that the images that come to us are coming from the past, that the dreams that come to us are coming from the past.

In terms of dreams, you may have seen this: how often we dream something and see many dreams. If we pay attention, not just to what happens in the days before, because certainly dreams pick up—Freud had a word for it—the remnants or the fragments, the debris, the flotsam and jetsam of the days before and use that. But not only that level of past, but also the deeper past and wounding and all that. But dreams pick up not just the past—they also kind of indicate and usher in the future. They open to the future. There's a forward-moving quality to dreams.

Now this could be something very banal: I ordered something ages ago and it just hasn't arrived, and then I have a dream and lo and behold, in the next one or two days the thing shows up after all this time. Or more commonly, something like I see an old friend once in a blue moon, I hear from them once in a blue moon, we get together once in a blue moon, and I have a dream about them, and one or two days later, in the next couple of days, they call.

Or something deeper for us, something more complex, like a dream comes and it has perhaps a particular kind of religious feeling to it. Or it has in it a particular kind of creativity. We dream in that way, and the dream touches us and moves us. There's a beauty to it. It goes deep. And then one or two days later, or a short time later—often that one or two days seems to be characteristic of dreams, this forwardness of dreams—a short time later, there is an opening or an advent, an arrival of something in the being related to the essence of that dream or that image that I had. Or there is at least, a few days later, the beginning or an initiation into some opening: a new spiritual direction, a new practice, a new kind of creativity that's really something that then unfolds over years. But the beginning happened just shortly after the dream.

So there's this quality of dreams as opening to, indicating, ushering in the future. And what does this imply?

What might this imply? And what is the self that experiences these kinds of dreams and images—premonitory, if that's the word?

What is the self? Is it just the result of the past? Just the result of my family upbringing and societal conditioning? Just the result of my genes and biological evolution? Of course, it involves all that—but only as part, perhaps only some levels.

If we pay attention, if we are open, and if our frame is open enough, we can see we are visited, we are summoned, we are called by visions, by dreams, by angels, if you like. And in that we're connected to the mundus imaginalis, the imaginal realm, connected to the angels of that realm. We're not separate from that dimension of existence, that imaginal realm.

You could say, of course, that that dimension is an element of the self, but you can also say we are an element, an aspect of that dimension. Both. And integral to that—integral to that dimension, as we've mentioned in other talks—is that the self is not just limited in the ways that we usually feel ourselves to be, spatially and temporally.

The self is more than just something spatial and temporal. I exist here, and I exist now, and I exist from this point to that point, birth to death, or as some say, even longer—lives longer than that, beyond death. But something in us, something of the self, a dimension of the self exists beyond space, beyond time.

We are not only trapped, or only, to borrow Heidegger's phrase, thrown into linear time, the inexorable marching of time—in his case, towards death. Sure, there's time. Sure, that's a fact, a dimension, an aspect of a certain dimension of our existence. But we are not only that.

We get this sense of the self, our being, being more than just spatial and temporal. Not just trapped in time, nor actually just trapped in space as it is usually conceived.

Both—again, repeating something I said before in another talk—both in the meditative playing with the lessening of fabrication, with unfabricating, with that spectrum of the fabrication of perception, and both through imaginal practice and entering into iconic images and magical and tantric worlds through these practices that we're doing in imaginal practice, through both that and through the experimenting with the fabrication of perception in meditation, time collapses, if you like, or explodes, and we have different tastes, different glimpses, different openings to eternity, to what is timeless.

We recognize through all of this, in this forward-lookingness of dreams, this premonitory aspect of images—we recognize that a dimension of the self is beyond space, beyond time, or dimensions of the self are beyond space and beyond time, and that in different ways as well.

Regarding this, we talked about Corbin talking about the angel out ahead and this idea of images—this telos, this future, calling us to something or something beyond time, then finding its way into our life as blessing, as challenge.

Listen to something from Henri Corbin. He says: "The ritual celebrated by man, the human being—the ritual celebrated by human being in the temple of his being—is his own metamorphosis, his own transformation, transubstantiation, bringing to birth within himself of that form of himself, which conforms to the angelic archetype." This is the angel out ahead.

And through imaginal practice, this ritual celebrated by human being in the temple of their own being is your own metamorphosis, your own transformation into that angel out ahead, the bringing to birth within himself, herself of that form of oneself which conforms to the angelic archetype. He gives a capital to the F of form. There's a kind of platonic idea there of something kind of inherently existing, which we're playing with as an idea, but not holding to as a truth. You can also see the dependent arising of that.

But note also a difference here with, say, a lot of tantric practices in tantric Buddhism, where the ritual celebrated, the angel or deva or deity visualized and practiced with and imagined is actually pre-prescribed. I've touched on this before. In Corbin's version of Islamic practice, the angel is, so to speak, conformed to the individual, to the person. The archetype is not universal.

So this angel out ahead is very particular to me. You also get that in Jung—the individuation, that an archetype is something we never actually experience. What we experience is individualized images that appear to us conditioned both by the archetype that we can never know and the way that forms the image, but also by my personality and cultural conditioning, all kinds of things.

But something here needs opening up in the view—to say this over and over again. And in particular, in relation to suffering, in particular in relation to the self, and the suffering self, in this case.

So, taking that direction from what we just talked about, from Corbin and tantra, and again, Nietzsche refers to seeing the madman—in other words, your craziness, your difficulty—seeing the madman as the mask and a speaking trumpet, the mask and the speaking trumpet of a divinity.

Back to the idea of persona that I mentioned actually on other retreats, but this—my personhood, including my craziness, my struggles, my weirdness, my eccentricities and my suffering—the madman as the mask and speaking trumpet of a divinity. Persona—what sounds through my personality, my dukkha, the particularities of my life.

How do we tend to view and conceive of our madness, our suffering? It's often not as the speaking trumpet of divinity, or if a person does that, then it tends towards some kind of mania, and it's over-literalized. It's reified. It's clung to. There's too much identification. So there's an art here.

We're going to come back to that delicate, tricky art that involves skill, navigation, and insight.

But in all of this, to pick up something mentioned earlier, we see so much the tendency toward reduction to what we call secular humanism—in the way we regard what the human is, in the way we regard our suffering, in the ways we regard what healing actually is and involves. There's this reduction to secular humanism that's become so endemic, so saturated, so sedimented into our modern view, our modernist view.

So healing the past may actually be—I would say it's actually only one level of healing. Healing the past is only one level of healing. It's only one conception of what healing can extend to and embrace. For us so often nowadays, that's what healing means, psychologically at least.

What about the healing of the imaginal? The healing of concretizing, liberation from concretizing, liberation and healing from any fixed singleness of vision, singleness of view—whether that's physicalism or, on the other extreme, a kind of New Age reificationism of angels or whatever it is. Any kind of fundamentalism, religious or secular—secular humanism, whatever it is—a liberation from all that and a liberation of soulfulness and soulmaking. That's another level of healing: the liberation of soulmaking and soulfulness, the full liberation of the spaces and the depths into which that soulmaking can expand.

Now over time, over a lot of practice and a lot of work, maybe a person—or usually over time—maybe a person experiences both levels of healing: the healing of the past and the difficulties of upbringing and

societal conditioning and schooling and family and all that craziness, and this other healing, the healing of the imaginal, the healing of the fixedness of view, the healing of fundamentalism and the rigidities, and the healing—the liberation of soulmaking, the fullness of that, or the allowing of more and more fullness of that.

The person experiences both, opens to both, goes through both, and looks back and may feel that this other kind of healing, this second kind of healing—the healing of the imaginal, of the soulmaking—feels that actually of the two, this is the wider healing, the deeper healing, the more radical healing, and maybe often even the more necessary healing.

And again, we're back to this question of order. Do I need to do the healing of my past before I open to all this soulmaking, re-enchantment business? Oftentimes that's the assumption.

But I actually don't know. I think it varies. It really varies. It's a delicate, complex, individual question. But I would say that rather than an order being universally necessary—that's certainly not true, or even in an individual case—it's more a case of, if we really actually ask what needs to happen here, the fruits of each kind of healing, or gaining the fruits, or a successful healing, if we can even use such a word, that's actually dependent in each case, whether we're talking about healing the past or healing the imaginal.

In each case, it's dependent on the development of certain skills, certain capacities, certain insights, certain abilities, psychologically and in relationship. The fruits of each depend on that, rather than "I do this first, and then I need to do this, and then I need to do that."

So each one of these healing dimensions needs a whole host of capacities. If we're healing the past, it involves compassion. It involves the different flavors of compassion. It involves learning how to feel our feelings and tune into them and hold them and have the capacity for them. It involves all kinds of psychological discrimination, all kinds of things. Many kinds of skills and capacities come together to allow that healing of the past. I've talked about that in other places; I'm not going to go into it now.

But the same thing with healing in the imaginal. So each of them are dependent on different capacities, rather than "this needs to happen, this kind of healing, and then that kind of healing." This kind of grounding, then that kind of grounding, or whatever.

So in regard, as I said before, in regard to healing, in regard to suffering, in regard to self, there's this so commonly a reduction to some kind of secular humanist idea, a reduction to secular humanism. And even in regard to art and our relationship with art—Oscar Wilde wrote, "All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling."

Now, for some people, they'd be like, "What?" All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling, he wrote. What's going on there?

Well, there's a couple of meanings here. "Genuine" is from the Latin genuinus, and it actually means

inborn. It's different than what we usually take it to mean. Inborn. So all bad poetry springs from inborn feeling—that is, we could interpret what he's saying this way: my personal feeling. All bad poetry is usually too personal. It's too conceived in terms of, again, the secular human, not something beyond the human or divine or whatever.

All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling—something that's too me and my history or whatever it is. There's something too simplistically one-dimensionally human about it.

But of course, "genuine" has this more common meaning to do with authenticity as opposed to artificiality. And again, that also I think is implicit in what Oscar Wilde wrote: "All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling." So this idea that we have to be authentic and true to what is authentic, and what is so-called authentic carries much more soul and weight and importance than what is artificial, what is artifice.

So what—again, I'm actually going to quote Nietzsche again. He wrote, "The worst of all tastes: the taste for the unconditional." Now he's unpacking something that's a little complex there. The worst of all tastes is the taste for the unconditional. By the unconditional, he doesn't mean the unconditioned, the unfabricated, in the way that Buddhists might use that, or some Buddhists might use that word. He means the word conceived in a certain way that leaves no space for art, for the emptiness of things and for the creativity to come into relationship with things. It's just unconditional. It cannot be conditioned by our creativity or realized to be a dependent arising.

So the worst of all taste is the idea that wants this or that or anything—concept or self or whatever—to not be empty, to not be open to the art of creative interpretation and shaping. This is the worst of all tastes, he said. And he goes on: "It's cruelly misused and made a fool of until a man learns to introduce a little art into his feelings, even to venture trying the artificial, as genuine artists of life do."

To introduce a little art into his, into her feelings, and even to venture trying the artificial. So this encouragement, again, to not be shy of artifice.

You can see that in metta practice, very, very simply. And if you like, we're acting as if something were true, as if a certain view was true, or entering into something. I may be angry and I'm saying, "May you be well," etc. There's a little bit of artifice there—actually a lot of artifice. In some cases I'm not pretending that I'm feeling that, but actually there's a place for—you see, as we get more and more into understanding and experiencing the fabrication of things, how much our experience, our feelings in this case, emotions and vedanā, actual sensation of pleasantness, unpleasantness, is shaped and shapeable by the view.

Artifice, and allowing artifice into our feelings, our emotions and our vedanā. We learn to actually shape and reshape and refabricate even basic pleasantness and unpleasantness. What is unpleasant can be very often learned. We can learn how to convert that into the pleasant just by shifting the view. And we see how much the view of something contributes to its shaping.

So for example, seeing the divinity of my emotion, allowing that artifice in, actually shapes the unfolding of that emotion.

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