Dilemmas and Delineations: How did we get here?! (Part 5)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:02:48

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote a lot of things that were sort of addressed to himself, kind of advice to himself, notes to self. And one of the things he wrote was, "All things have two handles. Beware of the wrong one." I think he was paraphrasing or even quoting the Greek philosopher Epictetus.

You can see how that applies to a lot of what we've been talking about so far. It's relevant to desire, how we pick it up, by what handle, by what direction. It applies to eros, to this whole notion of clinging—as we explained, are we picking it up as a key, or are we picking it up as just something to reject at one level? It certainly applies to imagination and images in the conventional sense. Two handles. Certainly also to emptiness, and the Mahayana tradition makes this very clear. To grasp at emptiness in the wrong way is like grasping at a snake by the tail, the wrong end, while its head is just going to come and bite you. With regard to emptiness, I think it was Nagarjuna who wrote that.

All things have two handles. And also delineations. So how we relate to the very process of generating and making delineations, either in perception or in conception or both. So it applies to all this.

Now, what that little aphorism is saying—I think it's not just saying you can pick things up but don't cling to them or don't identify with them. Certainly that's part of it, how we pick something up. Maybe it would be more accurate to say all things have many handles. So there are many ways this admonition to care how, from what direction, in what way we pick something up applies to all the things that we've been talking about so far.

With desire and with eros, it's true at a certain level to say it's fire and one is playing with fire to play with these things, desire and eros. It's true and there's heat there. But where would human beings be if certain experimentation with fire did not take place at some point? Yes, that asks for a lot. In other words, we need to take care and need to have certain things in place, qualities, abilities in place. We talked about this before. But in a way, we could say we're playing with fire to a certain extent.

That doesn't always mean that the fire is raging. It's not always that it's super intense—the eros is very intense, the desire is very intense, the fire is very intense. First of all, it won't always be that way for anyone. And secondly, intense is neither better nor worse. So from one sort of standard perspective, an intense desire, too simplistically, is a bad thing. From another perspective, again too simplistic, it's a good thing—it's better for it to be more intense, more fire.

But what this investigation into, this exploration of this whole subject, asks for is a lot of sensitivity, the development of our sensitivity. I've touched on this in earlier teachings. It asks for a lot of subtlety in our attention, and subtlety of discernment—a very keen, well-developed, sharp mindfulness, if you like, a very sensitive mindfulness, sometimes a very soft, delicate mindfulness.

It asks for a certain adventurousness of spirit, we could say, to go down this avenue and see what happens and explore. It asks for a certain boldness, a certain freedom—we could say freedom to question, boldness to question, to question boldly. And to experiment, to dare to experiment and find out. How will I find out? I have to experiment.

If those things are in place, or we can bring them with us, or we can develop them as we go, then this exploration, I would say, can open up for us radical possibilities, radical openings, radical shifts in our understanding, our sense—as I said before—our sense of self, of other, of soul, of imagination, of world, of cosmos, of existence. Real revolutions are possible here for us. So the potential with an exploration of eros is huge, huge and profound, wide and profound.

And we're talking about something that, if you like, is a formidable force. It doesn't always mean it's intense. So sometimes Cupid—the name, as you probably know, is the Latin, the Roman name for the god Eros. And some artistic or statuesque depictions of Cupid are of this little podgy, cherubic baby angel with soft, rolling, pinkish, smooth flesh. And so maybe he's slightly mischievous with his bow and arrow and who he's going to shoot.

kind of do the matchmaking thing, and that's kind of all—you know, a little bit cutesy. Compare that, for example, with Plato's description, actually the words he put into the mouth of Diotima, who's a kind of mysterious seeress and philosopher. Her characterization of Eros—I got this from a philosopher called George Steiner, who was a literary critic.

Diotima characterizes Eros as a hermeneutical daemon. What does that mean? Hermeneutics is interpretation, so his business is the interpretation of all things. And all things—Eros has something to do with the way we see them and how we open up and see them as messages, as angels. Daemon is, you could say, another word for a demigod or an angel or something like that—something given more than a purely personal or purely reductive existence and significance.

So Eros is a hermeneutical daemon who shuttles back and forth between gods and humanity, between being and nothingness, between what is real and what is less real, between wisdom and ignorance. And this Eros looks just like Socrates, which is to say shoeless, ugly, impoverished, cunning in pursuit of the beautiful and the good, a lover of wisdom and a master of jugglery, witchcraft and artful speech.

I hope it's evident to you just how powerful and well-captured that description is, how much it points to the kind of accuracy in what it brings and involves there. A hermeneutical daemon shuttling back and forth between the divine and the human, between what is real and what is less real, between wisdom and

ignorance. Shoeless himself, ugly, always poor—he himself has nothing. Do you get this, even in terms of what we've described so far about Eros? Eros itself has nothing. Cunning in pursuit of the beautiful and the good. A lover of wisdom, of insight, and a master of jugglery, witchcraft and artful speech.

So his mastery, his realm, his art, is the realm of art. It's not the realm of realist truth in the way that we tend to think about it. There's a lot in there, very beautiful, and certainly not a little cutesy description. We're really talking about something bigger than us because divine.

Now, we said already that we could give a kind of small start of a definition of what Eros is, but we also said that when we talk about this Eros-psyche-logos dynamic—or rather what Eros instigates, inflames, invokes, elicits, and puts in motion—because of its wanting more, in terms of the ways it expands, enriches, deepens, widens, complexifies, gives dimension to the images that it beholds of its erotic object, its erotic object as image, as imaginal dimensions, and the ideas, the logoi, the concepts of that erotic object. Because of all that, the definition that we gave earlier—this wanting more contact, connection, intimacy, knowing, to know more, wanting more penetration, to penetrate more, to experience more—all that provisional definition is exactly that: just provisional.

So we can almost make a kind of axiomatic statement, a fundamental statement that because Eros is not separate from this whole Eros-psyche-logos dynamic and what that does in its expansion, we can never totally understand Eros. There will always be something of it, something of Eros, beyond our grasp, beyond the grasp of our understanding. And therefore also maybe something of it to which we are always subject, because it's more than we can kind of get a full handle on, get our hands around. There may be something of Eros to which we're always subject. We never feel like we got it under our thumb. It's always in some sense bigger than us, bigger than our minds, bigger than our capacities in some sense.

Now this, of course, goes back to that whole origin of the idea of Eros as a divinity, which is something Jung restated, which implies the impossibility of a full definition or capturing it conceptually. But also we can see, if we think about the implications of this whole idea that Eros opens up and inseminates and fertilizes psyche and logos, which then further inflame and inseminate the Eros, we can see that Eros kind of has this tendency, because of the apotheosis, to keep expanding everything, or shattering boundaries, or stretching boundaries.

Whether that's an imaginal figure, or a lover, the way I see him or her, whatever it is, whether it's a piece of art or a piece of music or an artist or whatever it is that's my imaginal, perceptual object—Eros will tend to expand, will want to, will naturally expand, open, deepen, complexify everything. Object and everything it's in relation to.

But also, because Eros itself is tied up in the larger definition with the Eros-psyche-logos dynamic, it means that Eros itself also gets expanded. And this happens in two ways.

It happens, as I said, because when the imaginal object becomes even richer, even deeper in its

dimensions, even more wonderful—like a jewel revealing more and more sparkling facets and unknown wonders and mysteries, and becomes more rich, more deep, more wide—then there is more Eros. There is more Eros, more to penetrate. The Eros desires to penetrate what it's now discovering and desires to open to what it's now discovering of the erotic, imaginal other. I see more there. He, she is more. I want to open to, I want to penetrate that. Eros wants to.

So the Eros itself swells. There's a tumescence, there's an increase, there's an empowerment. The degree of the fire, if you like, grows—the amount, the range of the Eros. But in a second way, too. Because in all this, the image and the idea, the psyche and the logos of the Eros—in other words, what is the image that is present of the very Eros that's involved in this whole movement? So certainly there's an image of the other, and the imaginal other, and that's getting richer and wider. But then this spreads—we're going to go into this in more detail and all its implications—it spreads to self-reflect in this kind of auto-eroticism. I'll say more about that in talks to come.

So that the very way that Eros is regarded, the very image of Eros and the very idea, the logos of the Eros in the Eros-psyche-logos dynamic—not just of the object, but also the Eros—those boundaries too start to stretch or start to shatter and then have to reform in a wider, deeper, more spacious and generous and multi-dimensional way. So whatever ideas and images are involved with the Eros, the psyche and the logos of the Eros, so to speak, those too are expanded.

You understand?

So eros—whatever our notion, whatever our image or fantasy of eros is—that too keeps growing, gaining new dimensions, simply by virtue of what eros does and is through the whole eros-psyche-logos dynamic.

The eros itself starts to take on new dimensions, revealing other facets, other resonances, other breaths that it encompasses. We discover depths in eros itself that we hadn't known before.

Now this doesn't mean—this does not imply—that because we can never totally understand it, because of all I've just said, we can never totally understand eros, that we shouldn't explore it. It doesn't imply that we should ask, "Well, there's no point exploring it or trying to create ideas and concepts that address it, that support our exploration." It doesn't imply that we should stop trying to go further, to go deeper, to go wider into the breadth of eros.

Actually, to me, it should inspire a greater inquiry and exploration. Wherever we are in our understanding of eros, or wherever we are in building a conceptual framework of eros and adding to it, wherever we are in that process—there's more. There's more to discover. There's more to add. There's more to find out. There are beauties and wonders and depths and dimensions to be revealed.

So it should inspire us. Rather than feeling frustrated because "I don't really get this yet" or "I haven't sussed it out, I haven't encapsulated it, I haven't figured it out"—it should inspire.

And even as I alluded to before, it could hopefully give us a sense of okayness, and perhaps even rightness, in those times when we feel driven or dragged by eros and the eros seems bigger than us—bigger than what we can figure out, or encapsulate in concepts, or even in an image. We recognize that not only is this okay, there may even be a profound rightness in that.

I don't know—maybe you've been listening to the talks so far and, I can say this for myself, leaning into trying to be more precise and analytical about delineating between different concepts and qualities that we recognize when eros is present, how we distinguish it from this and that. And maybe some of you are listening and perhaps starting to feel a little uneasy at times, feeling as if we're being too precise and too analytical.

I have felt that at times, just in the material we've covered so far on this retreat. I'm not sure. When does the precision and analysis that we're bringing to bear actually overstep its soul-making function? When has it gone beyond its function of supporting soul-making? Because what we're interested in is soul-making—that's what we're interested in. When has the way we're delineating things with precision and making analyses of how things relate and processes work—when does that overstep its soul-making function?

It's not an easy question.

So on the one hand, you have this notion that eros is divine, and because of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic—this stimulating, inflaming, expanding, inseminating, fertilizing tendency of eros that it gives to eros, psyche, and logos, and more as we'll explain in later talks—because of the divinity and because of that eros-psyche-logos dynamic, there's always going to be something mysterious retained about it, something unfathomable, some sense of "more"—more that I haven't quite discovered, more to it, more dimensions to it.

So on the one hand, all of that—this unfathomability, if you like. And at the same time, on the other hand, a certain amount of delineating, of defining, of highlighting features actually serves the movement of eros and the soul-making process.

Right here, in relation to delineations and definitions, we have a dilemma. We have actually several dilemmas, but that's one of them.

There is, on the one hand, in approaching soul-making and approaching things like eros, oftentimes what's more helpful—and I've talked about this before and leaned that way at different times in teachings and writings—is leaning more towards the poetic and the mythical sensibilities. A poetic understanding, poetic depiction, poetic presentation or unfolding that calls on the poetics of our understanding. A more mythical sensibility in exploring and receiving and digesting.

When to emphasize that? How much to emphasize that relative to a more analytical approach? I don't know. So far in this retreat it seems to me we've been leaning more towards the analytical. In the past, and

in other work I'm doing right now, more the other way.

So there's a kind of dilemma here—a balance. Different people, different times, same person. But that's something to bear in mind about all this, about making delineations.

Actually, I want to say something general—make some general observations about making delineations in general. And I want to add to that and also say some general things about saying general things, if you follow me. Something about general observations about making delineations, and general things about saying general things.

Now, I'm aware some of you might be thinking, "What? This is really abstract now." And I don't know if you're listening and whether this just sounds really not relevant or pretty vague, or just abstract. Maybe in time, hopefully, it will come to seem more relevant why I'm saying these things now—generally about making delineations and about different levels of insight. I hope that it does make sense at some point and seem actually quite both very relevant and quite important.

It's interesting, just in terms of insights that can sound more abstract or that are more general—that apply more generally, or that operate at a higher meta-level, if you like. They can sound kind of vague, so much so that we barely hear them, or they make very little impression. For many people, it's like they don't really recognize the value when they hear or read something at that level, or they sort of get it, but they don't really get the way sometimes these meta-level insights can have, because of their generality, this really pervasive power.

They're general, but they generate an enormous amount of other insights. They link things together. They make certain ways of proceeding possible, open certain whole avenues—not just a little nook or crack here, but whole avenues. They generate a lot through their generality, their pervasiveness, their all-pervading applicability and their implications.

So oftentimes, you know, I'm a teacher or something, and a person, many people remember a story that I told or a certain image recounted. It strikes, it stays in the memory, it makes an impression immediately. And this is very, I think, probably normal for the ways that we tend to understand, the ways that most people tend to understand as human beings, take in information written or listening. Or when the advice seems very, the insight seems very, very specific, when it's obviously relevant to a situation that I find myself in immediately.

But actually, there often is much greater power, as I said, and much more far-reaching sort of embrace and influence and implication in these other more general, in a sort of more general meta level of insight, oftentimes. So it seems also that it's quite rare, I think, it's quite rare, it's a rare person who actually kind of has an ability to recognize a sort of relative hierarchy of significance of ideas or insights.

Sometimes it's almost the opposite. It's as if the more significant ones and the ones that are kind of really radical—radical is from the word radix, meaning root—they really go to the root of things in their

generality, in their power, in their implications. People have a hard time sort of recognizing what's a more radical, far-reaching, pervasive sort of meta-level insight and something that's much smaller just because it seems immediately tangible, immediately obvious, immediately applicable to something that's right in front of me now in a very obvious way.

So that's just, you know, the way most people's minds work, but in a way there's an encouragement there to try and reflect on this material, especially when it might seem a bit like conceptual or that kind of level, in a way that starts to build something for you that's really helpful and will be really powerful. As I said, radical and far-reaching in its implications.

Because one of the things I wanted to say about delineations, making delineations, is that, again, certainly not all, but a lot of people appreciate clarity when they're reading something or hearing teachings or whatever. And it can seem very easily that something has been made clear to us if we are presented with, if we read or if we hear kind of neat, well-delineated distinctions between things, between concepts, between qualities or factors of mind. And so sometimes people say to me, oh, you're really clear and da-da-da, you know, etc.

So that is something that I do definitely try and do sometimes. So I'm not, I'm certainly not wanting to throw that out. This is where the dilemma is coming. I'm not wanting to throw that out and I'm certainly not advocating a kind of general sloppiness or inattention and certainly not confusion. It's often not that helpful.

But I would say that or just kind of point out that I think we should start to feel a little bit suspicious if the neat distinctions that we have made ourselves or that we are being presented with by a teacher or by a piece of writing or whatever it is—the neat distinctions are, we should feel suspicious, our suspicions should be aroused if those neat distinctions seem to be being regarded by anyone, whoever is presenting them or ourselves listening or whatever, as real. It should be suspicious if these distinctions are presented as delineating real things, as accurately and simply reflecting the reality of things.

If we sense that a person is or we ourselves are kind of slipping into that very common assumption and position, then I think our suspicion should be aroused. Or we suspect that someone or we ourselves are clinging to them, these distinctions or these things that are delineated through distinctions and definitions, clinging as if they're being clung, if we suspect they're being clung to as real things. Remember that's a form of avijjā, that's ignorance at the deepest level, if they're clung to as real or as reflecting simply, accurately the reality of things, we should be suspicious.

The Buddha Dharma, especially in the Mahāyāna, this is made really, really clear. Those links, we said this before, those links of dependent origination, they are not real. All Dharma concepts are just ways of looking. They're just ways of dividing things and they don't reflect reality. They're ways of looking, ways of delineating in the service of something.

So that I would say, along with the Buddha, you know, why did he say after his enlightenment, it's hard to understand this dependent origination I've discovered. Hard to understand, subtle, profound, only the wise can see it, etc. Very famous quote. I'm not sure whether I want to even try teaching this. There's a whole structure of concepts that he's not saying this is reality. He's saying, look this way and you'll understand something about reality.

And eventually, I think I've said this already on this retreat, the very insight that's generated by the structure of the delineations of dependent origination, those links, etc., if we approach it the right way, melts those very delineations and distinctions, melts the very links, so that the whole thing, it's like a snake eating its own tail, swallowing its own tail, the whole thing dissolves.

So this is... The question is how to move. I don't just shrug and say, oh yeah, no concepts. If I just shrug and say, oh, all concepts are false, I'm just left with my default concepts. I haven't gone anywhere. All I've done is probably reinforced a little bit of laziness and sloppiness. How do I actually get from delineations, through those delineations, into a much more profound realization, much more profound freedoms, and actually even beyond those delineations.

So that's definitely there in Dharma teachings. The question is exactly how can I approach these teachings in ways that do that. And that's where I go back to the idea of ways of looking at fabrication, etc.

For me, that's a very powerful way of approaching these teachings. But this insight about the suspicion of neat distinctions is there in Western philosophy as well. Even back to Plato, he used to make fun of certain characters who were so fond of making these distinctions very clear and neat, and they get ridiculed a little bit in his dialogues. And Hegel as well—another one who gets a lot of stick—but actually, partly his extraordinary insight was that any belief in clear concepts as if they reflect reality just doesn't stand scrutiny. As you look at it and bring more investigation to bear, you see it involves its opposite, it doesn't hold, the boundaries fracture.

We can see this in our own practice. Just as mindfulness gets keener, more subtle, sharper, more sensitive, as our investigation gets deeper, more directed, more cunning if you like, and as our insight grows, we will witness this too in our very own experience.

So just for example, at first, the vedanā—the pleasant, unpleasant, or what some people call neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant—the three categories of vedanā, and the distinction between vedanā and craving. Here is this pleasant feeling, and then there's the craving to get more of it, or to move towards it, or to hang on to it. Or here's this unpleasant feeling, and the craving to push it away, to get rid of it, to reduce it. And it seems like the vedanā and the craving are two different things. It's very important to delineate these as two different things and actually see in our experience: yes, here are two different things. I can see A and I can see B, and I then see their relationship.

As I go deeper in insight, that very distinction starts to blur. We start to see it's a kind of illusory

distinction. No vedanā, no craving. No craving, no vedanā. Craving and vedanā are inseparable, as are craving and clinging—we touched on that before—as are avijjā and saṅkhāra at a very deep level. As are, in fact, all the five aggregates, or certainly the mental aggregates.

It's like perception and consciousness—they are not two separate things. They're divided up in terms of the aggregates, the third and the fifth aggregate, but they are not separate. Perception and vedanā are not separate. Perception, vedanā, and consciousness are not separate. Saṅkhāras—they're all... the aggregates are not referring to separate or separable things. They're not real distinct entities. The delineations are made to serve a certain purpose, but they are not reflective of reality. And we can see that in any domain, and certainly with dharma concepts.

So that's another dilemma regarding making delineations in terms of clarity and the illusions of clarity or the seduction of what seems like clarity.

And there's another potential dilemma, another potential pitfall or danger in making delineations. As I mentioned earlier, when we delineate something—like eros from desire or craving or whatever it is—in doing that we amplify something. We amplify something, a thing, through a distinction, distinguishing it from other things. So we're delineating a theme or an area or a quality or whatever. In a way, we're creating it. In a way, we're discovering it and we're creating it. We'll come back to this create-discover amalgam or duality later. But in a way, we're actually creating something for our experience and reflection.

And then we've got this thing called eros. And then in relation to that area of experience or that theme of eros, it's possible that it becomes an area where we then pass judgment on ourselves. So here I've created this thing—we've created this thing, whatever it is. We create something called samādhi, and then lo and behold, we start measuring where we are in relation to our samādhi, or our insight, or liberation, or eros, or whatever it is.

In a way—I think, I'm not sure if he actually said this—but in a way it comes out of some of the insights of Michel Foucault, in regard to sexuality, in fact. He pointed out in his sort of history of the whole sense and idea of sexuality that you can trace it back and see how much more defined and complex and solidified and prominent it is as a concept now, related to which the sense of self then relates itself or attaches itself.

In other words, over the past several hundred years, two things have grown, and they've grown together. One is the sense of sexuality, or sexuality as a theme of human psychology, of human behavior, of human being. And with that—not just dependent on that, but with that also—the whole idea of individuality, self, and identity, which, as I mentioned before, is a lot more different now in the kinds of interiority and the prominence of individuality than it was several hundred years ago in Europe.

So sexuality becomes this thing, this area where my identity and the measurement of my identity is so often wrapped up, oftentimes in not a very simple way and also quite a painful way because of

judgmentalism and actually a lot of ignorance and not knowing. My identity is wrapped up with sexuality. Sexuality is wrapped up with my identity and individuality and what's my sexual expression.

So there exists tremendous potential and beauty emerging from this connection between identity and sexuality, yet there also lies a certain danger. When we bring forth Eros—or create Eros, if you prefer—as a central theme, amplifying its significance in our lives, we inevitably generate countless questions in our exploration. Questions like the one I mentioned: How do we keep Eros alive in a long-term relationship, which differs fundamentally from metta?

However, we must proceed with great care in this territory, because as I've indicated, we risk creating yet another arena in which to judge ourselves harshly. "I've failed. I'm an erotic failure." Or "My relationship has failed in terms of its Eros. I should be this way or that way. It should manifest differently. There's something fundamentally wrong with me. Is there something wrong with me? I bet everyone else is..." You can see how this pattern unfolds.

You can observe this same dynamic with samadhi. Most people today—and this has become more pronounced recently due to the cultural emphasis on attention, workplace performance, and productivity—are intensely focused on developing their cognitive functioning through various apps and methodologies. Generally speaking, unless someone has been genuinely exposed to teachings, retreats, or environments where people seriously discuss mindfulness, presence, freedom from distraction, steadiness, vitakka and vicara—unless they've encountered such contexts—people begin measuring their samadhi attainments. What was previously never given a second thought, what wouldn't have become a source of pain or preoccupation in their lives, suddenly transforms into this significant thing by which they evaluate themselves.

The situation with Eros mirrors this precisely. The distinction opens a beautiful avenue of exploration, yet unfortunately can become another metric for self-measurement. Here lies our dilemma—a genuine double-edged sword.

Yet creating and discovering different themes, dimensions, and areas of our being and the being of the other—this constitutes part of what the Eros-psyche-logos dynamic accomplishes. We'll return to this crucial point. This dynamic creates and discovers ever more dimensions, ever more subtle openings into new territories—like getting your foot in the door, which then opens onto an entire avenue of possibility. Distinctions emerge, delineations form, various forms of otherness manifest. All of this unfolds naturally.

So indeed, it remains a double-edged sword: beauty and soul-making on one side, dilemma upon dilemma on the other.

Sometimes people observe that pointing out differences between various teachings and delineating concepts creates dualities—creates otherness or multiple forms of otherness. This observation holds truth. Sometimes such differentiation even generates further complications.

More accurately stated: this is true, but it's not invariably problematic. The mere creation of duality, differentiation, or otherness doesn't necessarily constitute something harmful that leads to dukkha. Again, we must be careful not to oversimplify here.

Consider even the various schisms among psychoanalytic schools or psychotherapeutic traditions. One could certainly say, "Oh, that's terrible—look at all the difficulties, interpersonal conflicts, and complications that emerged." On the other hand, examine the richness that resulted. Observe the creativity that emerges from schism. The creation of distinctions doesn't simply and inevitably lead to dukkha.

Even in Dharma practice, you can observe this principle at work. Returning to the concept of ways of looking, we can delineate between different ways of looking—really subtly different ways of looking. You delineate between two particular ways of looking, whatever they might be. One fabricates more dukkha and more perception; the other fabricates less. This recognition brings insight and greater freedom, yet it emerges precisely through delineation. So delineation itself, duality itself, doesn't constitute a problem here. Rather, it can prove profoundly helpful, profoundly fruitful.

When I make a delineation that subsequently brings ease, freedom, and less fabrication, this creates the possibility of making even more refined delineations—even subtler distinctions between concepts, degrees of clinging, and so forth. This can lead to fabricating even less dukkha, fabricating even less perception, opening levels of insight that become available through this very process.

We've explained this principle before. The path doesn't simply involve finding a way of being or looking that feels reasonably pleasant and relaxed, where suffering appears minimal, and then just settling back to surf in and out of that state without much intensity or effort. That approach is fine as far as it goes, but it remains fundamentally limited.

The creation, if you like, or the creation-slash-discovery of dualities, polarities, othernesses, is intrinsic to the erotic process, the process of eros psychologus, intrinsic to the soul-making dynamic. We're going to explain more about this later because it's quite important.

Wrapped up in that is also complexity. As I said, when the eros psychologus dynamic gets going, the imaginal object, the erotically charged other, the erotic beloved, becomes complexified, complicated in a good way. As I said, they're like a jewel. You suddenly see, oh, look at that. It's got even finer facets, and the way it reflects light in the different ways of the different facets—its beauty is increased through its complication, its depth, that there's more to discover there.

So complexity also, not always, but generally speaking on the whole, is generated, created and discovered through the soul-making process. Again, I caution against this sort of addiction to simplicity, this simplistic addiction to simplicity, what I call simplism.

So the question is: when to be simple and when not to be simple? Or actually, more accurately, in this

situation, what will a simple perspective give me and what will a not-so-simple perspective give me? Where will it take me if I look in a way that simplifies, and if I look in a way that actually seems like it's not so simple?

On the other hand, sometimes we as human beings make, or we're actually listening to teachings or reading something and someone is offering something to us—some distinction—and it actually doesn't serve anything at all. So what's the point of that distinction? Doesn't free you in any way, doesn't bring any more freeing insight, doesn't open soul-making. It's just a kind of pedantry.

So again, there's a kind of insight in really delineating what delineations are actually worth making, or what are the particular results of making certain delineations. Which ones are just—what's the point of making them? They really don't serve. They may sound clever, but it's just pedantry.

This is what I mean by a meta level of insight. Actually learning how to look, how to create distinctions, when to pull back, what kind of distinctions, where each of them will take me. Daring to find out and toss out the ones that are not helpful and pursue the ones where—even though they seem quite tricky—I can sense there's richness here. There's treasure to be discovered of different kinds.

For our purpose now in this retreat, primarily it's: which distinctions bring soul-making? When does a certain delineation increase, serve, support, and nourish the soul-making?

For example, as we said, just the distinction between eros and greed is, to my mind—and I hope you will see—a distinction that helps soul-making. Don't just tip it out, eros, because it's kind of desire, and desire, I've heard, is a bad thing. Trying to live without it, live without clinging, and so forth. We talked about that.

But even the distinction, say, between joy and happiness—I would define them slightly differently sometimes to actually open up a difference there. Joy, I would say, is a kind of happiness that's richer and deeper, if you like, in different ways. I'll go into that another time.

Someone told me—this is secondhand, so I'm not sure if it's true—but I've heard that in Tibetan, in the Tibetan language, there are only two words for emotions: happy and sad. I'm still not sure whether I quite believe it, but apparently there are just two words. Unlike English, which has a very rich emotional vocabulary—two words for emotions, so you're either happy or you're sad. I'm guessing there's a word for equanimity, because that's a Buddhist word, but anyway. Happy and sad.

Someone was telling me that they knew a Tibetan who then moved to the West and learned English, and they were reporting after some years experiencing emotions after they learned English that they never knew they had before. Is it that the language is highlighting something that was there anyway? Or is it that the language is actually creating new emotions? The very delineation creates something—or both? I'd say it's both myself.

This is interesting in its relevance to soul-making and to fabrication.

We can very easily believe that, or be taught that, words are thoughts, and thoughts bring discriminations, and discriminations have to do with papañca. They create papañca. So don't get entangled in words. Don't get caught up, because they feed thoughts, which feed discrimination, which feeds papañca.

So there's a way that's true in the original meaning of... Well, actually, there's a way that's sometimes true if papañca and fabrication are equated. That delineations create fabrication, sometimes actually.

But it's also, as I said, that the word—say the different words for different emotions, subtle shades of emotion, kinds of emotion—actually the words serve to create delineations in our sensitivity and refinements of our sensitivity. And this actually stimulates fabrication, a diversity of fabrication. In the way that psychoanalysts use the term consciousness, this then stimulates consciousness. We are then conscious of some arena more because we've been given a delineation that opens it up. And some of that increase in consciousness can be soul-making. So the fabrication there—some of it can be in the service of soul-making.

New doors, new experiences, new understandings can be opened through making verbal delineations. So again, the simplistic spiritual teaching about getting away from words and not thinking or not getting attached—it's appropriate sometimes. And like so many things, sometimes the very opposite is true. There'll be more soul-making, more of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic will be stimulated through the delineations of words, through the magic of words. Sometimes there's that possibility.

So regarding delineations, fabrication and soul-making, what can we say? Well, some delineations actually decrease fabrication. They lead to, they support certain ways of looking which will actually fabricate way less than we could have without that delineation. Some delineations will actually increase fabrication and actually create problems or create subtleties of awareness or whatever.

The soul-making could be in the greater fabrication, as we'll point out more and more on the retreat. Sometimes more fabrication means more soul-making, or skillful fabrication, as we could call soul-making. And sometimes there's an element of the soul, we could say, or dimension of the soul, that the decrease of fabrication, the movement towards the unfabricated, and that spectrum there, is also soul-making in a different way.

So the relationship there—there are all the different permutations and possibilities in terms of making delineations, increase or decrease of fabrication, and serving or not serving soul-making. It's not that simple. And it invites our investigation and our careful attention and our intelligence.

Why am I saying all this? You might be wondering. Well, because it will guide our work, or a lot of this will guide our work, certain material that we're exploring together in this course, certainly your practice, especially as it develops. Some of this will really guide that work and your thinking—your thinking about these things and thinking about practice and how you approach practice.

I'm saying some of it also really as a kind of justification for what's being presented here and for this whole structure and integrated path and the introduction of new concepts, etc., that seem kind of unusual or really counter to what we might have heard before. So it's partly, yeah, I admit, it's a kind of feeling it might be important for some people to have that justification and to have it make sense.

But there's another reason I'm saying all this, and in a way I'm saying it for the future. What we're presenting here and what we're going into here and what we're kind of elaborating and building, if you like, and playing with—playing with building in terms of concepts and practices and refinements of attention and all that—it's not a closed system. It might be integrated, and maybe it seems that way, but my hope is it's really not a closed system.

My hope is, or the invitation, really, is that as time goes on in the future or very soon or whenever, that you, or some of you, will feel like you want to or are called upon to add, to build, to what we're talking about here and what we're sharing together here and exploring and experimenting with and presenting.

So I'm saying this for the service of opening an avenue that no one owns, that other people can add to and build tributaries and other avenues that connect up or make more lanes in the highway or whatever the analogy would be, or a building that then is added to and given a whole extension or whatever it is. I'm saying it for the sake of creativity.

Because there's a whole other way, and I'm going to come back to this—there's a whole other dimension of practice which has to do with the creativity of one's practice, or the creativity of even making one's own practice, making one's own path, making one's own dharma, creating, discovering one's own dharma. The eros, and the soul-making of the creativity of Dharma, or Dharma as creativity.

It's open. You understand what I'm saying? I know that sounds maybe like a big deal, and not everyone will feel called to that or attracted to it, but I'm saying this for the sake of an open, shared, creative project so that if the time comes and you or indirectly someone wants to make further delineations, wants to make further definitions, wants to add to something, wants to question something, pull something apart, give it another level...

that all these generalities that I've shared about definitions and delineations and the dilemmas involved now apply to doing exactly that.

The erotics of an open, endless, creative path—an open, endless conception. And what does it mean to be wise and creative and insightful and playful and artistic? I'm not sure if those are the right words, but how do we cultivate these qualities in our relationship to practice itself?

This is something we'll return to when we explore the relationship with the path in general, and its other dimensions. But hopefully this makes some sense, and perhaps it will make the sense that it needs to in the places where it needs to.

Thank you for listening.

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