Eros Unfettered (Part 2)

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I know this represents a substantial amount of material with considerable detail. Let me restate the larger trajectory we are following—specifically, the portion of the trajectory we are currently exploring.

We are investigating and opening up the possible manifestations of Eros and its relationship with the imaginal—the full breadth of what this means and can mean, and the ways it can arise. Additionally, we are examining what Eros, when it is truly open, will open for us and reveal to us. This connects with our exploration of what we are calling the soul-making dynamic, the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic.

I will offer various examples as we progress through this exploration. Some of these are purely intrapsychic, arising perhaps in formal meditation practice. Others relate to our perceptions in the world—of the world, of others, of self, of objects. Some are sexual, some non-sexual, yet all are erotic. In discussing the sexual dimension, part of our objective is to open up the possible manifestations of Eros, to legitimize and widen what can be taken and used validly and powerfully as part of our practice.

We have said that when this soul-making dynamic is allowed—when Eros, Psyche, and Logos are permitted to inseminate each other, to grow, expand, deepen, enrich, and complicate each other—then not only is the erotic object, the beloved other, amplified, extended, deepened, and widened in this way, but the self is transformed as well. This occurs because, as we have established, subject and object, self and other, are always dependently arising together.

Where there is an object, there is a subject. If I am focusing on an image or an imaginal perception of another in my life, there is both the sense of them as other, as beloved other, and also the sense of self. Often we miss this, or we do not allow the sense of the self the same soul-making dynamic, the same movement and expansion and deepening of Eros-Psyche-Logos in relation to the self as we do in relation to the other. We will return to this in terms of diagnostics and things that can go wrong.

We have also established that what dependently arises is not merely this polarity of self and other, subject and object, but rather a fourfold meeting, a fourfold co-constellation of self, other, world in general, and Eros. A particular kind of Eros gives rise to a particular perception of other, of self, and of world at large. These four—self, other, world, and Eros—co-constellate. They are mutually dependent, almost like facets of the same whole structure or constellation, or what we might call a soul-making constellation.

This means that we begin to perceive ourselves imaginally. We begin to see and feel and sense our self as image, perceiving the imaginal dimensions of our self. Moving through our life, we feel that self gradually acquiring more and more dimensions. We are not merely the flatly existing human being that secular

modernism would tell us we are. Despite all our interiority—perhaps even the interiority of an unconscious with its repressed contents—there is a sense of being, perhaps, if you like, manifesting many faces, having within us many imaginal figures, being many imaginal figures.

Through imaginal practice and through the erotics of the imaginal, a dimensionality opens up not just of other, but also of self.

For example, one might have an image that one is practicing with, and perhaps this image involves being in a certain relationship with a particular divine figure—this imaginal figure, maybe a tantric deity, maybe some other kind of god or goddess. Perhaps in the image one is being held by them or resting in their lap, somehow receiving as a human being their divine love or being held by that particular divinity.

Right there in the image, you have a constellation of human and divine. The self feels human and as human receives succor or encouragement or nourishment or love, somehow infused imaginally through that divine other, that imaginal figure of divinity. This is actually a very important stage—that human-divine polarity, with self as human and imaginal other as divine.

But I would say that if you remain present with the image long enough, if you open up the awareness, you begin to recognize that the self is also image here in this image. There is imaginal self. Because dimensionality is always part of an image in the way we are using this term, the dimensionality of the self in this image—of being in the lap of the god or goddess—begins to open up, begins to expand. Dimensionality moves toward divinity, so that eventually what happens is you have two divinities present together, the self and the divine other.

This represents another stage, and rather than saying it is better or worse, it is simply different. It is, I would say, the inevitable movement if we allow the soul-making dynamic to move in every direction—toward the self in the image as well as toward the other, the object on which we are usually focusing. This is not a matter of making anything happen, but rather of noticing and simply being with and allowing something that is a natural, organic movement of the soul, of this Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic.

There are all kinds of examples here. In the example I gave in the previous talk of the raft and the infusion of black blood from the goddess, I then went outside and felt the power and energy in my body from this black blood she had given me. I became myself a divinity, sensing myself imaginally as a divinity—as this dancing, stomping, powerful, thick-set, muscular god, somehow also in deep connection with nature, receiving that infusion of the blood, that strange divine nectar from nature.

So there's this spreading of the soul-making, spreading of the imaginal, spreading of the erotic, and spreading also in this sense of the locus of divinity, if you like, in the faces of divinity.

The same is true in regard to all this. When we're actually dealing with an actual person who has become for us a theophany—whatever our actual relationship is with them, whether they're a teacher or a guru or

a lover or whatever it is—when actually we have an imaginal perception of a person, we are also imagining ourself in relationship to them. And even if this person isn't yet a divinity for us in that sense, there's not that theophany there, we want to see what the image of self is and what it can be.

So we include the self image, the image of self, in the constellation, in the imaginal erotic constellation, and we include that and we let it fill out. Eventually, ourselves... Ourself becomes a theophany, or plural theophanies. We are perhaps many theophanies.

And we get the sense, slowly, as I said, of the self as well as the other, as well as the beloved other, as well as the object—it could be an inanimate object—being infinite. That we are infinite. And I don't mean here, in this kind of practice, only... I don't only mean we are infinite in the sense that our essence is infinite awareness or infinite love or some of those more universal openings to a universal essence of oneness. So that you can perceive infinite awareness or infinite love being the fabric of the universe, and we are the same thing in essence, so that therefore I'm infinite. I don't just mean that.

I mean also in the infinite possibilities of the possible faces, if you like, who can come through us—what I used to call the vertical spectrum of the imaginal, but I might drop that word "vertical" because it has too many loaded connotations. There's a spectrum of imaginal faces that can manifest, if you like, through another, I can perceive, and through the self, so through myself and through another, and we can get this sense of all that being there as a sort of spectrum of dimensionality that they are, that we are. There's infinite possibilities there in the perceptions of, in this case, of one's own soul, in its particularities. It's not in its universality of just being awareness or love or something like that, but in its particularities, in my personhood, in my particular manifestations.

This also—so we said self, other, world, and eros. They get constellated together. So all this applies, this movement of the soul-making dynamic to involve and include the sense of the world and the sense of eros itself, if the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic is allowed, if it's not hindered, if it's not blocked or refused or dismissed where it wants to go. If the soul-making dynamic is allowed to spread naturally, organically, it will start giving dimensionality, giving beauty, depth, all the imaginal richness and eventually even divinity—self, other, world and eros itself.

So when, a few talks ago, I used that term "autoeroticism," and then I said, "Oh, actually, we'll come back to that as a facet of eros," as something to recognize as an aspect of eros, that there was an autoeroticism that was, if you like, part of eros. What I really meant there was that what distinguishes an experience of eros from just an experience of, let's say, metta or metta with imagination—you know, when we imagine the person that we're giving metta to being happy or whatever—what distinguishes eros from that, and this is something we'll come back to in regards to the distinction between eros and metta, is that one of the things is that eros has this autoeroticism as an aspect to it, meaning that the self is also regarded erotically, is given dimensionality, is attractive in that erotic way that we've been talking about, and not just the self, but also the self's eros.

So whatever image of erotic connection is involved in the imaginal perception of the constellation of self and other, whatever eros that the self is seen imagining to be participating in that connection—whether it's penetration or opening or being penetrated or whatever it is—that eros is also kind of regarded erotically, if you like. In other words, that too has dimensions, has beauty. The eros itself becomes an erotic object. Our own eros becomes an erotic object for us.

So, not just the other, also the self and the images of the self, that comes alive. There's eros towards the self because the self is given dimensionality, even imaginal dimensionality, and also the eros that the self feels also becomes an erotic object. It's given imaginal dimensionality. There's this attraction towards—almost like wanting to taste it, to connect with it, to open to the very eros more. It has beauty, it has dimensionality, it has divinity. So autoeroticism—this soul-making dynamic is spreading in these different directions to, in a way, touch everything.

So in regard to this and the self and the sense of the self or the image of the self that's operating at any time, we can say that a desire is not eros when it arises from and when it is serving the kind of narrow, habitual, and solidified self that's perhaps seeking pleasant sensations or seeking a sense of solidity to solidify itself or seeking to aggrandize itself. That kind of desire is more what we call clinging and craving or greed.

That sense of self, when it's narrow, habitual, solidified self, seeking pleasure, seeking solidity, seeking aggrandizement, self-aggrandizement—that self is sensed as unitary. This is the self, it's the real self, there's one of them, and it's also kind of one-dimensional. It lacks this imaginal dimensionality, this multiplicity of beings, this sense of shading into divinity, of emanating from divinity and all that. It's unitary, one-dimensional. It's also reified. There's a sense of, "I believe in this self." It's not even an intellectual concept. I believe in the reality of this self.

All of that in opposition to an imaginal sense of self that's not unitary, that has this spectrum of the imaginal, it's not one-dimensional because of that very spectrum, and it, as I said, shades into divinity or emanates from divinity or expresses or is a theophany, and it's seen, it's an image, seeing image as image, so it's not reified.

So desire that comes out of this narrow, habitual, solidified self is not eros.

Imaginal desire can be eros, is eros.

The same principle applies to our sense of the other—when that other, the erotic object, is not seen as image, is not recognized to be imaginal, when we're not seeing image as image. When the object is reified, when we really believe in this "real thing," that too gives rise to a desire that becomes greed or craving.

Already, just as an aside, you can hear me moving back and forth between the narrower definition of eros—simply this wanting of connection—and the larger definition, which implies the imaginal, implies seeing image as image. So just keep your ears attuned to that movement.

Now, oftentimes, simply because of what we've been taught and heard so much, we view desire that arises in a particular way. There's desire—perhaps sexual desire, perhaps erotic desire—and yet we automatically view it as if it's a defilement or something bad, and assume it's something the self is doing. Especially if you've heard enough standard Dharma teachings without sufficient differentiation in them, or interpreted them without enough nuance, then desire becomes a movement of the self. It comes from the self. It's the self that desires. If I somehow had no self, I wouldn't desire. Desire comes from the self and desire reinforces the self. We very often automatically assume this.

Perhaps we can slow down a little and have a look, sense into this desire and let it amplify, let it fill out imaginal space with mindfulness, with sensitivity to the resonances, with the energy body and all that. Because sometimes what happens, if we have this larger perspective on what a human being is, is that the desire arises from the imaginal figure—from, if you like, the divinity, from the deity. Whose is this desire? Is it just this narrow, flat, unitary self desiring? Or is it actually, as William Blake said, a divine influx?

Where is it coming from? Whose is it? Maybe this desire is from Dionysus, or some other imaginal figure that's more personal, less archetypal. But then what happens? This desire arises. I automatically assume something about it—it's from the self, it's a defilement. And maybe that assumption locks into place a certain view which, as always, shapes the perception, shapes what unfolds. Maybe that desire actually becomes craving or greed or clinging in the narrow sense through the very view itself.

Do you understand? This can only be explored by experimenting. We can only explore this by experimenting—what happens if I grant something another possibility? If I enter into another way of looking, what happens? I'm not saying it's easy, and it does, maybe not for everyone, but probably for most people, take considerable practice. It requires certain meditative skills and capacities and arts to be developed. But if I experiment, what do I see? What do I uncover? What gets opened up?

So this is the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, this weave of soul-making, the way the tree of soul grows in different directions organically, the way fire leaps and catches as it spreads, the way it ignites and sparks other things that it takes hold of.

And one of these directions is the world itself—self, other, world. We've been calling this cosmopoiesis, and we've touched on it in other talks and retreats. I could give many, countless examples here. The possibilities, again, are infinite.

So again, I might give some examples that emerge specifically from a kind of sexual eros that's working in the imaginal—just to open up that possibility where we can sometimes be a little shy, a little doubtful. And of course, I'm aware of how, as I said earlier, if someone were to simply pick up a talk at this point and listen, they might wonder how on earth we arrived here. But I really hope you can see how it fits very organically—we're gradually opening certain doors and underpinning them with understandings and meditative skills that make them truly fruitful and beautiful and important.

Sometimes, in an imaginal constellation like what I referred to before, we perceive a kind of imbalance. We feel very human while the other, the imaginal other, is not human but divine, and there's an imbalance there. In a way, we might feel somehow lesser. This pulls on all kinds of psychological structures, and we'll touch on this. But in a way, sometimes it's just one way of looking at it.

It's just the eros-psyche-logos dynamic has not yet opened up enough. It wants to move in every direction—towards the self as well as towards the other—but it simply hasn't flowed as fully in one direction before flowing equally in the other. Or perhaps it's not being allowed to flow there. We'll return to this.

Sometimes we perceive this same imbalance in an actual relationship in our lives, human to human. Again, there's some kind of perceiving of the other with all their imaginal depth and beauty, perhaps even divinity, and we somehow feel less than, or at a certain stage we feel wanting in some way. This is relatively common.

Perhaps we feel we are in love with this person, or with this imagined figure, or with this person imaginatively imbued. We can feel that they love us, but they're not in love with us. There's a dimension missing—the dimensions are not equal. Or sometimes we experience that very normal human desire to see and hear from the other that we are desired deeply, and that includes sexually. We want to know that we are desired sexually.

Let me give an example. This dynamic was at play in my own practice, and I said, "Okay, so there's this imbalance right now." Just giving myself—actually helped by the imaginal figure—the permission to feel and allow this wanting. I want her. In this case there was the male-female in the image, along biological gender lines, and I want her. I want to see and hear that she wants me, that she wants to let me in. That means let me in heart and soul and physically as well. That she wants to open her body to me erotically, sexually.

The first thing was simply being encouraged by the imaginal figure that it's really okay to feel that and to allow that feeling. That encouragement and allowing myself to do that actually liberated a wealth of images. The whole territory became very fecund imaginally, with many images arising quite quickly.

Interestingly, I was traveling to teach somewhere when all this was happening. I was sitting on the train during quite a long journey, working with these images—on the train, going to the station, and so on and off in that way.

There was a liberation of all these images from the allowing, from feeling into that slightly uncomfortable feeling but actually permitting it. Liberation of images, and then at some point, tremendous energy infused my whole body, the energy body. The image was of roaring, like a lion roars, and bellowing fire, like a dragon bellows fire. There was enormous energy and power in this. Bellowing fire—and in fact, I became flame. I became a being of flames. A great deal of energy and power was felt.

But still, regarding the original imaginal sense of the situation, despite all this energy and power, I realized I still needed to be granted admission. She still needed to let me in, still needed to say to me, "I want you inside me, I want to let you in." This power was not the kind that would force that. In any situation, you cannot force someone to want you that way, to want to let you in heart and soul and body.

So there was this fascinating mixture: tremendous power that I felt, roaring and bellowing fire with enormous energy in the body, at the same time as recognizing that no matter how powerful that felt, there was also this dependency. I was still, in the image, dependent on her—on this imaginal figure—communicating to me, granting me admission.

There was this double constellation existing: the power along with the tremendous sense of dependency at the same time, these almost opposites coalescing, mixing, co-constellating.

And as I tuned in to the imaginal figure, there was the sense, the recognition, that she did grant me admission, she did want me that way, in those ways.

All this was happening simultaneously—the power, the recognition of dependency, and as I tuned into her image more, the recognition that she did grant me that and she did want me.

What happened then was a cosmopoiesis, in the sense that the flame that I was, I found myself in a world of flames. This was an extremely powerful perception, very subtle. And this was happening on the train, so I was still aware of who was sitting next to me and opposite me, what was outside the window. But at the same time, there was this level of perception—subtle but very powerful—of a world of flames.

This was not a hell realm at all, not the hell realms of burning. It felt very wondrous, very beautiful.

Each thing, in a way, was a flame. A kind of essence of each thing was a flame, and fire, flame, is eros. So each thing was felt to be expressing its own eros, as flame, as fire. And sensing into that, each thing, each being, and the world as a whole—its eros, its desire, was that it wanted me to love it. The eros that I was sensing into there was each thing, each being, and the world as a whole desired, wanted me to love it.

The world, this world of flames, or the world that I now saw—as it was the same world—was erotic in essence. Including the sexual, but not necessarily just the sexual at all. Each thing, each being, and the world as a whole wanted me to love it. And in a way, recognizing that as human beings, this is this kind of altered mystical perception. We can feel that call, not just from the beings, the animate beings of the world, but from the so-called inanimate nature and the things of the world.

And so in myself, I felt the desire to respond to this wanting in things, this wanting that things were expressing. And I felt that very physically. I felt it in my tongue, actually, predominantly in my tongue, in my mouth, in my genitals, in my hands—my whole body was involved in a sense. And as I gave very sensitive, delicate attention to this, opening and working with it over time, I also felt that the eros I was feeling was the eros of the divine.

In other words, this was the gods, if you like, or Buddha nature's desire to penetrate—because I felt it as a kind of wanting to penetrate all things. This is very, again, sexual there. So the movement there was more, quote, masculine, as opposed to the movement of opening and receiving, which could have been both or either. So this is different. The divine's desire to penetrate all things, to sexually penetrate all things.

What does this mean? It's an imaginal perception. It's not the same as the divine desire pervading all things with its essence, its oneness of beingness or love or awareness. There's something much more particular there. All the wanting here—the wanting that belonged to things, their wanting to be loved, and the wanting that was coming through me to respond to that, to penetrate—all was seen or evolved through the imaginal process to have divine dimensions.

I'm reminded of somewhere Thomas Aquinas, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, "All beauty yearns to be seen." All beauty yearns to be seen. And I don't know enough about him or what he meant by that, but here's a sense of opening to a mystical or imaginal perception, very particular, where each thing, each being and the world wants its beauty to be seen, to be celebrated, to be loved, to have that erotic connection and in a way for that to penetrate it. So very particular kinds of cosmopoiesis opening there.

Okay, so another example. Sometimes we might be with a pure, so-called intra-psychic image, or actually someone we are in a certain relationship to. And as I said before, eros gives rise to, actually supports and nourishes and increases the way we love people, in the ways that we love the beloved other. An increase also it supports—an increase of the ways and the depths and the breaths in which we appreciate, in which we sense and see and feel their beauties, plural, and their divinity. So eros opens all this because of all of what we've been talking about, the eros-psyche-logos dynamic.

So that in relation to this, let's say, person in one's life where we have this kind of relationship, the eros there, if it's allowed, can actually start to... I love your body. But it's actually what... That also begins to have a fullness. I love your bones. I love your blood. I love your veins. I love your kidneys. It's got this whole other visceral dimension. And eventually... I love all your matter. I love all the matter that is you, so to speak. And so the eros is, if you like, moving there to the realm of matter.

And it can do this in all kinds of ways. So what can happen there, the way the soul-making infuses and spills over into the perception of matter—there's so many possibilities. But in this case, it could then be that one feels that eros, opens up that relationship with the matter of the beloved other. And then that spreads into the world again. I'm just talking about cosmopoiesis here.

But the perception of that matter is not matter as a quantum physicist would conceive it. It's not even divine as a sort of emanation of light—it's matter just as commonly experienced, as we tend to think of this sort of stuff that we don't really think much about or ponder. We just bump into it and assume what every modernist assumes. That's our experience of it. So a love for all matter that way. And again, this kind of thing, if it opens up, you might check...

It's often easier for this cosmopoiesis, this love of matter, to spread to other living matter—things in nature, animals and trees and grass and whatever. But I remember experiencing this and actually having some bones in front of where I was meditating. And you could see how it spread—not quite so easily as it did to living matter, but it spread almost as easily to the bones, because they were once living, they were organic. And then a little more difficult to spread, but still possible, to plastic things that were around.

So it spreads to all matter, but not in a way that's linked with or dependent on them providing me with pleasant vedanā. It might be easier with that at first, but it doesn't have to be linked with that at all, or even being conventionally beautiful. Because the whole thing started—we don't usually think of veins and livers as beautiful in that sense. But there was this loving love for all matter, independent of whether it was conventionally beautiful or whether it was providing me with pleasant vedanā.

At other times, this love and appreciation for the body of another, or just the cosmopoiesis that comes in—sorry, the sense of the imaginal other—might spread to a cosmopoiesis that's much more ethereal in its dimensions. So many possibilities here, but for example, one might perceive the world around one—the trees, the grass, whatever it is, the buildings—and have the perception that it's as if light or lights are shining through and into this world of matter, or that this matter and this world is somehow a reflection or a refraction of the light of higher levels, of other worlds, if you like, but in a way that doesn't really diminish this world as somehow less than or inferior or not valuable—this world and these appearances of everyday—but rather giving them beauty, giving them other dimensions of sacredness through the light that comes through them, comes to them and through them. So all kinds of possibilities.

And again, one might be working with an erotic image of a beloved other, and one might have this sort of wider sense of sexual eros pervading the image, constellating the image, and maybe we have, like we've alluded to already, the whole body is penetrated. And independent of whether you're biologically male or female, whatever, the whole body can be penetrated by the imaginal other or penetrate the imaginal other. The whole body, the whole being is somehow entered, or one can be devoured by the deity or by the god. So all one's flesh and bones, imaginal flesh and bones, is devoured, or one devours this imaginal figure—all these possibilities and permutations.

And again, they can give rise, if we dwell in the meditation with these kind of things and work with them, as I said, sensitively and with the mindfulness there, then they can spread sometimes into a cosmopoiesis. And it might be, for instance, the cosmos is mystically devouring me, it's eating me. And this might sound to someone like, "Oh, that's terrible," but actually can feel really wonderful, and the sense of participating in some kind of mystical dimension of the being, or process of the cosmos.

We can say, you know, this physical body will dissolve eventually and have to, in Buddhist language, give my aggregates back to the universe. This is something different. There's a kind of imaginal, mystical perception that the cosmos is eternally eating me, mystically eating me, and I'm participating in something there at some mystical level of being. Or as I said, the cosmopoiesis might be that I somehow am

devouring the cosmos.

What does this mean? Because again, in some ways I do devour at least part of the cosmos—organically and in ideas. So that's all true. It's giving this other dimension, expanding those kinds of ideas into other, more mystical, more hard to articulate dimensions. And it might be that it moves back and forth between being devoured and devouring the cosmos, being devoured by the cosmos and devouring the cosmos—maybe even back and forth very quickly, maybe even in some completely illogical way, simultaneously, the two are happening. The cosmos is devouring me, and I am devouring the cosmos. Of course, again, at a material level, we can see there's a certain truth in that.

There are so many possibilities here. So I just want to really—partly what I'm wanting to do is just open up the sense of just how much is possible.

One more: I was in meditation and an imaginal figure—beautiful—she came and kissed my heart and my torso gently, and just feeling the resonances of that. In this case, actually, it did progress to more sexual imagery. But again, there it stayed at a very specific sexual image, and really receiving from her in the image and dwelling with that and feeling it and receiving, through that sexual interaction and the sexual love there, so much tenderness. What this imaginal figure was imbuing—her sexual love with so much tenderness—and she wanted, it seemed as I fell into it, she wanted out of love, out of pure love, to give me pleasure.

When working with that in the meditation, this is what I tuned into—her love and this wanting to give me pleasure. This becomes a kind of wavelength or dimension of the image, very specific and subtle, the tuning there. And I needed, again, to feel the whole energy body and open to the pleasure there. So this is—well, actually it's not that hard to do, but it takes the kind of skills that we've been talking about developing. But it's very specific, very subtle tuning, whole energy body involved, and the ability to open to that.

And out of that—and you probably are not surprised at this point—samādhi came. So I had this possibility, kind of fork in the road there. You can go just into some kind of jhāna there, or the samādhi, and leave the image behind, or stay with the image and enjoy the pleasure of the samādhi mixed, or let it spread a little bit. And it was the third one that I chose, because what happened was there was a sense of just dipping into the samādhi a bit, and then the sense of a heavenly realm opening up.

Actually, rather, this world that I was in, the room that I was in, became a heavenly realm infused with divine eros. The sense was that the world was transubstantiated—transformed into a heavenly realm infused with divine eros.

Even as I say it now, part of the mind wonders: what does that mean? Even then, part of the mind asked this question. In some ways, it was a vague sense. In other ways, it was extremely precise and very subtle. But it was a sense. It was palpable—an imaginal perception of this world, this room, and the surroundings

outside.

In this cosmopoiesis, eros was woven into the cosmos. The cosmos was felt, seen to be a garden of eros, a garden of delight. And with all that, of course, eros was right. There was something fundamentally, profoundly right about eros. It has its rightful, beautiful, divine place in the scheme of things—in the cosmos, actually permeating the cosmos. In that imaginal perception that opened up, eros is divine.

All this brought tremendous delight and a sense of beauty, inner and outer, and much joy. The sense was of profound gift—that all of this was gift. The eros was gift, and the cosmos was gift. The whole cosmos was experienced in such a beautiful way as gift, as erotic gift.

You can see how that cosmopoiesis mirrors, or rather has its seeds in, the initial image. Because I had grown accustomed to some of this before and was playing with it, I experimented as I opened my eyes and moved around with the equality of perception—testing whether it applied just as easily to plastic or the sound of a plane overhead, to things unpleasant or man-made, not necessarily aesthetically pleasing artifacts or functional things, as it did to the beautiful trees and sky.

There's quite a bit more to this. What I noticed was that at a certain stage of this cosmopoetic perception opening, there was a stage where I felt that it was the divine purpose of the cosmos to express eros to me—to love me and give me delight. I was, if you like, a graced recipient of divine eros.

At the very same time, I knew it wasn't just me. It applied to everyone else. It was simply a matter of people opening to that perception. I was not in any way singled out or had any sense of being special or different than other people. But there was this sense—and again, it doesn't make rational sense, and it wasn't meant to. This was image as image, seeing image as image, holding it, holding these perceptions so that we know image as image. We're not reifying them, not clunking down on them as some sort of truth. Yet we're still holding them so that they can have tremendous power. It's neither dismissing nor grabbing at and reifying.

That was just a stage, because eventually it moved to a more general sense of the cosmos being infused with and expressing eros. So the cosmos is erotic. And with all this, there was a sense of dimensionality to the cosmos.

Later, I think it was the same day—I was on retreat at the time—I sat down to meditate. There was again tremendous power and expansion, the energy body really expanding and feeling very imbued with energy and power. Following that, letting it constellate an image of the self, of the energy body, it felt like I had become a wrathful deity—if you know those Tibetan images of Yamantaka and many others. A wrathful deity or a divine beast, a bestial deity.

There was roaring and waves of energy passing through the imaginal body. I wasn't actually roaring—no one would have heard anything. But this was the imaginal sense, and it felt very palpable and strong in the physical body. It felt very, very good, what was going on there with the energy body and the imaginal

body.

Then, coming back to the imaginal figure I was working with earlier, this divine beast, wrathful deity, with a subtle gesture in the image, claimed her. It made clear, through a certain gesture of the body, its erotic claim on her: "You are mine."

There was desire there—my desire, my sexual and erotic desire. But it also seemed, again, like tuning in and noticing what's happening with the image...

What else is in the image?

So there was a desire, yes, but also the sense that this claiming, this my claiming of this, of her, of this imaginal figure, was, so to speak, already happening. So it's a desire and an act to do something, and it expresses desire, but this claiming... and this desire is already happening.

It's not so much what I or this divine beast wants, but more that it's already flowing from me, from this imaginal self. The divine beast is flowing to her eternally, or rather timelessly, or as Henri Corbin used to say, in hierophantic time, in sacred time. There's a time that doesn't progress. It's almost like discrete, timeless moments or images. So it's already flowing, this movement of claiming.

As I fell into and got the sense of what was actually pregnant in this image, then a dimension of the image reveals itself, which is this hierophantic dimension we've touched on before. The desire there was to give her pleasure. So again, the desire then mirrors her wanting to give me pleasure before, and now it's me desiring to give her pleasure. And I could see that the imaginal figure, she enjoys being claimed. She enjoys me gesturing in a way of communicating: you are mine.

So again, all this could sound like it's ego or this or that. Far, far from it. There's something so light and so beautiful and sacred flowing through it. It feels very good in the body. And again, the body becomes flames that come and go, that moved back and forth, and again I went outside.

And again, the cosmos experienced as erotic. I'm in a heavenly realm where the cosmos is by nature, in its essence, at one dimension, erotic. It's an erotic cosmos. But in this case, I was not so much the recipient. So in the cosmopoetic perception of self and the world or the cosmos, I was not so much the recipient. Rather, it was my role—the role of this imaginal self or the imaginal role of self—my role and my ability to let Eros flow through me, to flow from me to others, to create beauty in that way and to give delight and to give pleasure through that.

And again, not that that was unique to me. It was clear to me that's everyone's role and ability. But what's unique is the ways in which each of us do that. So again, you can see how the imaginal self interfaces or spills over, shades over into the lived, actually physically manifested self. Because I could say that about my life, and I'm sure everyone could say that about their life. But the perception of that gets a whole other dimensionality and beauty to it through the imaginal dimension of that opening up. It gets this profundity,

breadth, richness, complication, sacredness to it.

I think later, still the same day or the next day, I can't remember, but the same couple in the imaginal meditation and really focusing then on our love—not so much her giving me pleasure out of love or me desiring to give her pleasure or claim her out of love, but our love, the two of us in a kind of mutual dance of love, of eros, of delight, if you like. And when I looked around me then, the cosmos after that is again infused with Eros. And our dance, our loving is, if you like, mirroring or echoing or infused with the divine cosmic Eros.

And this is something that can happen between two people, two actual people in their relationship, if they allow the soul-making dynamic to expand the sense of what's happening in actual relationship. But you can see in this little three-part imaginal practice I've just described: when the focus was more on her, on the imaginal figure's actions and qualities, then I felt the self to be the recipient of that in the cosmic perception, reflecting the actual imaginal perception in the narrower image. And when I lost the cosmopoetic perception, I could regain it by focusing on that aspect of the original image—of her wanting to communicate love to me through the sexual, through the erotic. Focusing on that in the image brought back the cosmopoiesis, that particular cosmopoiesis of receiving cosmic love, divine love.

In the second little part there, the focus was on myself and the power and the energy and the divine beast, giving her pleasure again with the eros and the love. And then the cosmopoiesis led to a sense of that in its cosmic place, of myself as a channel, if you like, for the divine's giving or outpouring through me—that's what characterized the cosmopoiesis. And again, if I lost it, I could focus back on that initial image and the cosmopoiesis comes back.

And in the last part, when it's more mutual, it's like the us, the our—our back and forth and flow of love together. Then again, the cosmopoiesis there was reflecting that kind of balance, that kind of equality, if you like.

So we can begin to see the potential here of what it can open up in perception if we allow eros to have and inseminate fully the whole dynamic structure of the eros-psyche-logos and that whole movement, the whole soul-making movement.

And partly, again, I'm using these particular examples, sexual examples. Some of them, you know—I'm aware, devouring and all this—it sounds quite dark and claiming, and some people would be cautious for different reasons around that. But I really want to say, first of all, as I said in the other talk, there's a whole range here, and a lot of the even sexual erotic is not dark at all. It's very, very light and gentle or whatever. So there's a whole range.

But yes, not just of so-called darkness, but also of what might be more straightforward or normal or anatomically plausible, ranging all the way to really quite far-out imagery and experiences. So the entire range is open to us. Within that, we learn to trust if something seems darker or stranger.

What's happening here is not disrespectful to the imaginal figure, or even if the imaginal figure is actually another person with whom you have that kind of relationship. It's not disrespectful. It's not lacking in love. You can notice this. You can feel it. Is it really disrespectful? Don't buy the first thing the mind tells you. Is it really lacking in love? Is it really an objectification of that other person?

To me, objectification means I've somehow shrunk this person down to not see the totality of their being. But have a look if this comes up. Dare to have a look. Is it that? Is it lacking in respect, in love? Is it an objectification? No. You'll see that most often this involves a totality. Respect and love are there. Neither is it out of control, nor does it increase defilement. You can feel in all of this, even in what seems very dark, there's a kind of sacredness and holiness that are palpable.

So again, as I said, the whole movement with eros is that it opens up the range of sacrednesses that we can feel and know about, experience for ourselves firsthand, woven into the cosmos, woven into our being and that of others, in ways that make a difference to our life—a profound difference.

Just to recap a little: the soul-making dynamic, the expansion, fertilization, insemination, deepening, enriching, and widening of eros, psyche, and logos—this mutual movement—needs to flow, or will flow if unimpeded, in all these different directions. It will flow not just toward the beloved other, the object, the imaginal erotic object, but also back toward the self and the imaginal self, amplifying that. And also toward the sense of eros itself.

We have this phrase, "falling in love." Why are we falling in love? Or rather, what does it mean? I wonder where that expression came from. There's something uncontrollable about falling. It may be—I don't know, but one way of looking at it—that what's happening in the expansion of the sense of the other and the expansion of the sense of the self and of eros itself, even of the world, is that the soul-making dynamic moves in all these directions and expands them all, but it doesn't have a limit. The infinite pothos will just keep expanding this potentially.

Maybe falling in love is what we're feeling—a kind of open-ended movement where we're not even sure who we are anymore because we're being opened into a kind of space that keeps opening. The other too. Perhaps our sense of love itself, of eros, is also open. It doesn't seem to be landing anywhere, and it's not stopping anywhere, because the soul-making, the erotic dynamic just keeps opening. That feeling has this bottomless, limitless quality to it. Maybe—I don't know—maybe that's part of what happens when we say "I'm falling in love with you."

But there's another dimension here, which may or may not happen. Actually, all of this may or may not happen in actual life, as we come back to what blocks this kind of infinite and comprehensive, potentially infinite, potentially comprehensive movement of the soul-making dynamic.

Here, as I've said several times now, it's possible that the sense of eros itself is seen and felt erotically and given imaginal dimensions, so that eventually we feel something like a divinity of eros, or divine eros that

infuses the cosmos. My eros, this eros that I feel in me, coming from me, is divine. Or it mirrors the divine eros, or it comes from the divinity—the Buddha nature, God, whatever you want to call it, the archetypes. All this can be there.

As I said, recapping: there's an infinity of possibilities. If the soul-making dynamic is not hindered or blocked in any of its potential directions, movements, and unfoldings, then there are infinite possibilities with respect to the self—the sense of the self, the image of the self, the conception of the self—with respect to the other, the beloved other, of course, with respect to the world, and with respect to eros itself.

That fourfold co-constellated aspect: self, other, world, eros. Each of them has infinite possibilities if the soul-making dynamic is allowed its natural expansion, deepening, movement, fertilization. The image and the idea of each of these—self, other, world, and eros—the image and idea, the psyche and the logos of each of these and all of these, is expanded. My eros is mirroring the divine eros.

That's both an image, it's an imaginal sense, and it's an idea, a logos. So you can see how in regard to each of these, if eros gets going, if the erotic movement gets going, psyche and logos, they touch everything. And everything involved in that constellation - self, other, world, eros - but also the notion of psyche itself, the notion of what the soul is and what an image is, gets also expanded, enriched, deepened, amplified. And even the image and the idea of ideas. In other words, the psyche and the logos of logos.

So, for example, we can feel, we can sense, as this whole soul-making movement happens, that our mind is, through image and through idea, through images and through ideas, participating in the divine mind, the divine logos, if you like. So again, this is an image, but it's also an idea, isn't it? Or that what comes to us through image or through ideas, through creative ideas, through concepts, is a manifestation of the world soul, of the soul-making process of the cosmos.

So these are both images and ideas, but they're not abstract ideas. Again, we're entertaining them, we're feeling them, we're plugging into them, if you like, in ways that really galvanize and catalyze and have a tremendous effect on the being, on the perception, on the ways of looking, on the energy body, on the soulfulness.

So when we talk about logos, we don't mean, as I said earlier, something abstract. We mean an idea that finds its way into the way of looking, that is imbuing the way of looking. And because the whole being is involved - the body, the soul, the perception, the intellect - these ideas are not abstract. But the very idea of ideas, the very, if you like, psyche and logos of logos, the image and idea of image and idea and soul and mind starts to also get amplified, enriched, deepened, given dimensionality.

So the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, the soul-making dynamic, will also expand, complicate, deepen, widen the definitions we have of eros, of psyche or soul, and also of logos, of mind.

And in all this, in describing cosmopoiesis, we might start with eros in relation to an imaginal figure, but if we work with it, if we allow it, actually it brings an erotic relationship with nature. So again, the eros

spreads, so the imaginal spreads to nature in the cosmopoiesis. But there's also wrapped up in that, because all these things are interconnected - where there's eros there's psyche, where there's image there's eros, where there's image there's eros.

And we start to feel, when we have - as that erotic relationship with nature starts to get supported and opened and nourished and ignited - then the eros and the love and reverence that are part of that in relation to nature and the things of nature, animals and trees and all that, quite a lot begins to open up in terms of our perceptions of nature.

So we might - we tend to have in our modernist cultures maybe that only human beings have intelligence, some animals have a very limited intelligence, but it stops at animals. But maybe through this erotic relationship with nature, we begin to perceive, in the cosmopoiesis, we begin to perceive other kinds of, let's call it intelligence, other kinds of knowing. What is the intelligence of a tree? And I don't just mean the biochemical intelligence of the way it works and photosynthesis and all that, how clever, or the intelligence of evolution. What's the intelligence of a tree? What's the communication of a tree or stones?

So something happens in the erotic movement beginning to infuse our relationship with nature. Something happens. We perceive other kinds of intelligence. I'm not going to say much about that right now.

Also open up for us in that other ways of knowing. Also in terms of intelligence opening up. So our whole being is involved in what intelligence means. My ovaries know. There's an intelligence in my ovaries. Or in the image, the tongue is connecting with maybe certain body parts of an image of another or something, and there's certain communication through the tongue, a certain information, if you like, that's being transmitted and received by the tongue.

The whole body is involved in the imaginal process and in the erotic process. More and more so. We'll come back to this. Sometimes we'll say your three centers need to be involved: your belly, your heart, and your head. And we'll come back to that. But in a way, your belly means your body and certainly your sexual organs and that whole sexual dimension of your body and the energy. And your heart center, meaning your emotionality and your affect and your love and whatever other emotions are going there, and also your head.

We talked about logos and the importance of that. Sometimes the shorthand is: all your three centers need to be involved. But actually it's the whole being. Every dimension of our being, every dimension of the mind, every dimension of the soul, of the heart, and of the body opens up in ways that we might not expect, just because that's what the soul-making dynamic does. That's what the psyche-logos dynamic does as it expands and fertilizes more and more.

In a nutshell, eros, as I said, supports, opens, ignites, spreads, deepens, widens our sense - senses, plural - of sacredness in all domains, in all kinds of areas, in all perceptions, and in all kinds of particularities that

we wouldn't even have maybe noticed before. And the kinds of sacredness are, if you like, also co-constellated. So the kind of sense of divinity is co-constellated with that other four-part co-constellation: self, other, world, eros.

It's also co-constellated with self—with the sense of self, of other, of world, of eros. Even the sense of no divinity, of a flat universe, is still a kind of constellation. When we have that sense of no divinity, there's a certain kind of sense of self that emerges—because only a certain amount is allowed—a certain kind of perception and idea of the other, a certain kind of perception and idea of the world, and a certain kind of perception and idea of any eros or desire that might arise.

So these five are actually co-constellated together.

Let me finish with something that will seed what we'll explore further. Jung wrote in his memoirs: "We are in the deepest sense the victims and instruments of cosmogonic love." Cosmogon—he said in another place, "Eros is a cosmogonos." That's a fancy Greek word. Cosmogonos means something that generates—gonos, to generate, like gonad. It's something that gives rise to the cosmos.

You find these myths where Eros or something like it gives rise to the cosmos. But we can see this in the phenomenology of our actual experience: eros opens up, it gives birth to the world, it gives birth to the sense of the self—or different senses of self, other, world, and eros—and to cosmopoiesis, and also to divinity. So eros opens, brings with it, or rather puts into motion, a cosmos-birthing process. Actually, the birthing of many cosmoses, if you like, because there's this infinity there.

Seeing our eros as divine—as I said, as gods, as divinities, as the Buddha-nature's eros manifesting through us—is a certain view of divinity, and of eros. And you can see how the self and the world is constellated according to that. All of this co-constellates within the soul-making dynamics.

What this means is that the kinds of divinity we are able to open to as perceptions, as actual experiences, are also infinite. Because that five-point co-constellation—self, other, world, eros, divinity—is infinite in its potential, since the eros-psyche-logos dynamic is infinite in its potential.

So the kinds of divinity are endless. The kinds of experiences of divinity, of perceptions, of senses of divinity are actually endless. I'm just throwing this out now—we're going to return to it, though it might seem vague. The perceptions and the conceptions of divinity are absolutely, potentially infinite and varied.

And that takes us out of the whole realm of dogma—either secular dogma or religious dogma. The whole field, including the exploration of what divinity might mean, becomes infinite in its potential. It's an infinitely large and expanding playground for us, for soul-making.

We'll come back to that. Thank you for listening.

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