Sensing with Soul (Part 2)

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So we introduced a bit of new vocabulary, a new term, sensing with soul, as a possible alternative to the word imaginal for some people, or a complement to it—a way of phrasing things that perhaps gives a slightly different slant or emphasis in case that emphasis was somewhat unfairly skewed towards the intra-psychic previously for some people.

We said that sensing with soul simply means sensing, engaging the senses, being involved with our senses as human beings in ways that support and fertilize or bring soul-making. Sensing with soul is just sensing in ways that are soulful, that bring soul-making.

This business of sensing with soul is potentially vitally, crucially important for our being in the world—for how we relate to existence, for how we relate to the gift of human life, how we relate to each other, how we relate to time, how we relate to nature and the planet, and also to the grave environmental challenges that we face as a species at this point, as do other species.

For me, there's something here in this whole business that we're trying to illuminate from different directions that's vitally important. We can relate to our senses in ways that close certain doors or open doors that we may really not want to open and go down, that may have grave or limiting consequences. Or we can find ways to relate to senses that actually open up gift and grace and beauty and soul.

I want to dwell a little less on giving examples and focus again on understanding what are we getting at here? What's involved? Why is this so important? Understanding the concepts involved allows that vitality to come forth, to come through in our relating to the world. It's actually understanding that can provide a kind of robustness to this whole endeavor, to this whole exploration—a robustness to our experiences.

If we have soul-making experiences, we have experiences that touch us, that move us, that seem to have bigger implications, one of the things that gives them grounding and gives them the ability or potential to be more than just ephemeral experiences that we sometimes forget or that seem to have no consequence or are easily dismissed or don't seem to carry out and bring forth their implications is the absence of a conceptual structure that really gives that soil and ground and rootedness and nourishment and fits it into a context.

For me, this understanding is crucial. I realize that for some people it's not how they tend to relate to things in terms of concepts and structures and how it all fits together. Many of the ideas that we're introducing are quite alien. So I realize that for some people it's quite difficult, for other people it's quite attractive. But there is something crucial and vital about understanding, because that allows the greater

vitality of what's going on, of this business of soul-making. It allows and offers robustness, durability, fertility to the whole project, the whole exploration.

So I want to dwell just a little on some of the concepts involved. Sensing with soul, we said, was sensing in a way that was soul-making. Now, why do we call it soul-making? Because if we define sensing with soul that way, it just begs the question for someone listening: well, what do you mean by soul? What do you mean by soul-making or soulfulness?

So why do we call it soul-making? What is made? What is the making? What is soul-making? I've been through this in different ways quite a lot in the last few years, but to say it again, one way we could approach this—actually, before we even say that, was it soul-making?

We pointed out in the last talk that this making is not only a passive process. There's a kind of straddling. It can feel to us, and in the movement of soul-making, it will feel to us that something is given to us. Images are given to us. Circumstances are given to us. Perceptions open up for us in a way as if there's a greater intelligence operating, as if the soul bestows on us as graces these openings that we call soul-making.

And yet at the same time—and that's a very important perspective—there's a sort of opposite or complementary perspective: it's not only a passive process, this making. So yes, there's a sense of givenness, of grace, of necessity, of something being handed to us. And sometimes that involves what is difficult being handed to us, as well as what is beautiful. So yes, there's all that.

But it's not just passive. There is also required in this making our assent, our willing, our choosing, our responsiveness, and our steering, and our desire, our eros. So in the making, it's this mysterious, beautiful, somewhat paradoxical mixture or encompassing of both the passive sense of receiving, giving, grace, and also of doing—our making, our choosing, our design.

But why do we call it soul-making? What is made here? Two ways of approaching this. We could say soul. Soul is made through soul-making. What is being made? Well, soul is being made, hence the word. But then that begs the question: what do we mean by soul?

Again, we can approach this in different ways and at different levels, but we could say soul means a quality—or rather the collection or manifold of qualities, aspects, or dimensions that constitute a sense of soulfulness.

In other words: meaningfulness, beauty, a sense of beauty that touches us, an involvement of the imaginal capacity or fantastical capacity, an ideation or conceptual structure or framework or logos that is stimulated and can support the whole network of elements—the lattice, the constellation of what is involved in soul-making.

Eros is involved—this wanting more connection, wanting more penetration, wanting more intimacy,

wanting to know more of the erotic other, the beloved erotic object. There's a sense of theater, this middle way between real and not real, this infinite echoing and mirroring, a sense of theophany, and so forth. All of this constitutes a sense of soulfulness.

Soul means the various qualities, the collection of manifold qualities, aspects, or dimensions that constitute a sense of soulfulness. This is what we mean by soul, and this is what's made in soul-making.

Soul is something we recognize—we recognize soulfulness, we recognize soul, and we recognize soul-making phenomenologically, in our experience. We recognize that dimension or those aspects of experience.

A second way we can think about or speak about soul is—holding this lightly—as an organ of sensing, or an instrument of sensing. The human organism is composed of different organs, and we could think of soul, very lightly, as an organ. It is that in us, or perhaps which we are in, that senses in ways that bring and increase and open a sense of soulfulness.

Soul is that organ that senses in ways that open, support, and deepen a sense of soulfulness. It is an organ of soulful ways of looking.

This organ—which we could put in inverted commas—we can also deconstruct. By putting it in inverted commas, I mean it doesn't have inherent existence. When something doesn't have inherent existence, we can conceive or view it like this, and we can conceive or view it like that. It's open and amenable to different ways of being conceived and sensed.

Because soul doesn't have inherent existence, it is not one fixed thing independent of the way of conceiving it and the way of sensing and looking at it. We can look at it from different angles, different perspectives. We can deconstruct it further into its various elements or aspects or ways of looking or properties.

But we could say soul is this organ which is or holds the capacity and ranges of ways of looking that bring soulfulness. It's an organ that employs ways of looking that support or open, nourish soulfulness—a sense of soulfulness.

It is this organ or instrument or capacity—or you could just view it as a range of available ways of looking. Soul is that. It's more of a verb. Like soul-making, it's a range of ways of looking. And it is this organ, this capacity, this instrument, or range of available ways of looking that is made in soul-making, that is built, that is developed.

Right there, there are two ways of seeing what we mean by soul, or conceiving what we mean by soul. The first is a phenomenological recognition—it's an object of experience. We have the experience of this theophany or beauty or meaningfulness. The second is the imputed subject of that range of objects or experience—this organ of ways of looking that bring soulfulness.

We can conceive of soul as object or as subject, or both.

Soul, in its activation into the soul-making dynamic of Eros-Psyche-Logos—which we'll review in a minute—soul makes. In other words, it creates as well as discovers soulfulness, and it creates as well as discovers soul capacity and soul sensing.

Soul is that capacity to sense, that ability to sense in a soulful way, in ways that bring soulfulness. It makes the objects, the aspects and dimensions of objects, the subject, the self, the world in cosmopoiesis, in sense of divinity, with eros, with dimensionality, with beauty. It makes and creates and opens all that up in the very sense of the fabric, the texture of existence, and the sense of what our existence is.

All that is why this is so important—because it has enormous implications for how we live, how we relate to our life, death, and the world around us. It is this openness and potentially increasing capacity to make soul, which means to sense in those ways, that is so important.

Now, as we just mentioned, soul amplifies what's happening in the soul-making dynamic by having elements. One way of breaking up the elements is to say that eros and psyche and logos are always involved when there's soul sensing, always involved in imaginal perception.

Eros is this wanting more connection, wanting more contact, wanting more penetration, intimacy, opening to the erotic object—whatever that is, whatever that erotic object is, what we might call the beloved other. We've talked a lot about eros.

Psyche—one definition of psyche in this sense is that it's the imaginal faculty. The sense of image, of sensing with image.

And logos is the conceiving faculty—the notion or ideation or whole conceptual framework that's operating at any time with a perception.

So that all these factors are involved when there is a sensing with soul - there has to be eros, there has to be the imaginal image involved, and also some kind of ways of conceiving that support that deepening movement and that sensing with soul, with all the elements of what we call the elements of the imaginal constellation, the elements of soulfulness that we've enumerated.

In the soul-making dynamic - what we were calling the soul-making dynamic, or the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic - these elements of eros, psyche, and logos interact with each other. They get involved with each other, woven into each other in ways that stimulate their mutual feeding, mutual expanding, enriching, complicating, deepening, and widening. This can happen in many ways.

One of the most obvious ways that it happens is because eros, if you heard in the definition, has that "more" in it. It wants more. So whenever there's eros, there is the enjoyment of what is present and the appreciation and the beauty there. And at the same time, it has *pothos* within the eros. And *pothos* is the Greek divinity of infinite wanting, of wanting always more. So within it, eros has this *pothos* that no

matter what beauty and what depth and what richness it has, it's always got an element of wanting more.

Rather than being a problem in the way that craving is a problem - this endless thirst that the Buddha talked about, *tanha*, creating more and more suffering, keeping us on the wheel of rebirth - there's something creative and stimulating and fertilizing about this *pothos* within the eros, this wanting always more. It orients itself to what is beyond what it already knows, what it already fully experiences, what it's already fully familiar with. It discovers beyonds, if you like. It also casts out and creates beyonds. And it sets itself in relation to - in erotic relation of longing, if you like, or just desire or impetus or dynamic - towards that beyond.

In doing so, it then finds, creates and discovers more beyonds in the sense of what is going on. In the sense of the object, the imaginal sense of the beloved other is deepened, widened, given more aspects and dimensions. All this is created, discovered also in the self, in that imaginal constellation, and then in the world. So eros, because of the *pothos*, always constitutes a beyond. And that beyond, it wants to move into, it wants to penetrate, it wants to open to what is more. And that engages and stimulates and fertilizes the whole Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic.

When there is more beyond being perceived, then we could say the image is enriched, and then that greater image - the greater beauty of it, dimensionality and aspects and complexities of it - stimulates more eros, and so on. And then at some point, maybe the whole idea of what is going on here - what am I in relationship to? Who is this that is in relationship? What is myself? What is the soul? What is this looking? What is this eros? What is this world around that I perceive? - the whole idea, not just the sense or the imaginal image of all that, but also the whole idea, the notion, the logos of all that, also gets stretched. It has to get stretched.

So either our previous ideas are shattered and they get reconstituted, if you like, in a larger way that can encompass what we're experiencing, or they just get stretched gradually in this whole gradual movement of the soul-making dynamic. So this can be over time, either at sudden junctures where there's a kind of breaking of the vessels, or much more gradually in this kind of elastic stretching over time.

Just to point out something there: in this beyond, eros has an element of impetus to transcend. But the impetus to transcend can be, as we've pointed out a lot in previous retreats - the impetus to transcend can be beyond the appearances, beyond the objects, or it can be a transcending in the sense of transcending just the limitations of our idea and image of what we are presented with, what we are encountering. And in that way it stretches, rather than going beyond into a kind of fading of appearances - the transcendent beyond of unfabricating - it's actually the beloved other itself and the self, whatever eros and soul-making dynamic kind of gets involved with. That object or other gets expanded.

So there's a kind of transcending of the limits, but not beyond the object so much as beyond just what was known of the object. So more gets created, discovered - more dimensions, more aspects, more beauties, all of that. So in a sense, eros has this push or impetus or longing or direction of - we could call it

transcending, we could call it transgressive. In other words, literally moving beyond boundaries, moving beyond limits.

I'm just mentioning this as a sort of side point, but because of this *pothos* in eros and the constitution of the beyond, eros, we could say, or wonder - does it need to be transgressive? Does it need to go across boundaries? Go across - wherever there's a boundary, eros will push across that in different ways. Does eros in a way constellate or create transgression?

Now transgression, if you're familiar with that word, often has a kind of moral implication, doesn't it? But I really mean it in a much broader sense. Transgression of any kind - it may be moral, it may be a transgression of category or type or behavior or divisions - but transgression implies this otherness, something other than what was within the limit, something beyond. Eros, as I said, needs and creates othernesses and beyondnesses.

When people have affairs or find themselves drawn to or attracted, or they can only be kind of sexually or romantically stimulated in certain conditions or environments or when something's happening that's a little taboo, that's a little transgressive or a lot transgressive in the moral sense, I wonder whether part of what's really happening there is it's this natural impetus of eros to constellate a beyond, which it then wants to explore and dive into and open to. It wants to, or it does need and constellate a transgression, but that transgression is actually much - potentially much bigger if we allow ourselves the whole involvement of psyche and logos, the imagination and the logos and dimensionality and all that.

So it's perhaps a kind of limited or constrained or thin manifestation of a movement, of a transgressive movement and impetus in eros, which is really, as I said, a thinner and poorer and limited manifestation of something much larger and more essential and much more potentially fruitful and more giving rise to, more supportive of soul-making than those kind of purely - the turn-on of some kind of taboo often is.

So again, I'm dwelling on the conceptual framework or the understanding of what's really involved when we're sensing the soul and what's really involved—or one way of understanding what's involved—in the soul-making dynamic. I'm dwelling with that and looking at it from different angles, trying to shine light on different aspects of it, because I really think and see that understanding the larger picture—understanding the dynamic, how soul-making works, what it involves, what supports it—really digesting it conceptually in ways that we can actually bring forward and engage in our practice and experience, that understanding of the dynamic will be so helpful, so fruitful. It really gives the whole movement of soul-making much more power, range, and fertility.

Also, it brings a beauty in itself. We see the whole thing when we understand it more. As we understand it more, the whole thing emerges to us or is revealed to us as something of much more power and beauty and consequence. So that's why I'm dwelling a little bit on these elements of the dynamics.

Let's say a few more things about it. If we consider these elements—Eros, Psyche, and Logos—central, if

you like, aspects (they're really parts of the same thing, but we could divide them into three, as I've said before, divide that whole soul-making process into three as if they were separate), it seems to me that it might be generally true to say that Eros is more labile, more subject to change, more changeable than psyche, than image, which is in turn more labile, more changeable than the logos.

So it seems like there's a kind of gradation between the three terms or aspects of this trinity—a gradation of how mercurial they are, how changeable they are, how labile they are.

So Eros—and again you'll notice this if you engage these practices and really notice what's going on and track your own experience—Eros comes and goes and fluctuates, it ebbs and flows relatively quickly. Even over a few minutes, the Eros is coming and going, getting stronger and weaker, disappearing and coming back.

An image, the psyche aspect, tends to stay a while, though it does need some focusing on and steadying. We need to kind of engage the psyche aspect, the image, and hold it in a way that it can stay steady. But it tends to be, once it's there, relatively steady. And within that, the eros in relation to that image can ebb and flow up and down.

The concepts involved, the logos aspect, tend to be even more steady, less changeable. They expand or shatter only under greater or more sustained pressure. In other words, only through repeatedly sensing this whole other dimension of being that we get when the eros opens up the image again and again, or if it's very marked—only under greater or more sustained pressure does the logos change, move, stretch, or shatter.

Though with practice, we can be quite agile and quite flexible in deliberately moving between different conceptual frameworks. And again, this is something I would really encourage. It's almost like you can just look at something with a certain logos and then switch, move agilely, look at it with a different logos, a whole different conceptual framework. And that's very much available with the maturing of practice—something I would really like to encourage.

All of that agility and flexibility of conceptual frameworks fits into this much larger logos that is partly a function of the whole deep teaching of emptiness and dependent arising, able to open up. It legitimizes that and allows it, gives us that permission and that ontological and metaphysical legitimation.

If we just dwell with this trinity of Eros-Psyche-Logos and the dynamics involved in that, and say a bit more about logos: the logos in the soul-making dynamic, in the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, doesn't expand only when the sense of the image or the sense of the self expands, when the psyche expands.

What can happen—again, you will recognize all this if you really get into these practices and this way of approaching things and exploring this territory—when there is eros for logos, in other words, when we see the beauty of the whole framework and the beauty of the conceiving function of the soul, when there is eros for the logos and we're attracted towards that and it becomes something that is beautiful,

attractive, has a beyond to it, divine, has dimensionality—when there is eros for logos, the logos is ignited through that eros.

And this igniting of the Logos engenders more creation and discovery of new concepts and new conceptual frameworks. You understand? So it's not just through the psyche. There can be a direct erotic connection with Logos itself, with the whole conceptual framework, but also with the very element of the soul that we call Logos, the very capacity or that part of the instrument that we call Logos. And then that engenders more creativity. It's like there's a whole activation of the whole logos structure or strand of the soul. And all kinds of creativity and discovery in regard to concepts and conceptual frameworks is born from that erotic connection with logos when that gets going.

And of course, the whole eros-psyche-logos dynamic might itself be stimulated into expansion when the logos itself is directly stimulated—again, not just by the sense of the image, the imaginal sense opening to then knocking on logos's doors and limits and saying something needs to stretch here. The Logos can be directly stimulated, directly stretched or shattered or ignited by something one reads or something one hears, a concept, a thought, or a thought or concept that arises spontaneously in the mind. And that stimulates the Logos directly to expand, to stretch, to enrich and complicate, deepen, to come alive, to come on fire.

So there are different ways, perhaps different styles, that each of the elements of this trinity operate under, but also different ways in. It's not always the eros stretching the psyche, which then stretches the logos eventually at some point, if there's enough sustained pushing on that and expansion of that. There are many ways these elements can kind of get stimulated, involve each other and fertilize each other.

We could say, and I think it's pretty fair to say, soul-making—it's complex. So what we're trying to unfold here in this kind of vision or logos or conceptual framework of the whole business that we're talking about is complex.

It's not easy to understand, and it's not easy to explain either or sum up in a nutshell. It's quite foreign, quite alien to our usual ways of thinking in modern society. And I would add that probably the way we're conceiving it would be alien to ancient and pre-modern societies as well.

In somewhat lighthearted justification of this difficulty, I quote Richard Feynman, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist—quite a character and a beautiful spirit who won his Nobel Prize for pioneering work on quantum electrodynamics. The day he was informed that he'd won the Nobel Prize, the phone didn't stop ringing and reporters flocked to his house wanting interviews and photos. One reporter came to him, stuck a microphone in his face and said, "Professor Feynman, can you explain your theory in five minutes for our audience?" Feynman looked at him and said, "Do you think that if I could explain this theory in five minutes that it would be worth a Nobel Prize?"

Some things are complicated, unusual in the way they stretch thinking, difficult to explain, and can't

necessarily be summed up very simply until one has familiarity and experience with the terms. Then you can sum things up in a nutshell—but there's a lot being implied in the words spoken.

The word *soul*, or the concept of soul, like other crucial and important fundamental words—like love, like dharma, like self—concepts that really matter deeply to us and to our sense of existence, are in a way undefinable. And they need to retain a certain dimension of undefinability. It's important that they not get trapped in a logos, in a conceptual framing that is too tight, too rigid, too narrow—so that Eros, Psyche and Logos can expand and enrich themselves, becoming complicated and deeper and wider in relation to that very concept.

In other words, soul-making can happen in relation to soul. The very idea, the very concept of soul is something that soul-making gets hold of and expands by expanding the Logos—enriching, deepening, widening, stretching, shattering, opening, complicating that very concept. The idea and sense of soul will keep opening, deepening, getting richer. It is in itself fertile. If I lock it in too tight, too narrow, too limited and rigid a definition, it can't be fertile. Its fertility is limited.

When we say "undefined," we don't mean nonsense or non-existence—that soul is just a nonsense concept because you can't define it, or that it just doesn't exist. Nor do we mean that realizing its undefinability, we should shrug and turn away from the idea of soul because it's a silly concept, not strictly and rigidly definable. Actually, just the opposite. Its ultimate undefinability opens or furnishes space for a kind of never-ending creativity of exploration. It allows this never-ending creation and discovery in the exploring, in the conceiving, in the logos. And it's this never-ending exploration that is soul-making and is fertile.

One last point: as soul-making gets going and there's the fertility of the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic and the discovery and creation of beyonds and more dimensions and more sensitivities and discernments in both the image and in the sense of eros and in ideas themselves, that creation and discovery essentially makes more distinctions. They're made to perception, made to conceiving, made to nuance, made in the realm of emotion. Making distinctions is part of what happens in soul-making—an element. The whole thing gets more nuanced.

We discern between this and that—for example, between eros and craving. There's an infinite birthing, creating and discovering of distinction-making, discernment-making, not purely conceptual, but also in the body, in the ways we relate to and with the body, in the very sensitivity of the psyche and consciousness and organism and sensing, and also in the concepts.

Soul-making brings distinctions, and making certain distinctions also opens up and supports the possibility, fertilizes the possibility of soul-making. The distinction between eros and craving, for example, is supportive of the whole endeavor of soul-making. If we just limit desire to "it's all craving"—which is way too simplistic—that won't serve soul-making. Or even if we limit it to just either unskillful desire, craving, or skillful desire, *kusala* desire, *chanda* for the elements of the Eightfold Path or the factors of awakening—that too is not a fine enough and nuanced enough distinction to support the conceptual

elements and experiential elements that are part of soul-making.

So soul-making engenders the making of distinctions, discernments, and fine discernments at all levels and aspects of our being. Soul-making involves making discernments and distinctions—delineations of reality. And certain delineations, distinctions, and discernments support and open, fertilize and catalyze soul-making, catalyze this process of creation and discovery.

Let's pause there.

As I've mentioned now for the third time in this talk, there's a whole other level of beauty and import that becomes apparent, that is revealed to us, and a whole other level of implication and power that also gets revealed when we understand—conceptually, when we really develop a working understanding. This means in practice, not just purely intellectual or abstractly intellectual, but in practice we develop a working understanding of the elements involved in soul-making, what it means, and what sensing with soul means.

That's why I'm dwelling on these elements today.

Thank you for listening.

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