Shaping Vessels

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 13:50

I really want to say thank you to you for your practice, for the willingness and openness to try different things and bring the fullness of yourself, open to perhaps new ideas. To throw yourself into something of such beautiful quality—I feel like saying, thanks for coming over to play. It's really, really beautiful and precious.

And so the vessel of the retreat ends, but life goes on, certainly, and practice goes on, and the path goes on. Creating these kinds of vessels, creating vessels or discovering vessels, is really, really important. It's not about jumping to the absence of any distinction between retreat and life, everyday life, so to speak, and retreat. There is that distinction. But in a way, there is no distinction either. Practice goes on; practice needs to go on.

So just to pick up something Catherine just touched on: What would support that? What would support practice, not just putting the time in—someone used to say just sort of treading water until the next retreat—but what would support and sustain a growing of practice, of these practices, of your soul-making off retreat? This is a real question. What supports it? What might sustain it? What might enable us all to grow, for our practice to grow, for our vision to grow, for our sensibility to grow, for our soul to grow, to digest what we discover in the growth, what we've discovered here, to fertilize, to be fertile, to expand the edges? What would sustain it? What might help? What would support that?

It's interesting—in the last few months I've come to realize something that I was vaguely aware of before, but it's become more clear to me. At least in insight meditation culture, we have somehow—certainly not everyone; there are people in this room for whom this is really an exception—but it seems there's a kind of... for people whose lifeblood is practice, who have a deep passion, where it's maybe the thing, the path and their engagement with the path and that whole movement and that whole opening and receiving is perhaps the most important thing in their life... And curiously, it's those people who often feel so lonely, even in a Dharma world.

Somehow we have set up, or there has emerged, a kind of culture of—maybe not non-sharing, but limited sharing. And this is really interesting to me. I know this from my past: How is it that the ones on fire end up being the lonely ones? Actually, there's a lot to that question. What has happened? And what might open it up differently and support the beginnings of perhaps a new way of relating?

What happens, or what has happened to you in the past perhaps—not everyone, I know that—where there has been an attempt at sharing and something has happened that causes us to back off, or it's ended up that we've backed off? And we yearn to be seen and to see and to share what's at our edge, what's most

alive, what burns in our heart. And so people might go to sitting groups and it's fantastic, and yet the things that are aflame in them, the things that are really on their edge, are the things that are not shared, that are not explored. I'm not saying everyone at all. And I know people in this room who have created something or relationships where there really is that possibility. And there are others in this room where, much as they want it and much as they know they want it, it's not there. And there's still interaction with Dharma people and friendliness and everything, but some level is missing.

And it's difficult, you know. What comes in? There's the whole measurement thing. Maybe I share and I'm not up to the level of the other person. Or maybe I share and it's beyond them, and then there's this whole trip that they think I've got a big ego or whatever it is. Maybe I fear they will judge me in some way. There's vulnerability, as you know. Part of what we've talked about is vulnerability and being together—all the complexity of vulnerability and being together.

Last night, while you were listening to the talk, I went for a walk and went up the hill. Maybe some of you know it. I came to some houses quite away from here, a farmhouse. Everything was just getting dark. And this lovely dog came out. And it was just in the middle of the road, just sort of flipped itself onto her back and just opened her belly—just "rub my belly." It was so unguarded and so simple and so beautiful, you know. Really, really lovely dog. And then when belly was rubbed and we had a sort of connection, it was like, "Okay, so..." Off she went, wagging her tail.

It's usually more complicated for us as human beings.

We have another practice to give you. No, not on this retreat. Next one.

Yeah, it's complex. We have history. It's not easy. We are complex beings. There are parts that haven't been seen or have a history of being unrecognized or slighted or disrespected or misunderstood. It's not easy for us, unfortunately.

So again, I go back to this question: what would support? What would support that intimacy? What would support the soul-making? Whatever has been meaningful, whatever has been your edge - why cannot there be a sense of a growing edge of retreat that can continue? It's really a myth that it all happens on retreat. So the question: what supports that?

We talk about vessels. There are different kinds of vessels. This retreat was a vessel. Coming together and being in silence and sitting together can be a powerful vessel. I know that you know that. Listening to talks together, reading, studying together, discussing what you've read, studied, listened to - that's a vessel as well. It's a certain kind of vessel.

Sharing images is also a vessel, and it's a particularly potent vessel, or can be. But images - have you noticed, I'm sure you have, how intimate images are to us? When I was doing the Path of the Imaginal retreat, I was saying to Catherine beforehand, "I'm not sure how it's going to work. Are people going to feel okay to share this together?" There's a lot that needs to be taken care of if we share images with each other

because they're so intimate. They can be. Did you recognize this?

So might it be another kind of vessel to actually share images with each other? Then what does that need? How might we take care of that?

Perhaps you've gotten a sense here - in an interview or in a group or in these little dyads and triads - of a vessel being created or just formed spontaneously that actually really takes care of something. And then there's an alchemy in the sharing and in the listening and something in the togetherness and the mutuality.

But it needs a temenos. Soul, images. Temenos is a Greek word. It means a kind of sacred space. We don't have to make a big deal of that, but it basically needs respect and care and holding.

That can be formal. So you could set up really formal structures - like when we do these dyads and you take your posture and you've got all that stuff that we've been doing and then there's your go and then my go. There's a formal structuring that can really, really help the intimacy. Or other times it's a much more informal back and forth that helps. But both are possible.

Another vessel is to share live images. What's the image? Catherine asked yesterday, I don't know how it was for you in the dyad, "What's alive for you right now?" And maybe some of what came alive in that moment was imaginal perception.

While you were playing, while you were working, Catherine and I just sort of did it for like a minute and she asked me that question. I can't remember exactly what I said, but I noticed that she was asking me, and I saw the divine light coming out of her eyes. This is an imaginal perception. And I shared that, and I said that.

I don't know if you noticed this, but for me I noticed something very interesting: that in the sharing of it, it took the imaginal perception and opened up the dimensionality. I know some of you know this.

So if I go back to the question I put at the other end: what is it that sanctifies? How do things, how do others, how do selves, how is the world sanctified? In lots of different ways - through body, speech, mind, through way of looking, through speech. We sanctify, we bless, we open our ways of looking, sometimes through what we share verbally or in writing.

And sometimes through listening. So sometimes there's even a vessel that deepens our images in the moment – right speech. The Buddha talks about right speech. It has a whole other level when you realize how the speech feeds back into the consciousness and into the perception.

And not just in the sense of if I go out trashing people in my speech and lying, then I get a dull mind and a worried mind about what people are going to be saying about me and all that – but also in this kind of speaking of that which is most beautiful, taking care about how that is expressed, trusting, putting that in a vessel that can hold it, that can care for it, feeling that mutuality.

And then the whole thing gets reflected back by, so to speak, the walls of the vessel and by the other. And we hear the echoes of our speech and it does something, it's part of the alchemy. This is not so common in our culture.

The main point here is that, again I go back to this question, what's going to support? What will support? You know, or you will find out, or you will begin to experiment or something. Lots of possibilities, lots, lots. What will support?

So, bless you and thank you all.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.