# The Holy Life (Part 2)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:28:05

So we want to unpack, unfold, have a closer look at and inquire into eros and the path—the relationship of eros and the path, but also eros on the path and eros for the path. What is it to have an erotic relationship with the path that one is on? We want to inquire further into this and explore it all, opening it out for our investigation and questioning and practice.

Because of all that we've said so far about what eros is and what it does, to talk about eros and the path, eros on the path, eros for the path, means, of course, to talk about soul-making and the path, soul-making on the path, soul-making with respect to the path. As we've said, eros stimulates soul-making. It's a part of soul-making, and soul-making always involves eros. As we're using those terms, they implicate and involve each other. So eros and soul-making on the path and with respect to the path.

Now, we should also point out that when we talk about path, implicit in talking about path is the idea or the sense or the vision or fantasy of where that path is going—its aim, its direction, its goal. Awakening, whatever the concept, vision, image, fantasy of awakening is. So talking about eros and soul-making with respect to the path necessitates, involves already talking about eros and soul-making with respect to whatever idea and fantasy of awakening we have, or the different ideas and fantasies of awakening.

And further, to tie a third point in, any idea or fantasy of awakening implies an ideation, a logos, regarding the world. In other words, how does the vision of awakening, the idea of awakening, conceive of the world? What's the relationship between world, the senses, what we experience through the senses, which we could call the world, or life? To talk about awakening means also talking about that—senses, world, life, sense pleasure, all that. The relationship with that is implicit in the idea of awakening, the vision of awakening, the image of awakening. And the idea of awakening is implicit in the vision, image of the path.

So if we talk about eros and soul-making and the path, eros and soul-making on or for the path, wrapped up in that is the whole fantasy and logos of awakening. And wrapped up in that is the whole idea about the world, about the senses and life. So that to talk about eros for the path and on the path is not really separate from talking about eros and soul-making and its relationship to the world. What the path and the ideation, the vision of the path allows or disallows, encourages or doesn't, in terms of the directionality of eros and soul-making with respect to the world.

So these three are connected: the world, life, the senses; awakening; and path, eros and the path. Three aspects that are actually interwoven inevitably in each other when we begin to unpack these things. And as was already made clear plenty of times, hopefully by now, when we talk about soul-making, we are

talking about eros, psyche, and logos. In other words, this erotic movement, this erotic inclination, attraction, desire; psyche, meaning image and fantasy; and logos, meaning ideation and concept. So all those three—eros, psyche, logos—are wrapped up with those three: path, awakening, and world, or senses, or life. So all these, one set of threes and the other set of threes, they're all completely interrelated, interwoven.

So let's go into this a little bit and take our time. What does the mind do with respect to, let's say, sense pleasure? How does this tie into what the path says about what we do with sense pleasure? Because that's related to how awakening envisages a relationship with sense pleasure, and tied in with that then is a relationship with the whole world. So eros, sense pleasure, and awakening—there are possible ways they're constellated or conceived of in different frameworks or different visions of path and awakening.

One that you'll be probably quite familiar with, even if you're not familiar with the words, is that when there's pleasant vedanā, a pleasant sensation, when there's sense pleasure, or the possibility of sense pleasure in the future, then what quickly comes in for unawakened human beings is papañca. Of course that applies to unpleasant sensations as well, but here's this possibility of pleasantness—that chocolate cake, whatever it is, that attractive person—and the mind starts spinning around that and veiling it over, hyping it up with papañca. How wonderful this thing is, how beautiful it looks, how dear they are, how interesting they must be, this person, or whatever it is. There's a veil of papañca, of ideation, thinking and imagination. All that's called papañca—complicating.

This is unanimously regarded as a bad thing. Papañca creates more craving and clinging. It's part of that process and creates self and basically creates dukkha and entanglement in dukkha. And the practice is therefore cutting that link, cutting the link from pleasant vedanā, which is unavoidable in life, and what can flow out of that in terms of craving, but now particularly the papañca. So just cut the papañca off.

What you get wrapped up, implicit in that kind of view often, is that when you cut that off, then there's a kind of reductionism. So we are reducing all this hype, clearing away all this hype and all the entanglement, all the veils of illusory thinking and aggrandizement of the object that I'm attracted to in this case, and the imagery that goes with it, the imagination that goes with it, and we're reducing to just sense pleasure—just sense pleasure. So when I'm in a situation which involves sense pleasure, there is just sense pleasure and I'm not adding any more to it with imagination or concept. There's a kind of reductionism in there.

This can go a couple of different ways, which are not really separate, and we've touched on this before. So it can go into a kind of atomistic, a reductionism towards an atomistic process view, as if there is just this moment of bare sense pleasure, which can be revealed with bare attention.

There's the registering of sense pleasure, but nothing more is added to that in terms of imagination or thought. And so really, what reality is that we can be with is just this bare process of bare registration of sense pleasure. Yes, it's enjoyable, but we just register that and we don't add anything. That's the

movement there to strip away down to the bare elements of this atomistic and automatic process, at its barest level.

Or it can go into a slightly softer-sounding vision of path and awakening, which is to be with what is. Be in the moment, be with the touch of life, open to the touch of life. And if the touch is pleasant, then that's what you're open to. And if it's enjoyable, that's what you're open to. And if it's unpleasant, that's what you're open to.

Here, implicit too, there's a kind of realism of the "what is," which is assumed to be real—the touch of life. There's usually the assumption of reality wrapped up in that. When I strip away this parpancha, then I'm passively receiving the real touch of life.

Now that one—the touch of life or being with what is—is slightly more romantic. There's a bit more possibility for some kind of eros and soul-making than with the atomistic process view. But the two get mixed. As I said before, sometimes the word "process" gets replaced with the word "flow," for instance, and then you've got river and water analogies or imagery associated with it, which can be a little more juicy.

But still here, with this kind of view of cutting the parpancha, the eros and the soul-making is limited. A path says: imagination or fantasy and thought about the sense object, about the sense pleasure, is parpancha. Cut the parpancha. In cutting the parpancha, psyche and logos are cut, and eros in relationship to the senses, in relationship to the world, is limited and cut as well.

So that's one view. And whether you know the language, familiar with that exact language or not, you'll recognize that kind of thrust of the teaching.

A second view: actually, if you take a closer look at the Pali Canon, while there certainly is that level of teaching about parpancha, there's also... parpancha is filled out in terms of what it actually means, what the Buddha really means by parpancha. It says a lot more—it has a lot more depth to it than what I've just explained.

There's a sutta where I think Sāriputta is explaining about parpancha. And he says that what parpancha really means—it's equivalent to sense perception. In other words, it's equivalent to sense experience. Parpancha is really objectification, meaning making objects, making things—self and this, this lamp, this table, this piece of paper, this person. So parpancha means the making manifold, the construing in the perception, in the actual experience, in the world, into objects, separate objects, things that seem to exist.

So parpancha is actually equivalent with fabricating the perception of objects, the perception of things. So parpancha has this whole other level of meaning to it, beyond this idea of being cut and removed with bare attention, which is there, but there's a whole other level.

In other words, what actually is the Buddha referring to when he says parpancha? What's included in

that? What's the extent of that?

There is, if you like, the parpancha of the senses, meaning the equivalence, actually, of senses and parpancha. So that to let go of parpancha is really to let go of the whole edifice of what we were calling clinging, and the whole edifice, the whole building, construction of the fabrication of perception.

So a moment of no-parpancha is really a moment of no fabrication of perception, a moment of the unfabricated. Where there is no-parpancha, there is no object. You can't really talk of anything, as the Buddha said, where all phenomena cease or ways of speaking cease.

Here then, if the path is construed as this—here is the sense experience and we're trying to get rid of parpancha—the whole movement there, again, is towards the unfabricated. The eros, the erotic movement and attraction is away from appearances, away from the world to the unfabricated. So therefore, of course, the psyche and logos, the soul-making in relation to the world is very limited. It's not itself really an object, an erotic object, an object for soul-making.

Compare that with a view—a third view of sense pleasure—which would perhaps make a distinction between parpancha and the craving that goes with that, and soul-making and the eros that goes with that. So parpancha craving on one side, and psyche, soul-making, eros on the other side.

So where there's eros, there will be soul-making. What's the difference? And we've touched on this before. What's the difference between parpancha and psyche, parpancha and soul-making? Eros and craving, we've talked about: the lessening of contraction, the different experience in the energy body, the fact of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic opening things up and liberating the object away from realism and expansion—all that.

So that, for example, if we talk about sense pleasure, eros in touching a lover, in the touch of two lovers, or eros with respect to the touch between two lovers—eros. What's going on for those two lovers when there's the erotic connection there? Is it really just sense pleasure? Is that all it is between two lovers? It's just pleasant sensation?

And would we teach those lovers, "Bring mindfulness to the sensation in your lovemaking? Notice the bare sensation of pleasure"? Is that the guide to profound lovemaking that we're going to offer them? Bare attention and the noticing of sense pleasure—is that all that's going on there?

Or is it just sense pleasure plus papañca? Are we really going to say that? Some people would. Or are we even going to say that in the touch between two lovers, what's really going on is yes, there's some sense pleasure, and then there's some love, meaning care—they care for each other. So what's really communicated and felt in that touch is a combination of sense pleasure and care. Again, some people will say yes, that's what's going on—a slightly more generous view.

Is it, though? Is that all that's going on? It's not that there's no sense pleasure, and hopefully it's not that

there's no care. But really, can we inquire into this? Is it papañca? What's the missing ingredient? Or is it actually soul-making? That there is, in the eros, fantasies, images, dimensionalities, beauties—in the erotic other, in the touch itself, in the sense of the eros, in the autoeroticism, all of that. You could call it papañca, but you would probably be missing something. And to call it just sense pleasure and care, again, would be missing something.

Or again—you know, at Gaia House, and I venture this is true for most retreat centers in the insight meditation tradition, probably all retreat centers in the Buddhist tradition—how many cookbooks are there in the kitchen? It's staggering. If you go into the kitchen, there are shelves loaded with cookbooks, and some of the cooks who cook in the kitchen have their own personal cookbooks as well. Really a lot.

What's going on there? So here, in cooking for the retreatants and the staff, is it just pleasure seeking, the pleasure of pleasant food? Is it just pleasure plus care for the retreatants? Or is there not another element—a fantasy of soul-making in relation to the food? All these cooking programs, all these cookbooks with their fantastic photography and suggestions of the abundance of the earth, the fruit of the earth, the freshness, the interconnectedness with nature, the sophistication of certain orientations to food, the sophistication of the palate and the refinement of sensitivity, or the interconnectedness with all things there.

Wrapped up in this relationship with food and in the movement of preparing food is soul-making, is fantasy, is logos. It cannot be, I don't think, reduced to sense pleasure plus care. Or you can notice when it is—what a different relationship. Different kinds of cooks cook very different meals. Sometimes when it's just about care, for instance—make it pleasant—it's a very different presentation, a very different orientation and relationship.

Or again, in Vajrayana teachings, when the teachings see all appearances as divine—there is in that already some tendency that will tend to transform the vedanā into pleasant. But again, this tantric movement is not just about sense pleasure, not about just enjoying sense pleasure, something very cheap versions seem to mistake it for. And you could say, "Well, that's just papañca," and offer a kind of dismissal of that whole Vajrayana movement and intention. Is seeing appearances as divine just sense pleasure? Is it just sense pleasure and papañca? Or is it the movement of soul-making?

There is, in that and in the cooking and in the lover's touch, this eros and soul-making with respect to the senses. In other words, how are the senses viewed? What eros and soul-making with respect to the senses, the touch of the world? Certainly with respect to sense pleasure, but actually also with respect to neutral and unpleasant. We're looking at that—what's the eros and soul-making that's allowed by the conception, by the vision with respect to the world and the world of the senses, and in this case, particularly sense pleasure.

If we expand that a little and touch on some Vajrayana teachings, which are very much related to what we're talking about here with soul-making and imaginal and eros, then you get, as I said, these icon

statues or tankas or paintings of...

of sexual union between the female and the male Buddhas or bodhisattvas. There's eros between the feminine and the masculine aspects. The feminine is often—or rather the prajña, the wisdom, the insight—is depicted as female in those iconographies. And the masculine often represents what's called upāya, which is usually translated as skillful means.

So in a way, this erotic union, this icon of erotic union between the feminine and masculine, is actually representing aspects of Buddhahood as a union of wisdom and means. The union of feminine wisdom and masculine means, traditionally depicted in this way.

This becomes particularly interesting in light of what we're exploring, because this word upāya in the Vajrayāna tradition can also refer to the maṇḍala. And the maṇḍala is, if you like, not just this arrangement of sand painting or whatever it is, but at its deeper level represents the world of divine appearances.

In other words—and we've talked about this on the re-enchanting retreat—one level of what the maṇḍala is, is this. Right here. If I see it the right way, where I am sitting right now, where I am walking right now, wherever I find myself, in the transubstantiation, the transformation of perception, becomes the maṇḍala. It becomes the means, the skillful means.

In other words, the world of appearances, of divine appearances, when the world and the appearances and the senses are seen a certain way, it becomes the upāya. What is the means of the Buddha? The skillful means. The skillful means is the world. This is what the Buddha uses.

So that means that this sexual union depicted in the iconography—between the feminine prajña, the feminine wisdom, which at its level of Buddhahood actually has the word jñāna, which is related to our word gnosis—the sexual union between the gnosis of the Buddha and the upāya, the divine appearances, the world and sense experience. There's a sexual union, there's an erotic connection.

How different this is from the first version—cutting the papañca, where there is almost no eros allowed, or moving away from it towards the unfabricated, there's no eros, very little eros allowed with respect to the senses and with respect to the world. We'll revisit this several times as we go on.

But here there's eros depicted, symbolized, between, if you like, the experiencer, the wise experiencer, and the experience—in other words, the senses, the world, the divine appearances—between the knower and the known, between the divine subject, that Buddha, that Buddha nature, that ultimate gnosis, that ultimate mind, if you like, ultimate kind of consciousness, between the divine subject, that divine subject, and the divine object of sense experience, of world.

Some people—this is a bit of an aside—actually refer to the coalescence of emptiness and appearance, and that has a couple of different levels of meaning. One meaning, which I've referred to in the past, is just

that appearances are empty. You can't get an emptiness that's separate from appearances. That's what it's referring to, and appearances are empty through and through.

There's another level in the teachings, or rather in some traditions of the teaching, which actually redefine, if you like, or expand on the very word emptiness. The word emptiness means different things in different Buddhist traditions, and you should be aware of this. So it can mean really quite a range of things—there's quite a range of what it's taken to mean, the word emptiness.

Mostly I use it as the absence of inherent existence—that things don't exist independently, from their own side, independent of the way of looking, so to speak. That's mostly how I use it. But there are traditions where emptiness and this jñāna, this gnosis, are equivalent—this Buddha's gnosis, this ultimate mind, if you like, ultimate citta.

So that's actually the meaning of emptiness, more than just absence of inherent existence. It includes the absence of inherent existence of what is observed, what appears, and it knows that absence of inherent existence, and it also includes the absence of its own inherent existence. This jñāna, this gnosis, this Buddha nature, this ultimate knowing, is also lacking in inherent existence.

But there's also, as well as all that, a kind of non-duality between the knower and the known, so that this Buddha nature, this ultimate awareness, if you like, encompasses both the knowing and the world, the senses, the appearances.

There's some case in the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, the Heart Sutra, which is a very famous sutra, where it actually says "form is emptiness, emptiness is form." I used to think that was just bad Sanskrit, and what it should say is "form is empty," rather than "form is emptiness."

And then it continues through all the aggregates. Vedanā is emptiness, emptiness is vedanā. Perception is emptiness, emptiness is perception. Saṅkhāra, mental formations, is emptiness, emptiness is mental formations. Consciousness is emptiness, emptiness is consciousness.

But from some case, and I think some scholars would very much argue, do argue, that actually the meaning of the word emptiness in some of those Prajñāpāramitā sutras is actually in this much larger sense, meaning to refer to the Dharmakāya in this bigger sense of the Buddha's gnosis of the ultimate kind of awareness, if you like, of the Buddha nature.

That's a slight tangent, but I think it's important to know if you really want to get into all this stuff and explore the teachings and understand that there are important divisions to be aware of. And I think I've said in the past, everyone might use the word emptiness. There's really, really quite a range of differences in what people are actually talking about when they use that. And there's a lot of confusion that comes when we don't really understand what a person means by emptiness, etc., or dharmakāya, or Buddha nature, or these words.

But the important point for right now is that, as I said, there's a very different notion implicit, a very different eros allowed between the practitioner and the world of the senses there, and the world in general.

Because this also gets mirrored in Kabbalistic teachings, and we'll come back to all this later. But this union that's depicted in the iconography there between, if you like, aspects of Buddhahood, aspects of the Buddha—aspects of Buddha nature, aspects of the ultimate, aspects of the Buddha's gnosis, whatever—this union between those aspects is actually to be practiced, to be mirrored, if you like, or mimicked by humans in their practice.

In other words, that iconography is encouraging and allowing, but also encouraging, a certain way of looking, a certain way of relating, a certain way of conceiving of senses and sense pleasure and the whole movement of what awakening is and the path and the soul-making in relation to the world of the senses. So, as I said, it's all wrapped up together there. But this union that's depicted between aspects of, let's call it Buddha nature, is something that is to be mirrored, or better, mimicked, echoed—mimicked is a good word—in human beings' practice, in a practitioner's practice.

So you can see just there, with those three or four different kinds of castings of the path in relationship to sense pleasure, in the first one that the bare senses, or what's received in the senses, the sense pleasure, is regarded—whether it's pleasant or unpleasant—as a basic kind of reality. Missing a whole level of the emptiness of that very sense perception itself, of the sense pleasure, of the sense unpleasantness, whatever. And it also, as I mentioned, as I stressed, limits the soul-making eros in relation to the senses itself, and in relation, therefore, to the world and to life, because world and life is what we get through the senses.

In the second, this movement kind of beyond, this transcendent thrust that we're referring to that refers to puncture—and the senses are kind of coterminous in what they refer to, and movement is beyond the world of the senses. To drop the senses, if you're trying to puncture that and open up to the unfabricated, then there, the unfabricated is regarded as real. And the word fabricated implies a fabrication, something not real. The unfabricated is reality. Everything else, the world of the senses, is essentially papañca. And rather than some kind of basic reality revealable there, the world of the senses is not reality. Unfabricated is reality in that view.

And there's a strong case for that view, of a reading of the Pali Canon that way, very much. But there, the soul-making is only in relation to that unfabricated. That's the thrust. That's what I want to open to. That's what I want to penetrate and reach. And then the fantasy of the path is around that.

In the third, the versions—either the soul-making vision of what we're talking about with the imaginal, etc., and eros, or the Vajrayana versions of that, where they, in fact, overlap, I would say—there's not the reality so much assumed of an independent existence, either of the unfabricated, and certainly not of the senses. Or I should say, most Vajrayana teachings, I would say. The emptiness is implicit there, or in the

soul-making, we say, knowing image as image.

But the general point here is there's always a way of looking. There's always a conceptual framework and there's always a fantasy involved regarding sense pleasure, vedanā, and world. There's always a way of looking. In places I've said before, there's always some logos and some psyche, some image and fantasy in relationship with the senses, with vedanā, with sense pleasure or unpleasant or whatever it is, with world. And that's determined by context, by teaching, by intention, by the conceptual framework of whatever tradition of Dharma we're being exposed to or we're in. And it has implications for eros and soul-making in all kinds of ways—certainly in relation to the senses and the world and what's allowed there. Actually more than that. I'll come back to that, but let's just start there.

So we're looking at: where does the eros get to go? Where does it get to be directed or to flow? Where is it allowed?

So a person—and this is not just a hypothetical example I'm going to give—but a person could have with them a lot of eros flowing in their system, a lot of libido, if we use that word, a lot of eros towards the unfabricated. They really want to know that. And towards the opening to, the penetration of, the realization of deep emptiness in their life. And they bring their energy and their intelligence and their creativity and their really into practice in that direction, everything that's involved in that directionality, and they reflect a lot, and they're experimenting, and all that.

But in relation to the world—there, with the things of the world and the senses, there is only craving, there is not eros. In other words, there's no fantasy and image with respect to the world and the things of the senses. The imaginal is not operating there. The imaginary may be operating, the imaginal is not operating.

And then this person is putting all their energy, all their libido in the direction of the unfabricated or deep emptiness. And if you like, just trying to kind of let go of their craving with respect to the world, but they can't shake their addiction—and they're calling it an addiction. They can't shake their addictions to food, keep going to the refrigerator, what's going on there, to sense pleasure in different forms, and to what they were calling ego aggrandizement. Despite the certain amount of, actually relatively deep penetration into emptiness, and despite a certain amount of practice with that, and a certain amount of practice with the jhānas.

What's missing here? What's going on?

In terms of the jhānas, I should say—this is again a slight side point, but it's important to make—the second jhāna is characterized by a really overwhelming, maybe overwhelming at first, then you get used to it, a very deep, deep upwelling of happiness and joy.

And that's the essential ingredient of the second jhana—one becomes really absorbed in that happiness, suffused and saturated in this joy that runs through the body, heart and mind, permeating and filling the

entire being.

This repeated sitting in the second jhana has a direct bearing on our addiction to sense pleasure and our need for sense gratification. All the jhanas do, but something particular about the second jhana addresses our relationship with sense pleasure. With time, we're weaned off our habitual seeking—it's no longer where we go to look for happiness. We develop a much richer source of fulfillment.

But this weaning is only possible if we really sit and marinate in the jhanas, particularly the second jhana. A little bit here and there, just dipping in or racing through because you want to experience all eight jhanas before moving on to insight meditation—this style of practicing probably won't make much difference to the operation and pervasiveness of craving in our life. We have to really marinate, really sit in it again and again for hours, soaking it up until something deep in the being is transformed in terms of patterns, needs, and where we truly feel fulfillment. But only if we sit underwater in that happiness like a sponge for hours upon hours. Then it makes a lifetime difference.

The main point, though, isn't about jhanas. Could it be that these practitioners need something completely different? Rather than having all their eros directed toward the unfabricated, with soul-making fantasy centered only around that movement toward the transcendent thrust of the path—while refusing the imaginal in relation to the world, allowing only craving there—maybe what they actually need, completely contrary to conventional assessment or wisdom, is for the world itself to be imagined. Food, even ego, sense pleasure—all of this needs to be imagined.

We need to let the imaginal infuse world, food, ego, whatever we're addicted to. Through this infusion, as is characteristic of the imaginal, these experiences gain dimensionality. Food becomes more than just sense pleasure. Even ego, even self begins to receive image. The whole world of the senses starts to gain dimensionality, and through that dimensionality, some kind of sense of divinity emerges.

Eating or drinking—a simple cup of tea, whatever we're consuming—becomes divine nectar. This is an example of allowing the imaginal to infuse the realm of the senses, instead of refusing the imaginal dimension there and just trying to cut the craving. Why isn't it working? "I'm doing my emptiness practice, I'm really committed to that. I'm doing jhana practice. Why isn't it working after all these years?"

Might it actually be that there's a doorway opening into freedom here that's quite the opposite of what we assumed?

If divine nectar sounds silly or contrived—and it can be contrived—I would say practice with this. Practice in relationship to the world, to the senses and sense pleasure. Images await you. Images that work for you are waiting to be discovered. You don't have to choose the standard Vajrayana ones—divine nectar is a standard Vajrayana practice or instruction for seeing food and drink. But we're practicing the imaginal in a more open and creative, less prescriptive way. Images that work specifically for you are waiting for you to discover them in relation to the senses, to sense pleasures, to the things of the world.

What's the difference between this and what one of my oncologists said about taking holidays—that sense of escaping something? What's the difference between seeking sense pleasure as an escape, seeking to escape something in sense pleasure, or seeking escape from the world into jhana or the unfabricated, as the Buddha sometimes described? What's the difference between that and something that brings embodied soul-making into our sense experience, into relationship—an erotic, soul-making, imaginal relationship with the experience of the senses, with life, with the world?

Pilgrimage instead of vacation.

Nietzsche wrote: "The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit." I'll leave this in his gender-biased language for now. He wrote this in a book containing mostly single-sentence aphorisms, so the immediate context isn't exactly apparent. But what if we replace sexuality with eros? "The degree and kind of a person's eros reaches up into the topmost summit of her or his spirit."

This starts to make sense in terms of everything we're discussing. The degree and kind of eros will shape and determine, open to lesser or greater extents and ranges, the degree and kind of spirituality or path that a person chooses or engages in. The degree and kind of a person's eros determines the degree and kind of the path—and not only in obvious ways.

What is it, then, that might limit eros with regard to the path? If eros determines the path, and if eros itself becomes constrained, it will inevitably limit the kind of path we engage with, the very notion of what spirituality encompasses.

This investigation reveals fascinating and varied dimensions. Richard Tarnas, in his beautiful work *The Passion of the Western Mind*, traces the intellectual currents that have shaped Western culture. He points to a pivotal moment in England: the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Following this restoration, prominent clergy, philosophers, and doctors began emphasizing what they called "sober natural philosophy"—a mechanistic understanding of the world as composed of inert material particles governed by fixed laws, the Cartesian worldview that emerged with the scientific revolution.

This emphasis on sobriety served a specific purpose: to undercut what Tarnas calls the "passion-inflaming enthusiasm" supported by esoteric worldviews and radical religious streams of that era. Here we see how a particular kind of logos actively undermined the eros that people could bring to their relationship with the world and their spiritual paths. The very word "enthusiasm" reveals this dynamic—*entheos*, the influx of the divine. What was being systematically squeezed out was juiciness, exuberance, ecstasy, breadth of emotional range, and the heat of passionate love.

We've touched on this before: how inspiration from the divine, imagination, and other ways of knowing were replaced by an epistemology that dismissed anything falling outside the narrow confines of emerging Western scientific materialism. The heat of passionate love gave way to mere warm goodwill.

Philosophy and religion became sanitized, sobered.

But notice how logos and fantasy intertwine here. Alongside the conceptual framework of the scientific revolution and the so-called Enlightenment ran a powerful fantasy image of sobriety itself. This raises a crucial question: does this pattern persist today? Are juiciness, exuberance, ecstasy, breadth of affect, and passionate love still being squeezed out of certain dharma paths, creating that same sober tone, that same suspicious regard for the ecstatic, the *entheos*?

Consider how some process views—the atomistic, moment-by-moment analysis of *vedanā*, sense perception, and mental formations—mirror that mechanistic philosophy of 1660s England. This too can become a kind of mechanistic processing that systematically undercuts eros. The emphasis on cooling, on simplifying, deliberately excludes and shuts out certain dimensions of experience.

Sometimes what's worse is the subtle disempowerment of eros through apparent acceptance: "It's okay if you feel passionate, it's okay." But this differs radically from actually giving passion a meaningful place and purpose—honoring the ecstasy, the *entheos*, the metaphorical intoxication, the wildness, heat, and passion that comes with complexifying, with richness, with imaginal engagement.

This "everything's okay, just let it come and go" attitude can prove more destructive to the erotic, soul-making, and imaginal dimensions than outright opposition. At least clear opposition acknowledges the power of what it resists.

What's particularly striking about that historical moment in England is how political motivations shaped these limitations on both logos and eros. After the perceived chaos following the monarchy's removal and subsequent restoration, the imperative became clear: preserve order, reinstate stability, keep the lid on passion. The range of permissible logos—the scope of religious imagery and worldview—became deliberately constrained.

These limitations on eros, psyche, and logos were, in significant part, politically motivated. And this raises the essential question: was this merely a historical anomaly, or do similar dynamics continue shaping our spiritual landscapes today?

The Logos, if you like, shapes or allows a certain amount of eros—or rather, shapes and allows a certain amount of eros that determines the eros. And the eros and the soul-making shape and allow and determine the logos, as we've touched on before. But let's go into this a little more from a psychological point of view.

Again, a little bit of history. There's a stream of philosophy—modern Western philosophy—called pragmatism. Some people regard William James, the psychologist and philosopher who was active at the turn of the century from the 1800s to the 1900s, as one of the first exponents of this view. In a way, what he was saying was similar to what we're saying about ways of looking and conceptual frameworks. Rather than thinking about reality in absolute terms, he emphasized what works and what effect a certain way of

looking or conceptual framework has. It's pragmatic—something to practice. If you put it into practice, into praxis, and it works for you, then it's something worth pursuing.

More recently, in the 20th century, the philosopher Richard Rorty—who died not too long ago—also labels himself or is labeled as a pragmatist philosopher. But there's a difference between Richard Rorty's version and William James' version. Writers like Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman stress the difference between these different kinds of pragmatism.

I would say that Richard Rorty is what could be called a deflationary pragmatist. Although he's also saying don't get hung up on this idea about reality—that you can come to some way of determining reality or find a single right way of looking and realizing the true nature of things—and advocates moving toward this more pragmatic view of what works for different cultures, there's something in his project that seems intent on disallowing anything that involves enthusiasm, anything that involves a perception or way of looking that would open the perception to other dimensions, to religiosity and divinity.

Somehow wrapped up in what he's saying is a kind of deflation. It's almost like: there is no truth, there's nothing to really penetrate and know, human beings are very limited, we can't really know things. Just calm down and accept this fate and give up on any sense of being able to expand the perception of things in a way that brings enthusiasm. This runs through his philosophy, as far as I can tell from what I've read.

So there's a deflationary pragmatism, and one wonders: where does that come from? Why is it that some people, having grasped hold of the same idea, thrust toward deflation—a popping, a bursting of bubbles and balloons? While other people allow this expansion of the eros and the psyche, an expansion of the balloons, without falling into realism?

I think we can recognize this in different versions of the Dharma as well, in different teachings and emphases. There is a kind of deflationary explanation or take on emptiness, for example: everything's empty, nothing's really there, there's nothing mystical, it's all just interconnected phenomena, there's no ultimate basis. The whole movement sounds like a similar conceptual framework, but the thrust is to burst bubbles—just calm down, don't get too excited by mystical inspiration. It's a deflationary emptiness.

Versus—and I can't help revealing my leanings here—the realization of emptiness being something utterly mystical, utterly wondrous, profound, something to really be excited about. There's something so transcendent about the usual way of seeing, something that brings wonder and joy and dimensionality to existence, and all kinds of possibilities. Instead of closing down possibilities, it actually opens them up.

Emptiness allows a flatland, one-dimensional view, certainly. I have that view a lot of the time, or it's one I can pick up and put down. It allows that, but it also allows much more mystical conceptions and views. Whereas a deflationary take on emptiness tends to, by default, encourage this more one-dimensional view.

Sometimes that extends to the whole Dharma, so that an approach to it is essentially deflationary:

simplify, calm down, just be even. Don't get too excited, don't get too depressed. There's a kind of "it's just this—this is what you have to deal with, just this." The flatlanding, reducing the dimensions, is also a kind of deflation—deflating the eros, deflating the soul-making dynamic, the way that expands and grows.

One gets deflationary psychotherapeutic theories or approaches as well: just calm down, just ground more, just rein it in, just sober up a little bit. And I wonder sometimes if there's even a kind of deflationary approach to art, to the arts or different arts.

I mentioned in an earlier talk the Scottish psychoanalyst Douglas Fairbairn, who was active in the mid-20th century. His understanding of libido—similar to what we're calling eros, though lacking the dimensionality we're exploring—centers on movement toward making connection.

In Fairbairn's view, the human psyche splits into two dynamics: a libidinal ego that thrusts toward connecting with objects—essentially with others—and an anti-libidinal ego that constellates out of fear that the object will reject us or be unavailable. This anti-libidinal ego functions as a kind of protective alter ego, dampening our enthusiasm: "Don't get too excited, don't make yourself too available, don't reach toward that too much, because you might get disappointed, they might reject you, they might not be there for you."

There's an ongoing struggle throughout life—until one becomes more conscious of it, and even then one is simply more aware of it and perhaps less controlled by it—between this libidinal thrust and the anti-libidinal restraint, between the libidinal ego and the anti-libidinal ego.

If we take Fairbairn's insight and expand his meaning of libido to encompass what we're calling eros, we might ask: how much does this limiting of eros through anti-libidinal movement stem essentially from fear of disappointment? "Don't puff things up. Don't get your hopes up. Don't make too much of things"—whether that's the path, our sense of the world or reality, or the unfabricated. There's a restraining of what we're calling eros, a limitation born from this anti-libidinal ego that wants to protect us from disappointment, or from the discomfort of allowing that much eros, that much libido to flow through our being.

How much does this anti-libidinal movement of the psyche actually end up limiting the eros and then limiting the soul-making? How much does it limit the eros-psyche-logos dynamic because we're pulling back the eros, not allowing it because of fear, protection, discomfort, or some other defensive reason? And then we choose something that's more of the deflationary philosophy—the deflationary version of the dharma or emptiness, deflationary psychology or whatever it is. How much of this choice actually comes from what Fairbairn would call the anti-libidinal movement?

Let's explore this further in terms of eros and how it chooses, creates, or finds a path—which path, what kind of path it will choose, find, or create.

We've established that eros needs a perception of otherness. Eros requires this other, this erotic object that

is other than itself. It's not just collapse into union, into oneness. Eros needs a perception of otherness, and something in that other needs to have something more or beyond in it. There needs to be a fascination with the other—this is necessary to eros. Part of this fascination is that there's more there in this other, in this otherness, that I don't quite know yet, that I'm not quite in contact with. I can maybe intuit it, or I've been told about it, or I kind of half-perceive it, but eros needs this perception of otherness and, within that otherness, this sense of more and beyond.

What this means in relation to eros for the path is profound. In order to have eros for the path—to be deeply, fully in love with the path and with where it's heading, with awakening—I need to have a vision, a sense, a logos or image of the path and of awakening that has some otherness to it. There has to be something other to know. Just as with another being—a person or thing—the path itself has to have some dimension of otherness, some sense of more, of beyond that I want to know.

For eros to really impregnate the path, to have a truly erotic connection with the path and with awakening—when people are deeply, fully in love with the path and with that movement toward awakening, however they conceive it—something has to constellate. The vision, the sense, the logos and image of the path and awakening has to have some otherness to it, something other that I don't already know.

If my sense of the path and awakening is just about reducing my suffering—if that's my vision and logos, my conception of what the path is—that doesn't allow eros. It doesn't allow enough eros. It's just about reducing my suffering. I can't really fall in love with such a path. It might be very useful to me. I might engage in it, might even be fairly disciplined in my engagement with practice to reduce my suffering. But if that's the only thing in it for me, if that's how I'm seeing and sensing and conceiving of the path, eros cannot really establish in relation to such a vision. I can't really fall in love with that kind of path.

Some secular visions or conceptions of awakening, some visions of where one is headed in secular versions of mindfulness, some secular approaches to how mindfulness is taught and characterized...

Their conceptual frameworks and visions of awakening are characterized by an absence of there being much else to discover or perceive than what is already obviously true, apparently obviously true, or apparent—more than we already know. They're actually characterized by the absence of much beyond to discover or to perceive. The vision of awakening isn't really that there is much more beyond what we already sense and perceive to know.

It may be I learn or discover not to believe thoughts of how I am, or how she is, or he is, or how terrible this situation is, or how wonderful this situation is. And again there's this sort of even keel—go for the equanimity. Don't get too seduced by something seeming wonderful, don't get too taken in by something seeming terrible. So there's an acknowledgment of that, but basically, this that I currently perceive is, for the most part, taken as reality. For the most part. And the vision, the concept of practice or path or awakening is really just a disentangling of my relationship with that reality.

There's not much more to perceive. I'm just changing my relationship by more letting go, by just not being so entangled with that reality. But the reality is pretty much the reality, except for the kind of crazy bunch of things I get into about believing this person's like that, or this situation is absolutely awful, or whatever it is. There is not, then, in such a conception, such a vision of awakening, very much more at all to open the perception to or to discover. Maybe a little bit—oh, there's not really a self, there's just a process, so that's a little bit more. But there's not really that much erotic connection one can have with that idea, or soul-making connection. Again, it's in itself quite a deflationary idea.

Compare that conception or vision of awakening with a path that says something like: awakening means to discover your true nature. Or awakening involves the realization of the thorough and deep emptiness of all things. Or awakening involves an opening to the unfabricated. Or awakening involves a union with the divine, or a becoming divine. In any such conceptions and visions of awakening, the otherness there, the beyond what I already know, what I've already tasted, that is in the vision, in the conception of awakening, and therefore of the path, is much, much larger.

There's more otherness there, and therefore more eros. You understand? More eros, more otherness—because there's more otherness, more beyond, there's more eros can get constellated there, and more soul-making. Very different logoi and fantasies of awakening allow, if you like, and constellate different erotic relations with the path, degrees of eros with the path itself and with practice.

But then even within the limits of what we might call secular religions—why I'm using that phrase is, you know, the religion in the sense of just an insistence, a kind of dogmatic insistence that there is just this, there is just this one dimension. And that dogma, that insistence makes it a kind of religion, but a secular religion, if you like. But even within limits of secular religions, and there might be different versions of that, there's still going to be—and this is where it's interesting—eros is in us as human beings, so there's still going to be a relationship with some kind of otherness that is constellated by the eros.

In other words, the eros in the being will constellate a relationship with some kind of otherness, even within the limits of a secular religious view and vision of the path and awakening. And that relationship with whatever the otherness is that it constellates will be erotic to some extent. In other words, from our definition, there will be a wanting of more contact, of more intimacy, of the aliveness of that contact and intimacy with whatever this kind of other is.

So then you get presentations of awakening or visions of awakening, concepts of awakening that have to do exactly with awakening being an intimacy with life, for example. And again, what's life there? Well, it's—good question—it's senses or whatever, or a flowing with life. In other words, again, here, it's not just a reduction of suffering. The eros has come in, created a kind of otherness, but in this case, the otherness is with what? It's with that one dimensionality. And it's trying to make more of that otherness.

So life becomes an erotic object. Life with a capital L. Intimacy with life. It becomes the erotic object. And there's a kind of romantic, if you like, quasi—I'm using that in a loose sense—the romance of life and the

intimacy of life and being with life and flowing with life or whatever. And the touch of life. Life becomes the erotic object. There's a kind of romantic relationship with an elevation of the importance of life, give it a capital L, and an elevation also in the importance of this intimacy with it and the touching life. And there's this desire for the contact, the intimacy, the touch of life.

So eros is finding some otherness there, and this otherness is life, if you like, and it does what it does. It pumps it up, it gives it importance, it gives it a kind of romance in the relationship with it, and there's the desire for the intimacy. But there, the eros is limited into how much it can actually expand the notion of life, if the logos is absolutely rigid.

So, even then, that kind of erotic relationship with life and intimacy with life and that vision of awakening will only allow a limited eros, a limited falling in love with the path and a limited involvement of the whole being with the practice, with the path, with that movement towards awakening. There's still eros trying to do its thing, constellating another, creating a kind of romantic relationship with that other, trying to fill it out, elevating its importance, desiring more contact. But actually it's limited.

Now, if we take Nietzsche's quote again, he may say—and he doesn't pull any punches, Nietzsche—so he may say, well, many on that kind of path, that kind of secular religious path, he might say, well, they just don't have much eros, and they don't have much psyche, and that's why they're okay with that. We might more fairly say, I think, or more generously say, if a person has limited eros psyche, limited libido—and remember, that might just be, you know, people are different.

People are different. If a person has limited libido, limited eros, and a certain circumscribed psyche, then that conceptual framework with its limited otherness—an otherness which cannot expand or become multidimensional because that's refused—might be enough for their souls. There's already a limited amount of eros-psyche-logos fertilization and expansion anyway, so a limited vision and idea of path and awakening comes out of that limited eros-psyche-logos dynamic. This limited vision, this constrained conceptual frame, this bounded image and fantasy of the path and of awakening might be sufficient for some people.

The opposite is equally true. A limited conceptual frame, a restricted logos and circumscribed image of the path and awakening will also limit the eros for the path and awakening—the eros that we can genuinely feel and embody in relationship to the path and the movement toward awakening. The question is: where are those limits coming from? How is it that the eros or the psyche or the logos gets constrained in these ways? Some people encounter limits, but the crucial inquiry is: where does that limitation originate?

If there's a genuine limit on the libido, on the eros, on the psyche, then it might be enough. A constrained conception of what the path is and what awakening is—a vision that doesn't extend much beyond what we already sense and know—may be sufficient for that soul. It depends where the limits are coming from.

Someone with much more libido, much more eros, will need something quite different. If they begin to

have an erotic connection with the path and with the whole movement toward awakening and that vision, they will need a bigger vision, a more expansive idea of what the path is and involves, what awakening is and demands and involves and opens to. They need more otherness. They need more beyond. Why? Because the eros needs it and will create it. It will discover it, find it.

People with abundant eros need a greater, wider path, a deeper path. They need more to discover, more to move into. They need a beyond—a more beyond. This "more" that they want and discover because of the eros and because of the expansion of vision that they create and discover will include, at some point, some kind of sense of dimensionality and divinity. In other words, divinity gets somehow included on the path.

If they start with just a flat-line view, dimensionality will be added to that. Eventually transcendence will be added to that. Or if they're oriented only toward the transcendent, eventually the path, the vision, the concept of the path will have to fill out to include the immanent as well. It can't just be about the unfabricated. Why? Because the eros is pushing, penetrating, opening, expanding, and in its relationship to the erotic object of the path and awakening, it opens and expands the sense of the path and awakening—what the dharma is.

So it can't be just transcendent. It can't be just this world. It will be both, eventually, gradually. If there is no sense of the divine, a sense of the divine will come. If the sense of the divine is only in the direction of an impersonal divinity, then it will add the personal. If it's only personal, it will add the impersonal.

There's this movement toward discovering more and more, actually including and embracing more and more in the path—gradually, gradually. Gradually more and more depth, more and more range, more and more fullness, multidimensionality, more and more richness, more and more complexity. More to the path, more to the sense of what awakening is and can be. All of this comes from the eros, predominantly from the eros-psyche-logos dynamic.

People with abundant eros will, if they're not blocked, tend to keep opening in these different directions gradually over time—not smoothly necessarily, but persistently. A vision, a sense, a concept of the path and awakening which doesn't ask for any more, or much more, to be perceived or discovered of reality or true nature than is already apparent to normal, popular, consensually agreed perception—such a logos and vision of the path and awakening will limit the soul-making dynamic, the eros-psyche-logos, and the eros in all kinds of ways. This includes limitations in relation to what we conceive of and our image of the path and of awakening.

If a person's eros is strong enough, though, it will expand that image, that fantasy, that concept of what the path is and of what awakening is. Or it will actually shatter it—shatter whatever the current image, fantasy, and logos is—and create or discover or find a larger view, a larger concept, a larger conceptual framework, a broader, richer, deeper, more far-reaching image and fantasy of path and awakening.

If this logos of nothing more to discover—which is usually implicit, by the way, sometimes explicit, but

often implicit, not actually voiced yet present nonetheless—if this logos is too rigidly held, stuck in place, or not questioned sufficiently, then the eros and the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic cannot expand. It cannot flower. The soul-making movement is thwarted. It lacks the necessary food or sustenance, the necessary soil or basis. It doesn't have this beyond to nourish it, to move into, to open toward.

And the basis we're speaking of, remember, is a basis of groundlessness—groundlessness because of the teachings of emptiness and because of seeing image as image. It's precisely this groundlessness that allows the expansion, the deepening, the enrichment, the creation and discovery of more of the object—in this case the path, but whatever else we're engaging with as well: the world, the beloved other, whatever.

The eros can be blocked, and it can be blocked by this kind of anti-libidinal movement of fear, if you like, or self-protectionism or something of that nature. It appears as self-protectionism. But also the image, the fantasy can be blocked, or the logos can be blocked. So it can block from any direction, and can be blocked in any way.

We've been talking about limited paths and what I was calling secular-religious and one-dimensional views, but it can also be blocked with a transcendent view—just blocking it into that direction, for example. So the blocks can work from any direction and in any direction.

We'll continue with this exploration and delve deeper into these movements.

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