Aspects of the Imaginal (Part 4)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:22:19

So we've been saying that from, for a number of reasons, it might be helpful at times to adopt or enter a perspective that recognizes that the imaginal—or an imaginal perception or sensing with soul—is actually constituted with different elements that are interrelated, or different aspects. We investigate a little and see what is involved there, what are those elements and aspects of this imaginal constellation.

Exploring in this way, bringing this perspective, and then looking a little closer and teasing things apart, even if that apartness is somewhat artificial, and looking a little closer, is for the sake of increasing our understanding, filling out our conceptual framework, also increasing and developing our sensitivity and our discernment to actually be sensitive to these things and notice these things, and our attentiveness and our attunement, our capacity to attune to them and feel their different qualities and modes and aspects.

But it's also useful and helpful to adopt and explore this perspective because of the potential for practice in igniting the imaginal, entering more fully into the *mundus imaginalis*, the imaginal world, moving along that spectrum of imagination experiences, moving more along that spectrum towards the fully, authentically or genuinely imaginal.

So we can say again, that an imaginal perception or perceiving imaginally or sensing with soul actually involves a constellation or a lattice of elements, of aspects, and any star in that constellation or any node in that lattice, its triggering can trigger or ignite or infect, if you like, the whole lattice.

For example, it might be that seeing the self—seeing myself, yourself, seeing the self as angel—is what occurs first, or we notice first, or what actually ignites first in the experience. And then this seeing the self as angel, as part of the whole larger constellation of imaginal experience at that time, then ignites the sensing of other-world and eros, imaginally, erotically, theophanically.

So it might actually happen in time that they get ignited, or it might be actually that there's a noticing that happens in time, one and then the other and then the other. Or the first to ignite—or so to speak, the door that opens first, the node to resonate first—with eros and to resonate erotically and imaginally, might be the humility of the heart. We will come back to this.

The sensitivity, awareness of the energy body—we've touched on that already. It might be the middle way of the imaginal, actually sensing that middle way, this kind of neither real nor not real quality. It's related to the middle way of emptiness, but it's different. It's what I call the imaginal middle way, or the middle way of the imaginal, the theatre-like quality or status of what is occurring, what is being experienced, the perceptions involved.

Or it might be an idea or conception that's involved in this perception, or we start with an idea or conception, and this starts, as I said, infecting, inflaming, igniting, triggering, opening the other nodes in the lattice. We actually start with an idea or a conception that's implicit there.

Or we start with the eros, or some part of the whole multi-directed eros that is flowing, that is alive in the self-other-world relations there. It might be we start with the sense of deep value, that that is the first door to open, the first to be ignited in our consciousness, and the sense of deep value or treasure of what we are perceiving, or some aspect of what we are perceiving, some pole of what we are perceiving.

It may be a sense of the divinity, or a theophany, again, of some aspect of perception. Or it may be the very sense of participation with or within that sense of divinity. It's that sense of participation that then inflames the whole constellation, the whole lattice, makes it burn more brightly, takes us deeper into the imaginal.

So an awareness of one or some of the different connecting nodes in the lattice allows us to try different things, if you like, to trigger or ignite the constellation, to ignite the imaginal experience, to enter further into the *mundus imaginalis*, the imaginal world.

But as I said, sometimes we can jiggle and wiggle one node and actually do something there to support that particular star or node igniting and illuminating. And sometimes it's more a matter of—more precise and helpful to recognize—that what we are doing at times is rather than changing anything, it's just noticing some aspect that is already aflame, already ignited. And it's this noticing, this attention, that allows that node to ignite further and more fully and deeper, and then the whole lattice to get ignited and triggered from that.

Either simultaneously, the whole lattice, the whole imaginal constellation kind of illuminates at one point, like a light switch going on, or gradually, kind of node by node. And this is quite interesting, too. When it ignites the whole thing, or turns on, if you like, becomes alive imaginally, when the whole lattice ignites simultaneously, it can feel like something just took a quantum leap. So from one discrete state to another, it's like a sudden jump of a system, if you like, this system of nodes and lattice to a different state.

So it's something that can feel really like, well, we just suddenly shifted gears there into a really different state of perception, of consciousness, of being, and a different experience.

Now, we haven't talked much, and we won't talk much yet—maybe perhaps for quite a while—about actually working in a dyad with another intensely, with the soul-making and the imaginal perceptions that involve each other, and being in participation and dialogue and reciprocal relationship in that erotic-imaginal dyad. Sometimes what can happen—I'm just mentioning this—but sometimes what can happen is that quantum leap happens not just for one person, but for a whole field of two people, or sometimes more. It's like the whole field, in this case, if we're talking about dyad, and both people suddenly undergo that quantum leap. There's some kind of almost magic of a shared entry or a shared

inflaming or illumination of the imaginal together. We won't dwell on that.

And at the same time, I already mentioned this, it's good to recognize that where there is eros in the imaginal, there is always—and we'll come back to this too—a sense of grace, of gift. And with that, therefore, there must be a sense of receptivity. We receive gifts. We receive grace. We open to it. It is bestowed on us.

If it's grace and gift that we are receiving, that means that the quality of receptivity, the stance, the poise, the posture, the inner posture of receptivity, and of sensitivity and flexibility and attunement are necessary. It's as if we notice the gift. We pick up on the grace, on the breeze, so to speak. Our antennae, so to speak, are moved. Our receptors are moved. And then, ah, what is that? Something on the wind, something on the breeze, an intimation, a fragrance. And we tune to it, cock our heads to it, turn towards it, open to it, to receive it.

So there's this real element of grace, gift. "No one knows whence the Spirit bloweth," to quote roughly Jesus. And so it's not completely in our control. We don't completely direct this.

There is an element of technical art and skill and deliberateness—bringing images back deliberately, gently supporting this or that, working with responsiveness. But there's also this element of grace, of openness, receptivity, sensibility, flexibility, and receptiveness. These qualities are part of the imaginal constellation as well. It's not just about technique, but it does involve technique. It's never totally under my control and mastery. Recognizing that fact is humbling, but it also, to me, makes it more beautiful. I said this before: soul is greater than ego, is greater than me, greater than you.

But again, we have a conception or an approach or an attitude that kind of straddles two modalities or two inclinations—the inclination to receive and the inclination to be deliberate and active, proactive, a kind of mastery. We're straddling and including those. There's space here, flexibility, range.

A little bit more about this process or dynamic of what we might call ignition, or turning on, or illuminating the imaginal—the imaginal becoming illuminated. I've talked about these nodes and elements of the imaginal constellation, but it's not just that they're like on-off settings—this element of humility or this element of eros is either on or off, just like an on-off switch. They are also, at times at least, more like spectra or dimmer switches. Instead of a flick on-off switch, a dimmer switch—you turn the lights up or down in the middle, like a volume control or like a fire. If each is a kind of individual fire, it's not simply on or off. I mean, that's one way of looking at it, but it's also like a degree. Is it just a kind of ember, or is it really flaming or really a raging fire?

It's maybe too clumsy an analogy, but at least it's more nuanced than a switch, which is something that we switch on or off. So this idea of suddenly sparking or the ignition of one node triggering or igniting suddenly the sparking of other nodes or elements—that's a good way to understand this, and that actually can convey this sudden change of state, this kind of quantum leap that can often occur here.

But at other times, the transition, as I mentioned earlier, is actually more gradual. So it's like dials or faders moving higher or lower up their scale, more or less on or off. And we can actually actively turn any one of them up by simply noticing or paying careful, gentle, attuned attention to that element. Perhaps then the whole lattice is gradually turned up—the whole imaginal constellation gradually turns up with that. Or sometimes, at a certain threshold of tuning up one of the elements, there is a sudden ignition of all the others. So all kinds of transitions are possible here, all kinds of developments.

One more thing about this. All this that I'm talking about—we're really talking about developing the art or the skill of imaginal practice, of sensing with soul. In time, as that skill or art develops, along with the whole range of what's involved there—because it's really a collection of all kinds of capacities that are implicit and required for imaginal practice—we may find that we can even guide the relative balance of the settings of any two, or maybe even more, of these dials.

So, for example, the attention to the energy body is one of those nodes, one of those dials, and the attention to it can modulate from anywhere—from just a background minimal awareness to a kind of complete immersion in the sense of the energy body, the whole energy body. The awareness is completely immersed in it. That energy body awareness, where it is on its scale relative to the attention to the image itself—you understand? So here's this image, whatever it is, and here's my sense of the energy body. I've got basically both of them, awareness and attention to both of them in imaginal practice, and the relative degrees of where the attention is weighted, more or less, we can vary that.

So I can lean it back, so to speak, into the awareness of the energy body, and more of the energy goes there, more of the sensitivity there and what's experienced there. And I might go so far as into a jhana—I can lean so far into the pleasure that's going on in the energy body that I actually enter a jhana, and the image is either completely gone or in the background. Or vice versa—the energy body is there, I'm aware of it, but the primary thing I'm paying attention to is the image.

There's a whole gradation there of relative weighting of attention and emphasis of attention. And similarly with the emotion—we can give what's emotionally present... maybe an image brings with it some kind of poignancy or a particular kind of loneliness or a particular kind of loving and being loved, or sadness or joy or a particular kind of delight. And again, we can lean into that, if we want to, in time, much more than the image, while still keeping the image around. Or we may just, so to speak, completely lean into an exploration of being with and holding the emotion going on, and let the image kind of fade. And vice versa—we can be much more with the image or some other aspect of the imaginal constellation, and just be aware of what's going on with our emotions in the emotional body.

Similarly with other aspects—the emptiness aspect, for instance. We can play with the relative emphasis of attention, or leaning of attention, or weight of attention, on any of these different elements.

I don't know how that sounds. It might sound to you like that's really advanced. Certainly it takes practice to develop that kind of facility and flexibility and nuance of art and attention.

But it's similar in many ways. Some of you will know I used at one point the analogy of a great hawk or eagle gliding on air currents as a sort of image or symbol for how one can move really quite gracefully and sometimes with minimal effort between, say, an insight mode of working, a way of looking, and the samadhi that kind of organically comes with the letting go that arises from the insight.

Just like this hawk riding high on the warm air currents—if it wants to go left, it's just the slightest movement. It's sensitive to what currents are already there, what thermals, what directions are winning. It can just pick the one that's going left, if it wants to go left, for example. And just a slight inclination sends it that way. This hawk is riding on what's already present. And similarly, if it wants to go right, there's just a slight inclination, a slight modification. There's a real beauty and gracefulness and art to that.

One develops—again, it's all part of developing the sensitivity in practice and the attunement—and there's so much possible here. If it sounds outlandish, it isn't. It probably takes time and practice to develop, but it's certainly possible.

So if we continue with our list, we've already mentioned the first element: energy body awareness. We said a little about the second one: the fact of giving rise to soul-making, the sense of soulfulness and soul-making happening. So soulfulness as an experience is another element. The soulfulness of what's going on is another aspect. The third we mentioned was loving and being loved, and we spoke about the particularities there and the attunement there.

With that third element, really tune in and feel that particularity and let it touch you. Let this being loved touch your being, touch the heart, feel it in the body, feel it in the soul. And we also said that in the range of what those loves can manifest—how they can appear in imaginal perception, in sensing with soul—is really, really large.

Yes, absolutely, it includes metta, it includes compassion, at times it includes mudita, and we should also say equanimity. So it includes the classical brahmaviharas, but there's much more particularity in the kinds of love. And the range is actually larger than what we tend to think of with the brahmaviharas, whose range is also quite wide because there are different flavors of metta, of course, and all that.

A fourth element or node in the imaginal constellation is eros. I've talked a lot about eros before, but I won't go into it much, just mentioning it here. Again, it's something we can notice, tune into, and that noticing and tuning into ignites it further, and then that can trigger the rest of the lattice, take us further into the imaginal, deeper into the more authentically, fully imaginal place.

And we also said, for example, being in relationship with the whole of my energy body and the sensitivity of the energy body is likely to support eros opening rather than craving. And the dissolution of craving is going to support the opening of eros. So eros feels like an opening. It also opens. It opens the imaginal.

We've been through all this on other retreats, so I'm not going to go into it much now. But all this presupposes that I'm able to notice eros, that I'm actually familiar with the experience of eros. Again, I'm

not going to delineate everything that's involved in the experience of eros—we've done that before. But that also may take some practice. Like, oh, this is eros present. How do I recognize eros? Am I familiar with it? And then I can kind of hone in on it more, open up to it more, allow it more—all that supports that particular element or aspect or node.

So eros is very important in distinction to craving. As I said, craving is a contraction and it contracts, it limits and contracts the possibility of soul-making. Eros is more of an opening and it opens all the dimensions of the possibilities of soul-making. It's really that that makes a difference here.

But I've also talked about a fifth element: beauty—a sense of beauty as an aspect of the imaginal constellation. But just like love, the range of beauty that we can feel touched by and feel open to is huge. So oftentimes, like with love, we tend to kind of box in a little too narrowly our sense of what qualifies as beautiful, or what beauty is, what it looks like or sounds like. There's a huge range here.

Be surprised at the range that beauty can have for us, our sense of beauty, the things that we can find beautiful. And again, I've talked quite a bit about beauty and written about it recently, so I'm not going to go into it here much. But just to mention that it's again a factor, if you like—a node, an element, an aspect that we can tune to, begin to resonate with, be touched by, open to, appreciate, enjoy. And in the fullness of that, that node comes deeper and more fully alive, and that can trigger the other nodes to come alive and the fullness of the authentically imaginal.

Now, I really have lost track of the numbers, which is a good thing, because as I said earlier, if there are numbers here to the elements of this list, don't take them too seriously, or too rigidly, or too tightly at all. You'll see that these elements kind of reflect each other, blend into each other, and are not that discrete. Some of them are obviously not discrete; others are interconnected anyway.

But I think it might be number five, number six—and this is a sense of what I call dimensionality. It's a little hard to describe, but this dimensionality is almost as if a thing is not just flat. It has other depths, if you like, or there's more to it. And those dimensions kind of recede or proceed into a sense—they shade into a sense at some point of divinity.

Again, I've talked quite a bit about divinity here in the last few retreats, so I'm not going to say too much, but it's a mysterious word, isn't it? What do you really mean when you say divinity? And this is, again, one of those words that I would deliberately not put in too tight a box, because by its nature, it won't fit there. And in addition, there are infinite possibilities for the experience of divinity. We could, and I have, delineated certain common elements, if you like, of experiences of divinity. But actually, I would say, there are infinite possibilities. There is not one experience of the divine. Once we get into imaginal practice, infinite experiences we can have of divinity.

So it's a word that's mysterious in a number of different ways, but for me it feels like a very important word. And actually for most people who experience imaginal practice and get the flavor of it and get into

it and get the sense of it, all this makes sense. So it feels like, yes, that is the right word. I might never have used that word before, or really related to it much, but there's kind of no other word for this sense I have of this imaginal figure, or this way that I'm sensing this thing in my life, or this person, or whatever. It has a sense of dimensionality, of multiple dimensions to it. They may not be clear, and that dimensionality shades into a kind of sense of divinity.

So the sense of divinity also implies a kind of infinity, or kinds of infinity itself. In other words, the word divinity to me implies that we can never exhaust it, we can never fully fathom it. So it's related to the unfathomability of objects as well—of imaginal figures and objects and of things, that which is perceived when we are sensing with soul, that which is sensed with soul.

The divinity means that I can't reduce this, or it feels like this perception, this sense of whatever it is, is not reducible to X or Y, or "it is this," or "I sum it up," or "I box it in," or "I understand it now." There's always going to be more. There's always going to be more dimensions, more depths, more heights, if you like, more beyond what I can either capture with my intellect or even fully experience. So there's always an infinite and beyond element to an experience of the divine.

But—and again, I've been through this before, but I'll say it briefly now—that beyond is not, I would say, especially when we get into imaginal practice of sensing the soul, by definition, the beyondness of the divine is not only beyond appearances. In other words, it's not only the transcendent, unfabricated, the fading of experiences. Nor is it a beyond in that it's always lighter or more ethereal. It's somehow in, with, through, as the appearance itself.

So yes, there is a sense of a divinity—we've talked about this before—a kind of divinity that is beyond the appearance, with the fading of the appearance, so revealing the essence of a thing, we might say. But there is also, in the particularities of this appearance, an immanent divinity that has still a beyondness to it, and an infinity to it.

Both the notions of dimensionality—or if we say depths, or heights, or supernality in some traditions, the supernal, I mean the heavenly—both notions of dimensionality and of divinity make some people very nervous, understandably, because of some of the history associated with such concepts and the kind of metaphysics involved. But particularly the implications for valuing—what is of value and what is of more value and what is of less value, and what is considered more real and less real.

So these two aspects—valuing and real—are tied up, or at least historically were very much tied up, with notions of dimensionality and divinity. And many people felt that this sort of entrenched Western religions would value the deep or the high or the transcendent over the immediate, the material, the superficial, and sometimes exclusively valuing one over the other with great cost to all kinds of aspects of our existence. And also valuing of the divine over the human, and then this had a reaction with humanism and scientific materialism.

But to me it's actually not that simple. It's quite interesting, not that simple. I would like to say that perhaps, in terms of the question of what's real, perhaps we can think of this notion of dimensionality and to a certain extent even of divinity, as not so much a question of more real. So it's not an ontological assessment. This is deeper, this is therefore more real. When we get a sense of depth in some perception or pertaining to some figure or something that we're sensing—

Rather than making an ontological claim, this becomes simply an epistemological one. When we speak of depth, we mean something that is harder to sense - requiring the instrument of perception to be opened, tuned, and prepared with greater care. What we call "deeper" or "more obscure" or "less obvious" demands this heightened sensitivity rather than being inherently more real or valuable.

Instead of asserting ontological distinctions about reality, we acknowledge that these dimensions we sometimes feel graced to perceive require more refined attunement. The nodes of the imaginal lattice must be empowered and activated to enable this sensing of dimensionality, which may be felt obscurely at times and more specifically at others.

Regarding value, I would say that greater dimensionality does encompass increased value, but precisely because these dimensions don't devalue the immediate, the apparent, the form, or the material. We're simply not viewing the material through a reductive lens that dismisses it as purely unholy or mere illusion.

When we speak of deeper dimensionality, higher dimensionality, or divinity, we're not asserting ontological priority - that these are more real, or that only the divine beyond is real while appearances are not. To avoid making such ontological assertions is somewhat unusual. It's also to say, from another perspective, that divinity is neither real nor unreal.

This may sound mysterious and challenging for those accustomed to discussions of divinity that involve assertions about hierarchies of reality. They might wonder: How can it have power, value, or meaningfulness for the soul if you're not claiming it's real or more real? How can something that is neither real nor unreal possess such significance?

Yet it can and does have power, value, and meaning for the soul. Those familiar with emptiness teachings understand this middle way - neither real nor unreal - and the beauty and transformative capacity this understanding opens. We can apply this same principle here through what we might call the middle way of the imaginal, which is related but distinct.

This sense of divinity that moves us so profoundly, that bestows and gives and opens, carrying implicit value within it - this divinity we sense as neither real nor unreal in the conventional sense. Wonderful. Beautiful.

Perceiving, imagining, or sensing with soul involves some conception, whether clear or obscure, of the sacred or divine nature and origin of an imaginal image or whatever perceptions are involved. These are

not conceived merely as results of personal human history - arising because of some past experience - unless that very human history is also understood as an expression, manifestation, or journey of the divine. In this case, any image representing or recalling such memory also partakes of divinity, having its origin in the divine.

Nor are these images simply the result of random brain activity or contingent responses to sensory input. The valuing permeates everything - it's not separate from appearance itself.

Related to this aspect of divinity - whether we count dimensionality and divinity as one element or separate them into two - comes what we might call our seventh element: grace. Grace is intimately connected to the sense of divinity.

Grace carries this quality of being given something, of receiving. The image, the perception, the sense of beauty and divinity - all of this comes from divinity. The divinity itself, its beauty, its very appearance and experience are sensed as gift, as given.

This differs from mere luck, which implies random occurrence. Grace suggests some divinity or greater dimension bestowing something upon us - not through fortunate chance, nor through our clever engineering of circumstances. Neither of these would constitute grace.

There's this sense of gift, of receiving, of grace. It's a beautiful word that carries something inexplicable within it. No matter how much preparation we've undertaken, there's always an element of surprise in opening to an image - always this quality of "What a gift!"

Who would have imagined this? Who would have foreseen such a thing? There's something inexplicable, a mystery there—and a sense of being, as I said, given something, receiving something from some dimension, some divinity bigger, greater, beyond ourselves and beyond our capacities, our machinations, our ken. And with all that, with that kind of gift, there's a sense of beneficence, of the goodwill and bounty of something pouring down on us, visiting us, being given to us.

So that's another element or node aspect of the imaginal we can tune into. Very related to that is perhaps an eighth, depending on how we're counting—and I've mentioned this one before very briefly on retreat: reverence.

Reverence, obviously related to grace and divinity. Reverence, as I think I pointed out when I previously mentioned it, is from a Latin word that means to be in awe of. So again, this sense of something that's beyond us, beyond our ken.

And reverence is, for some people, a strange word, or it's a word that has associations of perhaps stiffness, or a sense of should—"reverend, you should be reverent, you should be respectful." Like we're being told by authorities or elders to be reverent, with a sense of should and stiffness.

What I mean—the sense of reverence itself, when it's authentically experienced—is something very

beautiful. It's something that has a pliability to it. The soul and the heart are pliable. And again, here we have reverence itself as a composite. Like grace and other things that we'll come to, it involves the heart. The heart feels reverence. It involves the soul—it's more than the heart. And it's also a kind of concept. There's a concept involved, again, of something to which we feel awe, something bigger, greater, beyond us.

We can feel that reverence in the body. We feel it in the energy body—the pliability, a certain softening perhaps, a certain opening, a certain energizing. Very beautiful quality.

Where there is eros, and where there's the imaginal perception, where there's the erotic imaginal perception, and eros is allowed to do its thing in inseminating, fertilizing the eros psychologos dynamics of the soul-making—where there's the erotic imaginal, reverence is implied there, reverence is included there. It's part of, if you like, certainly the subjective pole of the imaginal constellation. An attitude, a poise, a stance, an opening in reverence—something very lovely.

And if we go on to our list related to that, this kind of constellation—you see how closely related and interconnected and overlapping, actually, a lot of these elements are. But still, I feel it's really important to draw them out and discern between them and draw attention to them.

So this next one—ninth or ninth and tenth, depending on how you're counting: humility and also bowing. And again, they're related.

So humility is another word that can be kind of loaded for us in our culture. Or we get a little bit narrow and stuck in a certain range of meaning or a certain stiffness in relation to what it means or what it looks like. So we certainly do not mean by humility any kind of self-shaming or self-blaming or self-punishing or anything that's kind of life-denying. Some people, even if they don't consciously think that's what humility means, it has those kind of echoes, perhaps from the past or dimly from some cultural associations that we have with us.

Certainly not what we mean with that. Humility goes with reverence for the other or the imaginal object and for the self. Again, the imaginal constellation spreads over self, over other, self and world. So there's reverence, not just for the other, but to the self. Humility goes with reverence to the self. There is respect and reverence for the self included in our humility. Do you understand?

We tend to think humble and we tend to think of a sort of belittling of the self, some people. But actually there's reverence for the self in the very experience of humility in the face of another, or towards another.

This participation of the self with another through humility reveals something even deeper. For humility implies and involves a profound and wonderful participation of the self in the other, in the imaginal object, in the cosmos, in existence, in God. We'll return to this notion of participation - it's a crucial but subtle point.

Humility doesn't create alienation; rather, it implies a kind of participation. I'm included in what I am humble towards. I somehow mysteriously and deeply participate in that theophany or that divinity, that beauty in relation to which I feel humble. Again, this goes with grace and with a sense of meaningfulness.

These can be tricky words for us - humility may be one of them for some. This difficulty is partly cultural and historical. Often in the West, with secular modernism and the ethos that dominates our culture, we sometimes lack the humility found in other cultures or periods. Instead, we carry a kind of arrogance.

There's a sense that we can do everything, that everything depends on me. If we want something, we can rearrange it, fix it. We can master nature through technology - that rapidly growing impetus and movement and desire, perhaps addiction, to master and control everything, to make everything dependent on us, on our will.

While this brings beauty and gifts and help, the lack of humility that sometimes accompanies secular modernism is also tied to a kind of existential alienation and unrootedness of the self. So the self feels less humble, more powerful, if you like. But simultaneously, it feels this existential alienation, this unrootedness, and the abyss of what's supposed to be the ultimately real meaninglessness of existence. This forms an existential abyss of unrootedness.

You can make up meanings or arrange your life to give it meaning, but at the bottom of it all, we're living in a meaningless cosmos. This abyss of existential meaninglessness and alienation, this unrootedness, becomes the flip side or the wages of this lack of humility. They very much go together - this presumed ultimately real meaninglessness of one's existence, struggles, life, and choices.

At first glance, the humility of another culture, whether past or present elsewhere in the world, might look to us less powerful. But again, it has a flip side. Someone embedded in that culture might truly have a sense we lack - of much deeper, wider, and more intimate belonging, and of meaningfulness to their lives that we sometimes don't possess in our dance with what can be a lack of humility.

Such cultures offer an embeddedness in the cosmos, a significance and value of the self, of one's life, choices, actions, and duties. Sometimes this is harder to achieve within the cosmic picture we currently hold. I'm not suggesting a primitivist return to other cultures, but can we bring awareness to this and find ways to open up so that we can cultivate a beautiful humility that gives us gifts without completely sacrificing technology?

How can we move forward, not backward, to receive a more healthy, soulful sense and perspective of the self and cosmos? How can we progress toward that?

Humility is implicit in the imaginal constellation - implicit in our sense of the images' or imaginal figures' autonomy, which we'll return to, in the non-reductive, non-reducible nature of the image, in reverence, unfathomability, divinity, and dimensionality. You could say humility emerges from this; it's implicit in all of that.

If we can notice it, tune to it, allow it, and open to it, we can draw it out, amplify that node, encourage it, and perhaps even ignite it further. This ignites the whole mode.

I mentioned bowing as well, and this is deeply intertwined with this sense of divinity, grace, reverence, and humility. Bowing, for me, is a profoundly beautiful stance or poise or movement of being - a movement of devotion.

By bowing, I don't mean just a physical gesture, though it may be, or it may look different from what we typically think a bow looks like. Something in the being is moved - and it may not even manifest as physical movement - in reverence, in surrender, in orientation to that sense of sacredness, in giving oneself to something.

Bowing is not merely a gesture. It's also not simply accepting - "I bow to my fate" or "I bow to this illness." It's not just about acceptance. It includes a sense of the sacredness of what one is bowing to, and implicit in this is the unfathomability of what one is bowing to.

Humility can be, for some people, a slightly awkward word or one with tricky connotations, even if these operate subtly in the field, in the aura or cloud of the word and what it might mean for us. But as we're using it, humility doesn't preclude empowerment. Because I feel humble doesn't mean I'm disempowered. It might mean I feel great empowerment in all kinds of ways.

Empowerment and humility can coexist in the experience of an image, just as they can coexist in life - in our relations with others and with events and the cosmos. But this is only possible if neither the humility nor the empowerment is identified with.

Only if neither the humility nor the empowerment is identified with. So again, this kind of imaginal middle way is necessary so that we don't take on the identity of the humble one and reify that as who we are and really believe that—or the empowered one or whatever.

But one of the points here is humility doesn't always look or feel how we typically think it looks or feels. So humility, even grace for some people, these kinds of words are often loaded for us, and they can mean different things and be loaded in different ways, depending on our past conditioning with such words.

But in imaginal practice, or with sensing with soul, these words and these attitudes—humility, grace, reverence, etc., bowing—the words and the attitudes to which they refer, they need to not be too self-weighted, too heavy with self, too focused on self, and certainly not on heavy concepts like sin and the sin of the self and all that kind of heavy, contracted, dense and tight fabrication of self-sense and self-story.

You could say these kinds of words, humility and reverence and the rest, and the dispositions that they refer to, occupy a certain region of the spectrum of self-fabrication. In other words, too much tight, dense, solid self-fabrication in association with those words, and we've lost the imaginal. Outside of that region of

at least slightly lighter self-fabrication, the imaginal perception, the sensing with soul, won't work and won't be fruitful.

Let me say one last thing as a general point about this cluster of notions—humility, bowing, reverence, grace. If they are involved in soul-making and imaginal practice, as I'm saying they are, when they are involved with soul-making, they will themselves get caught up as objects of the soul-making dynamic, of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic.

And so the very sense, the very experience and the very idea of, for example, humility will expand, will stretch, will break open and be reconstituted larger. As we have explained about the whole process, the whole way the eros-psyche-logos dynamic works, when anything comes into its vortex, into its orbit, when anything is caught up, subsumed, involved, implicated in it, then it comes alive as an object of soul-making. The eros-psyche-logos dynamic goes to work on that object itself.

Our sense, our idea, our experience of humility—of what that means to us, of what that can be to us, of what it looks like, of what its range is—similarly with bowing and the rest of them, will itself become image. Humility becomes an imaginal object and an object of eros. We start to have an erotic relationship with the humility that we are experiencing or that we glimpse. You understand? And the whole thing gets infused and ignited itself.

Again, we don't reject delineations in this whole conceptual framework that we're unfolding. We don't reject delineations and concepts and try to just open and be non-conceptual or whatever. But we use definitions and use delineations from some starting point—wherever you are, wherever that is for an individual at the moment, in your sense of "this is what humility means."

And then that quality, humility or whatever it is, can develop because it gets stretched, it gets expanded, it gets busted open, it gets worked, deepened, widened by the soul-making dynamic. The quality can develop because we're practicing it and because we're allowing it and opening to it, but then it gets a whole other kind of gear of opening and development of the image and the idea of that very quality of, say, humility or reverence.

And as with all soul-making, it's potentially infinite. What's the range, what's the limit of what that word can be and mean and feel and be experienced as by us? Like the rest of the soul-making dynamics, it's potentially infinite—its range, its depth, its subtlety, its nuances, the individual shadings and delineations we start to make within humility, as well as our relationship with it. And that gets all opened up.

So like everything else in imaginal work and soul-making work, we make delineations, but those delineations we make don't get dissolved or erased. The twonesses that we make—humility and non-humility, or whatever—don't collapse or melt into a oneness only, although we can be conscious of the dimension of unity pervading everything. But rather in imaginal practice, in soul-making work, the delineations and the twonesses are mostly retained, but they have soft and elastic edges so they can

expand, they can be stretched—whether we're talking about the twoness of self and object or self and imaginal object or self and other, self and world, or just the twonesses of delineating between concepts.

So we introduce some of these words, like humility, and they might sound a little awkward or unfamiliar. We're just not really used to that kind of word, or that kind of stance, perhaps. And we're not really familiar with it. We don't get a flavor of it yet. We haven't got a flavor of it yet. But as we practice with it, we start to notice that we get more familiar with it. We start to amplify it. We start to feel more comfortable with it. It starts to grow and develop.

And then once it becomes itself an object of eros, once it itself becomes imaginal—when we have an imaginal image of this humility, of this bowing, of this poise, whatever it is—then there's an even greater development, potentially infinite development of the depth and the breadth and the complications and the nuances of what can be involved for us in that very word humility. But we start where we are. We start where we are and it grows from there just through the attention, through the care, through the gentle and subtle entering into the practice and responsiveness.

So I think—I've lost count, but I think a tenth on our list is trust. I've mentioned it briefly as we ran through the list, and I've talked about it on previous retreats, I think, the Path of the Imaginal, perhaps other retreats.

Sometimes what happens with images is that we might have a sense of clearly good beings nurturing us, and this feels genuinely helpful. But then perhaps other characters enter the image, and they seem to be destroying or attacking or wiping out what we thought were the good guys—clearly they must be the bad guys.

One option in imaginal practice is to intervene imaginatively, supporting the good guys against the bad guys. But it may also be that there's again a deeper intelligence working. What seems problematic or dark, what appears pathological, may have a deeper intelligence to it, a deeper wisdom and necessity.

So what if I simply move back into a mode of witnessing that destruction of the apparently good guys by the apparently bad guys? I witness it, resonate with it, feel the pathos of it, and sense in the soul what that does. I sense in the energy body what that does.

Again, we can use the sense of the energy body being aligned, energized, opened, harmonized. This is a very good indicator that we're on the right track. My mind doesn't get this—it was all very nice with the good guys, now the bad guys have come and they're destroying everything. But if the energy body is saying "yes," if there's a sense of opening and expansion and beauty coming through this, then I trust that. I trust that there's something here that my conventional thinking doesn't understand.

Sometimes what we call "dark" imaginal figures or images are actually serving the soul in ways that we don't comprehend with our usual thinking. They may be destroying something that needs to be destroyed, or initiating us into some necessary wisdom, or breaking open some structure that has become too rigid.

This trust—this willingness to suspend our usual judgments about good and bad, about what should be happening—is fundamental to imaginal practice. It's a trust in the deeper intelligence of the psyche, in the soul's own wisdom about what it needs for its unfoldment.

kind of taking over from the good guys, somehow my energy body just is getting more harmonized and more open as that happens. I can trust it even if my mind doesn't get it. You understand?

Or sometimes there are deeper than just the mind's superficial conventional objections and fears, there's a sense of the soul-making and the resonances and the meaningfulness. We don't completely understand it, but it feels somehow right. It's touching us and resonating with the soul deeply.

Let me offer one last element for now—number eleven on our list, though again, it depends how you count: duty. I mentioned it before, and it's something I've talked about quite a bit, certainly on the Path of the Imaginal retreat. To me, this is really important as well. It's another aspect of the imaginal constellation and indeed of any soul-making experience—a sense of duty that the soul feels.

It has a duty. It's not always clear what that duty is or how it should manifest. I've explored this before: whether it needs to be literal, whether it needs to be concretized, whether it needs to be an obvious translation or something much more subtle, whether it needs to be just purely internal—through the reverence, through the bowing, through the respect and humility. So I won't go into that again, but I will point out that, as I said, it's always an aspect of the relationship with the imaginal object, the imaginal figure, and indeed of any soul-making experience.

Even, for instance, when what's happening to constitute a soul-making experience is not so much an image, but just an idea, or a framework that has expanded—our whole logos, or conceptual framework, or just an individual idea. We have a new idea, and we can feel the importance of it. It's new. Something's expanded in my whole conceptual framework just by the introduction of this new idea. It might be something about anything—about the cosmos, or about the nature of God, or the nature of self, or soul.

Or it might be the expansion into a new way of looking. It might be even the perception of a level of oneness that is relatively new, as an expansion for me, or a state of consciousness—for example, a jhana that's relatively new. But when it feels soul-making, somehow, and often vaguely, we feel at some level a sense of duty—for instance, to explore it further, to consolidate it.

So if I've perceived that oneness, there's somewhere in the being a sense of: I need to go into this more, I need to open to it more, I've got a duty to consolidate it, make it part of my life, let it or support it to actually influence and guide or undergird my everyday life, my choices, my values. What would it be for this new idea, this new conceptual framework, this new way of looking, this new perception—whether of cosmic oneness of some kind, or just this state, this jhana that I've glimpsed, this remarkable state, the third jhana, utterly remarkable—what does it imply about my life? What does it imply about how to live and what to choose and what's important and what's valuable? And how can I bring that in so that it

really flows in and informs and supports and grounds my life, my existence, my orientation?

Somehow, I feel that we vaguely, even when there's no obvious image involved, when there's soul-making involved in any way—it's different with imaginal figures, but still the same—there's some kind of duty that we feel. At the very least, not to forget it. At the very least, not to forget it.

So again, I would say that's an aspect, an element, a node of the imaginal relationship—again, more of the subjective pole. It may be also an objective correlate or a correlate in the imaginal object, in the imaginal figure.

But let's stop there for now.

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