Sensing with Soul (Part 5)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:13:40

I very much hope that all this analysis of what's involved in and what supports sensing the soul, perceiving imaginatively, soul-making—taking apart what we mean by those words—I hope that this is helpful. I hope that it opens up possibilities and makes actual possibilities for you, allowing you to open up this field further.

I hope that through what we're saying here and through your own practice of it and dipping in, you really get a taste of the kinds of things that we're talking about, the kinds of experiences. Get the taste in terms of actually experiencing for yourself these kinds of openings, deepenings, transformations, whatever you want to call them. That you both get the taste and get the idea—as a metaphorical term, but also more literally—and you understand conceptually as well. As it opens up experientially, may it also open up for you conceptually, making sense and being grounded conceptually, both through what we're saying and through your own practical explorations.

With that, again, I really want to encourage you to play, to experiment. Experiment means trying different things, doing some different things in practice than you might usually do. But experiment implies with it a sort of attentive, careful noticing of what happens—a kind of inquiry in and through the practice, sometimes even questioning. Through that combination of play and inquiry, we could say experimentation is attentive noticing when we're playing. A maturing of soul-making and imaginal practice and of understanding will take place.

It's that combination—playing or experimenting with a kind of attentive noticing and inquiry and thinking about it as well. All of that together will inevitably open up and establish a kind of gradual maturing of these kinds of practice and of the understandings. This way of approaching things is very different from a kind of harassment or pressure of the question: "Am I getting this right? Am I getting it right?" which so often plagues meditators and oppresses the meditative exploration and the meditative path.

Slowly, gradually, we're looking at what is it that allows, opens, supports, catalyzes sensing with soul—sensing life, the world, the things of the world, the materiality, the bodies, the beings of the world, sensing any and all of that with soul. We've touched on the importance of certain aspects of the way that we are present, the way that we show up in the present moment and bring our awareness and our being to bear. Certain factors or aspects of our presence are key.

For instance: humility, heart opening or heart softening, a certain amount or some degree of lessening of the fabrication of perception, some degree of loosening of perceptual and conceptual grasping too tightly

on what a thing is and how reality is. Sensitivity as an aspect of presence, energy, body awareness—these kinds of things.

I'm just repeating now what we've been through before, just to reiterate it once more. We said any aspect or element of the imaginal, any node in the imaginal constellation—we went through that whole list—attention to or noticing that node can either suddenly or gradually bring that element alive. From there, the whole lattice can ignite, become illuminated. The fully imaginal can be moved towards or entered into, either suddenly or gradually.

In all of that, some of those elements won't necessarily be there at first or in the beginnings of your practice with all this. Something like the sense of participation, for instance—I wonder whether that's just a bit more subtle. In other words, it's maybe not likely to be noticed immediately. It could be that the fact that you've heard me say it so much stimulates that noticing and makes it more accessible. But the general point right now is that it's not necessary that all these elements are noticed at first.

As I said, there's a maturing of the discernment that happens, like your eyes getting used to the dark, but over a period of time—like, what's actually involved in imaginal perception, what's actually involved in sensing the soul.

We also said that the order of practices is not important. For example, one might start with a so-called intrapsychic image or intrapsychic sensing the soul, and from there it spreads out to some thing, some object, some person, or just the general environment in a kind of cosmic sense—to what we might call extrapsychic sensing the soul. Or it might work the other way around. One starts with some material object or the general sense of one's surroundings, perceived and sensed with soul, and from that arises some intrapsychic image of oneself or of someone else or something else.

So it can work in either order, either way. It might be only extrapsychic. It might just stay with this object in front of me, this thing, this being, whatever it is in the material world manifesting materially, and one senses them as soul, and that's just what it does.

It might be that we start with, for instance, some degree of cultivating some samadhi, and the well-being, the harmonization, the integrity and beauty, really, of the energy body experience there liquefies to a certain extent, lessens fabrication to a certain extent, loosens things to a certain extent. In that loosening, liquefying, there's the possibility for more sensing the soul of the world around us, because everything is liquefied, a little bit loosened.

Or it can be emptiness practices first, which essentially do a similar kind of thing. They're all in the movement of less fabrication, lessening of fabrication. Or some other element—for instance, we've mentioned humility earlier. It might be that lingering with that sense, allowing that to open one and allowing oneself to open into that realm, that mode of being that we call humility with everything that's involved there, in whatever way that does and whatever that means for us or however that opens at that

time. It may be that that element is the way in, the door that opens to allow the sensing of soul into the mundus imaginalis.

In all this analysis, there's this possibility to develop our understanding conceptually of the conceptual framework and understanding regarding the elements, some of the elements that might be involved in—whichever way you want to put it—opening a door or building, creating this constellation, this construction, this fabrication that is the imaginal.

And also with practice. So dwelling on this allows both the understanding and the practice, hopefully, to develop, for you to gain some confidence in, because you can actually try different approaches. Dwell or focus on this or that element, try changing this or that, just noticing or tweaking an element or amplifying it or whatever it is.

But we also made the point that okay, there's this understanding and skill that develops regarding what elements may be involved, but never, never, never is soul-making going to be only a matter of technique or something that can be harnessed under the rubric of mind mastery, of our mastery. It's never going to be only that.

Yes, there is skill and art that can develop in practice, and yes, there certainly is quite a beautiful and remarkable evolution of refinement, of discernment conceptually and perceptually and all that. And that's really, really helpful and important. But it's never going to come just under that. I'm never going to get it completely under my thumb. There's always going to be an element in soul-making of grace, of the unexpected, of something being given, a gift, and receiving something, so to speak, from beyond ourselves.

This sense of grace, of gift, of receiving something from beyond ourselves, is always, I would say, to some degree, an element in soul-making practice, in sensing the soul, in imaginal perception.

So that's the end of the little review. If we pick up on that little point and amplify something that I mentioned earlier—I can't remember when, but recently—so we can, as I said just now, receive something from beyond ourselves. And that beyond ourselves might be from another human or other humans right now in the present, materially with us, together with us, or a whole field, or group, or whatever. That's one possibility of the beyond ourselves that we may receive from.

Now, I'm not going to talk—we're not going to talk, and we probably won't talk for quite a while—about, I don't know what to call it exactly, deliberate dyadic soul-making practice, where there's deliberate sort of erotic imaginal exploration deliberately face to face with another and kind of held there and explored there and allowed to amplify with each other. I think we'll save that till later. I don't actually recommend that practice quite yet. It takes some very beautiful, very wonderful prerequisites psychologically in terms of skill with one's own process, relational skills and arts, all kinds of things, energetics, etc.

So I'm not really wanting to talk so much about that as a deliberate avenue and possibility and practice. Rather for right now, just to mention a possibility, because some of you will have experienced this

anyway, and it happens, of course, that we receive, we are given something from beyond ourselves, sometimes from other human selves right now that we're in relationship with, and that opens up for us. It's what we get from them, what they communicate to us, that opens up the possibility right then for us of sensing the soul.

I could possibly give a few examples of this. One actually is something that I can report for myself, helped by Catherine. I think it was the last retreat, the Alchemy of Desire, and I was talking at some point, perhaps in the talk called "Longing, Vulnerability, Anteros," and was talking about something that happened, and my worry, or fear, regarding a certain creative project that was very dear to my soul and heart and my fear, my concern, worry that it would just sort of get lost or dissolve or not come to fruition. And also my recognition that it didn't depend on me and how that opened up through an exploration that Catherine helped me with, but that was primarily my own image that I explored.

That was around the same time—I can't remember if it was before the retreat or after the retreat—but Catherine and I were Skyping. And I think it was a similar uncertainty that I was in, or similar anxiety, really, about this thing that felt, this creative project that felt very, very important to me.

At a certain point, I was maybe sharing some of this, and some of my feelings. And at a certain point, her perception shifted into an imaginal perception. In other words, she was sensing with soul. She was sensing me with soul through the medium of Skype, perceiving me, sensing me with soul. In other words, I for her had become image at that point—not so much as a narrative, but in that moment as a kind of iconic image. Not so much the whole story of this, if I remember rightly, but with everything that involves: the theophany and the dimensionality and all of that.

And she shared that with me in real time, in the moment. She said, "This is how I'm seeing you right now." She was quite struck by the perception and the sort of luminosity there, and the beauty of that in her perception. Her communicating of that perception—in this case of me—communicating that to me in the moment, in the midst of my sharing open-heartedly about the anxiety that I was feeling, did something to my perception of the life of this work, or the life of this creative work that I was caring deeply about and actually concerned about.

So her communicating that perception to me—it's not so much that I picked up that exact perception and saw myself iconically, theophanically, as image as she was. It was more that something illuminated in the field, and then I was able at that point, somehow in the magic sort of ignition of that field of her communicating, that was triggered by her communication of her imaginal perception, I was able actually to perceive the life of the work more imaginatively, the life of this creative project more imaginatively. And then the kind of contraction of anxiety that was there was able to relax.

It's as if I caught the sensing the soul, or caught the imaginal field from her. Or her perception, her communication of that perception, that imaginal perception, ignited not the same perception, but a related perception perhaps, but a different perception in me, imaginatively.

And so I had been in this kind of grip of "I need to figure out what to do to ensure that this creative work lives and becomes generative in the future, if I die," etc. In my shift, that was catalyzed by her shift of seeing me imaginally, in my shift, then that kind of grip relaxed and there was a whole different seeing of this creative project, of my relationship with it and the possibility that I might die before it comes to fruition.

That all relaxed and became imagined. There was a very different relationship with the whole situation.

So that would be one example of something we receive from beyond ourselves that opens—if you like, turns the key in our perception—so that we are then able to perceive, to sense with soul.

A second example might be—and some of you might remember this, since I'm pretty sure I recounted it in a talk, which I think might be the Theatre of Selves, maybe in the second part. I was relating the true story of working with a yogi on retreat who shared with me some really difficult memories that she'd felt a lot of shame about for many years concerning something that happened when she was quite young, a very young woman really.

As she was talking—and we hadn't discussed anything about the imaginal, hadn't even used that word, this was really quite a few years ago—I heard the words "sacred prostitute." I was sort of wrestling with myself as I was listening, wondering whether it was okay to share that phrase. And I did.

In a way, what came to me through these words was an imaginal perception, a sensing with soul of the memory of the whole scene and narrative that she was sharing with me. It was so painful for her and so bound in shame decades later. And my sense, my imaginal perceiving of that story, that episode in her life, I then shared with her.

In this case, she immediately picked up the flame of that very same imaginal perceiving, that very same sensing of that memory, of that narrative with soul. It was the same image, so different than what happened with Catherine and me on the Skype, where what ignited for me was a slightly different perception. In this case, it was the same image. I'd been listening for a few minutes to this very painful thing, but I shared what came, and she immediately grasped that image.

It immediately cast the whole episode and the whole pain of it in a very different light. It was literally seen with a different way of looking. The memory was remembered—not the facts, but the whole color and the whole actual movement of what was going on there.

What was going on in this painful memory? We can interpret it this way: the hermeneutic is shaming, it's a kind of moral inferiority and great mistake, and there's no beauty, nothing redeeming in it. But something shifted in this perception. It wasn't just my intellect coming up with how to recast it, to bring in a different way of looking. Something was, if you like, given to me.

So I received something from beyond myself, which had to do with the field, and in the field we were

looking together at that memory. I received something from beyond myself—who knows from where, from soul, from whatever—and then communicated it to her. That was exactly what she needed then to shift and see the whole thing with a re-sanctification, a redeeming, an opening up to see what was beautiful there and what was divine. Mercy began to flow, healing began to flow.

Her sense, not just of the past, but then of her present as well—it's as if she recognized the necessity and the truth, if you like, the truth of that imaginal perception, the truth of sensing what happened with soul, remembering in that different way both her past and herself. And that means herself in the present too.

So that would be another example of receiving something from beyond ourselves and it being communicated between humans.

Another one—and again, it was something I was involved in with a very good friend, sometime in the last few years. I don't quite remember what led up to it, but I think we were both feeling a certain particular kind of tenderness and openness between us.

It wasn't that something had been closed or hardened or hidden or held tightly behind certain doors for fear of being seen. It wasn't that at all. But something happened and I think we both felt this kind of, metaphorically speaking, nakedness with each other. And again, it wasn't that we were hiding anything before that, and suddenly it was like, "Ah, now I can show you what I'm ashamed of" or anything. It was nothing like that at all. That can be a very important moment in human beings relating, but it actually wasn't that. It was just that something happened, or in the flow of things there was suddenly a sense of this really beautiful kind of nakedness together.

We were talking a little bit, but there was a lot of just silence and a really slow pace to things. I was checking, paying attention to this kind of beautiful feeling of nakedness, metaphorically. And I sensed, oh, it's got this real innocence with it and a kind of real unguardedness. And again, not that there was really much guardedness before, but it had this kind of almost pristine Edenic quality—as in Garden of Eden. Something very young, very innocent, sort of open and unguarded and really naked.

As I tracked this inside, in the flow of this very sparse conversation, just being together—there was a lot of love there—I was paying attention at the same time to this sense that I had.

And in the paying attention, it became imaginal. It took that quantum jump. And the very sense of my nakedness and innocence, openness, unguardedness, and the youngness of that began to have those qualities of beauty and theophany and dimensionality. It became iconic for me—there was something of the iconic image in that.

As we talked about elements of the imaginal, I began to pick up and notice these elements. I wasn't doing it in any deliberate way. I don't think I'd even articulated this business about elements of the imaginal to myself at that time, but I began to notice the element of eternality. It's as if that nakedness, innocence, unguardedness, openness, youngness—this image—I sensed the eternality of it. There was this young

naked boy that had this "always, always already happening in hierophantic time" quality to it. And that amplified the sense of divinity of the whole thing.

I haven't talked about it for quite a while, but I spoke at some point, perhaps in *Path of the Imaginal*, about this possibility of seeing an image as an object or becoming an image—two possible different ways of relating to an image, among others. In this case, I opened more to this iconic divine image and its eternality and the beauty of it and the sweetness of it, the innocent purity of it. And I became that more.

Again, it's not that I was identified. There wasn't this rigid, tight ego grasping at it. But it's as if I let myself enter into being that image or feeling myself as that image. And with that, it felt like, as part of the image, there was a blessing radiating from that image. As I entered into the image and became that image physically in my bodily experience, it felt like my body and my hands were emanating blessing and were part of the image.

I remember placing my hands on my friend's head in blessing, and she could feel the blessing energy. It was very beautiful and touching and interesting.

Now, again, there wasn't really much reification going on or identification. If someone were to go around placing their hands on people's heads with this sense of being identified with having blessing energy coming out of them—"that's good for me, it's good for you, telling people it's good for you if you let me touch your head because I've got blessing coming out of my hands"—that personally would make me very nervous. Maybe that's just my style, but here it really felt in that theatre, in that imaginal way, with all the loveliness and power and ability to affect the soul and heart, but not the identification, not the ego identification and grasping and reification of that.

So what happened was through the touch—well, we were together in this heart experience before—but through the touch, we both were sensing the soul. Through the touch, the image, the imaginal was shared between us, and part of its sharing was sharing through the touch.

In all those three examples I've just given, we could say something comes from beyond ourselves. It could be from another human being, or we could talk perhaps about the field. Like fields in quantum theory, it's as if the field takes a quantum leap. In other words, what two people are experiencing—the whole thing becomes imaginal together. This to me is really quite interesting. In the field, whoever is participating, there is a quantum leap into a new imaginal sense.

Notice that in the examples where there was dukkha, that imaginal sense doesn't ignore or erase the dukkha that was there, nor the particularity of the persons involved, or the events, or the story. But it transforms the seeing, transforms the sensing. Something has gone to sensing with soul. Something has opened up in the field, taking that quantum leap. It's taken a quantum leap into the imaginal realm—imaginal perceiving has opened up.

What can happen, as I mentioned, is this quantum leap can be given to or arise first in one person, if there

are two people there. First in one person who then communicates it to the other, and the second person's sensing also then makes the quantum leap so that the whole field has shifted. Both of them are in this new perception, and the whole sense of what was and is present—the perceptions, the selves, the others, objects, events, the world—all become, as they do in the soul-making dynamic, involved and transubstantiated, transfigured, and the beauty of that.

So again, I'm mentioning this as one of the ways in which sensing the soul opens for us—that we receive from beyond ourselves. But I do want to put the brakes on a little bit in terms of this deliberate dyadic soul-making practice, which I think does take quite a lot of preparation and prerequisite capacity, skills, arts in all kinds of domains—relational, psychological, personal, energetic, insight, all that.

But some of you will recognize from these kinds of examples that you've already actually experienced this. As I said when I described what happened with the ritual with the tangerines, some of you might have felt, "I've already experienced this many times"—talking with a friend or in an interview or something, or sharing some images in a group. Of course, lovers in love know this kind of thing. They might not have a conceptual framework for it, but people taste this kind of thing. You may know the possibility from your own experience with times when you were in love.

And it's not so much about that form or definition of a relationship. It's more like where there is the erotic-imaginal alive, it can spread between two people. And the erotic-imaginal alive does not necessarily mean sexual or romantic between two people.

As another example of this field or receiving from another, let me share something that Catherine told me, that her niece told her. This particular niece is just five years younger than Catherine. When Catherine's mother died—which was Catherine's niece's grandmother, despite the fact that Catherine's niece is only five years younger than Catherine—

When Catherine's mother died two and a half years ago, Catherine's niece shared something deeply moving with her. "Nanny was the only person," she said—that's what she called Catherine's mother, her grandmother—"Nanny was the only person who would say to me when I went round to her house and sat beside her and told her my problems, 'Let's sit quietly and put ourselves in the hands of the Lord.'" It was beautiful. "Let's sit quietly and put ourselves in the hands of the Lord." And then Catherine's niece continued, "Now there will be no one who will say that to me anymore."

Catherine's mother, a devout Catholic who died in her nineties, was the only figure in Catherine's niece's life who still had that kind of devoutness, that unabashed, unashamed, humble relationship with God that she could share with others. Not in a pushy evangelical way, but as the only person in Catherine's niece's life who would communicate that sacred presence.

Looking at this through our analysis, several elements converge here. In that simple invitation—which probably happened many times throughout Catherine's niece's life—different dimensions would open up

depending on what the problem was, depending on countless factors as they sat quietly together and put themselves in the hands of the Lord.

You can see the humility there, the reverence. You can see what is communicated from one human being to another—receiving something of that humility, and also a certain conception, because there's a whole understanding involved in putting oneself in the hands of the Lord. It might be vague, but there's a conception of divinity, a conception of the human relationship with divinity being communicated.

An idea is there. An invitation to humility is there, coming from another. And also an image is there. When someone says, "Let's put ourselves in the hands of the Lord," presumably no one literally visualizes some giant hand descending from the clouds. It's a metaphor, but it's a loose image that can become, as a vague metaphor, itself an imaginal perception that opens up the sensing with which problems can be met and resolved.

There are definitely several elements converging: an image, an idea, and this other—in the field, or in this case, a kind of dyad from which Catherine's niece receives something from beyond herself, something she's not quite able to access on her own for various reasons. All of this, together with the invitation to humility and other elements, opens up the sensing with soul. This can then manifest and unfold in different ways depending on what the actual problem was or what other factors were present in the moment.

I want to say something else about this particular anecdote that could easily be overlooked when someone shares such things after another person dies, or in what people generally report of their lives. It might be obvious to some of you, but I think it can be very easily overlooked in our present zeitgeist, in our culture's way of conceiving existence.

To me, when I hear this—of course I could be wrong—it seems that Catherine's niece, in saying that to Catherine after her grandmother died, is expressing that she's missing not just her grandmother's human kindness, not just the comforting that happened, but something much more specific. She's missing what was communicated of the sacred through her grandmother in a very particular way. When she said, "Now there will be no one"—it's very rare in her life, very precious.

She's missing not just human kindness and comfort, but what came through her grandmother in a very particular, very personal way—of the sacred, of the sense or idea or image or conception of the divine, expressed or brought into presence or conjured through a particular person, their style, their mode of doing that. As if each of us is potentially—and hopefully more than potentially—each of us refracts the divine in a different way.

Each of us in our life has the opportunity to sing the praise of existence, to communicate through our being in countless ways our sense of the sacredness of existence. We all do this; we refract the light of the divine, the infinite light of the divine, each in our particular ways. We each have our different songs or

ranges of songs that we sing.

Over and above the human kindness or comfort that she might have received from her grandmother, it's this that Catherine's niece is expressing she's missing—the rarity of that, the loss of that from her life. "My nanny, my grandma had this particular way that she expressed and brought the divine into manifestation through how she related to the divine, through how she felt it, how she expressed it."

Is this not the most precious gift that we bear and give to each other as human beings? The ways that we express and refract the light of the sacred, of the divine, of the beyond, of the mystery?

There's something much more going on here than just a strategy for decreasing suffering. It could be seen that way, and it certainly had that function—there's something useful there. But there's this whole other level: the taste, the intimation, the disclosure, the fragrance of the particular expression or slant or refraction of divinity that we receive from each other. It's not useful.

In a way, it's useless. I'll come back to that in another talk, I think. But is it not the most precious gift? I think it is. One of the most beautiful things that we love in this existence.

So let me move on to another possibility that I've alluded to many times, but let's draw it out a little more. A life situation that we're in can become image for us—it becomes imaginal for us, or we sense that situation with soul. There is that potential.

Instead of just thinking "this is just a problem" or "just this thing that I like" or "this thing that I'm interested in," we can in practice allow it to become fully imaginal for us. Sometimes that's obvious, or it's clear that something can easily be fully imaginal. But oftentimes it's not—not at all. We just regard the thing as something we're caught up in, some predicament, or a problem we have: "I have too much desire," or "this or that."

So oftentimes we're not aware—a person isn't aware of the potential in a life situation to liberate the imaginal that's there and to plug in, to connect with, to open to a very different sensing of that situation, of themselves in that situation, sensing it with soul.

Someone was sharing with me in an interview a while ago—I asked her permission to share it with you. She was describing a slightly complicated nexus of conditions, and I think she may have said in relation to imaginal practice, "I don't get images." She may or may not have said that, but I think it's important in this connection because what I'm going to say now also addresses those of you who still might think, "I don't get images." We've said quite a lot about that in past talks.

But oftentimes the image is there in our life. It's just that we haven't recognized it as image, recognized the fantasy that is propelling us, that is calling us, that is pulling us anyway. It's in what we love. It's in what we're moved by. It's in what is meaningful to us. I think I said this in the Image, Mythos, Dharma talks, but I've said it many times over the last few years: where we love, there is image. Where we're dedicated,

there is image. You can look there.

It's a matter of unearthing the image or illuminating the image there, and then allowing it to shine its light on us and on the whole situation.

So here was a situation with different sides to it. Let me present the whole picture very briefly. She had shared with me that she had gone to an exhibition of a certain Japanese artist, Hokusai—some of you will know him, a wonderful artist from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She was sharing how much she really loved art and literature, but was regretting that she had no time in her life to study it as she would like.

But it turned out some of the impetus to study was because she was in a certain social situation. She had moved to a new town where many of the people she was encountering were into the arts, but in a way where they seemed to be boasting about their knowledge—showing off how much they knew about it. So she found herself in a slightly intimidating social scene where she felt she had to equal their knowledge or risk being exposed as ignorant. It didn't sound like a very pleasant social scene that she had been introduced to, and she was understandably very ambivalent about whether she wanted to be in that scene at all.

This "I don't have time to study it" was itself mixed. It was partly "I need to know more to keep up with these people around me"—it had this slightly harsh, judgmental quality of comparing and measuring each other. And some of it was just coming out of love.

Another piece was that she also had a column in a magazine in her profession, which had nothing to do with art or literature—a regular column. She was talking about her relationship with that, with teaching and communicating the teaching in her column.

As we discussed this, she reported how she could get really manic in relation to some of these things—either in relation to this column she had to write, or in relation to getting excited about art or literature. She felt that energy in the chest, and then her mind just spins: "Well, then I'll do this, and then I'll do that, and after that I'll do that"—this kind of forward momentum of overexcited papañca was something she recognized and didn't want to get into. I think she used the word "manic."

Most of us will recognize that possibility—when we're in planning mode, overexcited, not really in our bodies, and it's all gone out of hand.

As we were talking, I said, "That's really good to be aware of that. And there are three fantasies, at least three fantasies, woven together here in your life." And I mean fantasy in the good sense—something that is already image and fantasy for us in that it has beauty, it has meaning, but it needs to be recognized as such and allowed as such, given permission and granted respect and trust in order for it to have its power.

Because otherwise what happens is we mistake something that's potentially imaginal—we mistake it for

papañca. Sometimes what comes to us as image and fantasy can be papañca, or it can turn into papañca, or it can actually be papañca but we start relating to it differently, and then it becomes imaginal.

What I want to offer as a possibility, as a permission, or as a reconceiving, is that maybe it was actually imaginal to start with. Because we didn't trust it, because we didn't pay attention and relate to it in the right way—because we were suspicious of it, or we closed it down, or we didn't involve the energy body and didn't respect it—it became more of a papañca force and a problematic energy spinning in our consciousness, in our being.

Do you understand?

So these things are usually always redeemable at any point. It's not that we have to catch them and nip them in the bud. It could be years of what I've been considering as papañca, an unskillful relationship with something. And actually then I re-conceive it, I just give it a little bit of trust, I enter into relationship in a much more different way with much more attention and respect, and grant it the possibility that it may have some treasure in it. And actually the thing becomes imaginal and not papañca.

So here, there was the possibility, as we were talking, that woven into her life there are at least three fantasies pulling her, propelling her—good fantasies in our sense of imaginal fantasies, soul fantasies, and functioning already. One was around art, one was around what we might call Japanese Buddhist aesthetics or Japanese way of life, one was the whole realm of literature, and one was her column, her teaching column in this magazine as her own creative flow rather than as just something that she did as part of the duties of her job, as a kind of "oh dear, it's time to write that column again."

All these were possible and kind of live fantasies that somehow in relating to them or conceiving of them, there was more suspicion than trust and not quite the relationship that allowed the blossoming, the blooming into full sensing with soul and imaginal relationship. But all these fantasies, these imaginal narratives—the art, the Japanese Buddhist way of life, the literature, the column as heroic, artistic, creative—all of them had beauty, soul resonance, meaningfulness, mystery.

All of them can be and sometimes were what we were calling fixations—in other words, images that weren't imaginal, fixated images, the stuff of papañca. They could be that if we relate to them in the wrong way. So for example, if that wanting to measure up to this strange new social situation that I'm in where everyone's sort of dropping hints of how much they know about this art or that art or literature or whatever, and I feel like I have to keep up and it's very intimidating. If that part of me that gets roped into that not very nice social way of relating and the kind of ego measurement involved in that, if that part of me gets hold of this, then I'm going to be relating to these potentially beautiful fantasies and potentially imaginal fantasies. I'm going to be relating to them as they become fixations, not imaginal. I'm going to be relating to them from the need or from the effort to try and impress others with what I know about art or whatever, or in my column that I'm writing, or my fear of failing to do so.

But what we can do at any point in practice is actually take it into the meditation process—take these strands in our life, this complex, this nexus of fantastical strands in our life, and begin to meditate on the soul resonances that these have for us. So that Hokusai art, for example, can meditate on, tune into, bring back into the mind's eye those paintings and meditate on the soul resonances and how they move and touch my soul and what they mean for me even if I can't articulate it or put it into words, but feeling into that, allowing those very fantasies of my wish to somehow be artistic in writing this column that's about something completely different and my wish for a creative flow there.

So meditatively taking up these strands, perhaps at first singly and then perhaps in combination, meditating, feeling into the soul resonances, taking one's time with mindfulness, with the sensitivity to the energy body. And then within all that, one can be aware, for instance, of what happens in the energy body when it goes into the excitement of "I'll do this, and then I'll do that, and then I can do this, and then after that I'll do the next thing." And perhaps relating to that in energetic terms as one possibility within the meditation—how does the energy want to flow when I become excited?

So it goes into this almost intolerable kind of what she was calling manic energy in her chest. And then probably at some point what happens—and she was trained in mindfulness—but probably at some point what happens is we lose connection with the body and then the mind just spins about what I'm going to do. And then when we think, "I just need to drop all this, this is crazy, forget all this, it's all papañca," we just cut the loop. And sometimes that's really important. We talked about this, the necessity of being able to do that.

Sometimes you can just let's go in slowly and really tune into the resonances, the meaningfulness, the beauty, the dimensionality, the mystery. And within that, the energy—what does happen to my energy body? When I think about my own possibilities of artistic flow or my own wish to be creative artistically somehow in whatever form is given for me or available for me to do that, then I see it tends to go to excitement. Well, excitement is an interesting energy. It comes from inspiration. It comes from love. It comes from eros.

So what happens to the erotic energy in the body? If we just stay with the energy body experience dimension now, what happens in the energy body experience of eros that it goes from something that's very lovely and harmonizing and takes us deeper into the imaginal, and opens up beauty and empowerment, what happens is that it goes into a kind of excitement that's a little too top-heavy and intolerable and feels not very helpful. How is it that the energy wants to flow?

Maybe I can allow it to flow that way. Perhaps it wants to go up and out the body. Perhaps it wants to radiate out the chest in this kind of outburst of energetic song like a songbird, or out the throat. Maybe I can allow it to do that or even imagine it flowing that way, moving that way. Maybe sometimes it's just the simple awareness of what's happening energetically. But I can also use the imagination, as we've talked about, in the energy body awareness, and have an image of my body, maybe have an image of my body a

certain way with this kind of inspired energy in it.

Then because I'm approaching it meditatively with this delicate, sensitive attunement to soul resonances and how the heart is touched and how the meaningfulness is touched and how the energy is and wants to be and wants to move, and again, the dynamic responsiveness and sensitivity to all that, the whole nexus of these meditations, fantasies, soulful fantasies, can open up in a way, open up their beauty, their dimensionality, their gift to us, rather than become problematic.

And again, one can do all this with a particular fantasy, like even of what I want to, or this impetus that I have, or this calling, or this wish to be creative, or it might be a combination of fantasies. And then one can play, as I mentioned, with the kind of balance of awareness within that, with the attention to the fantasy and all the elements involved in that and to the energy body, maybe a bit more in the energy body, play with that. When we talked about the—each one is like a dial, and what the relative settings of my dials of attention on the energy body alongside attention on the soul resonance of the fantasy itself, I can play with that. What feels helpful? There's so much to explore there and allow to open up in potentially a much more helpful, fruitful, soul-making way.

So again, the images and the fantasies were, so to speak, already there underneath all this complexity in the sense of papañca, in the sense of manic energy and all that.

But they weren't quite being related to yet in a way that brought soul-making, that brought empowerment, that brought freedom, that brought the creativity and discovery of soul-making, of sensing the soul.

But it really is possible. And actually, in a way, this applies to so many of the examples that I've given over the last few years in talks. There's a way of hearing them again from that perspective. This or that situation or this or that event or whatever. And is there a way that actually the image or the fantasy can be made sensible again, in the sense of we sense, oh, that's the image, that's the fantasy, what's involved there, how does it feel, we enter into it, and we give it life, or we allow it to have life, and it gives us its life, instead of strangling us in all these spaghetti loops of papañca, and then constriction, and then feeling, oh no, I shouldn't do that, and it's not okay, and over the top, or whatever.

Now, another related element in all this, and again, in hindsight you'll see that this is the case, imaginal images and fantasies or sensing the soul always includes, I've said this already, always includes a sense of value or values, what we deeply value, which is, if you like, a part of the meaningfulness that it has for us.

So if we think about the example I just gave of that person, the valuing of art, the valuing of artistic expression and creativity, the valuing of a certain kind of aesthetic, Japanese aesthetic or whatever, loosely speaking. The valuing of, with Catherine's niece, the valuing of everything that was involved in the beauty of Catherine's grandmother, of Catherine's niece's nanny, saying that, bringing that forth, bringing that possibility, opening that possibility, opening the door into the realm, into the territory of that mode of being. It included, wrapped up in there, were things that Catherine's niece, or elements, or dimensions, or

directions of experience that Catherine's niece valued deeply.

So always when there's sensing the soul, and similarly with that story about the seeing of this episode as the something shining through it of the sacred prostitute, always in the imaginal images of fantasy and sensing the soul, values are part of it.

Now this is something I want to return to, probably in this set, almost certainly in this set of talks, and hopefully at some point even more in the future. In this set of talks, partly why I want to return to it is because it's not obvious at first, and I'll explain hopefully how, but this business of values relates to our...there's something about the philosophy of the imaginal or the philosophy undergirding this whole business of sensing the soul. It has to do with epistemology, which is how do we know or recognize that we're knowing something. And there's something about values that mirrors that, how we know and recognize values. But I will come back to this.

Actually, I'm looking at the time. I think I'm going to end soon. One possibility, which I may do soon or maybe in the future, is we could perhaps do a whole guided meditation where one enters or opens up the sensing the soul, opens up the imaginal realm through a sense of value. But I don't think I'm going to do that right now.

But just to say, just to finish, actually, on a more general point, many of the aspects that we've explored and the elements that I've enumerated over these talks so far, for instance, this whole notion of value, values, and humility, whatever, many of these aspects we could single out and really dwell and linger on them and explore them much, much more. Each one.

So for example, humility. We could spend a whole retreat even on just this question of humility. And what does it mean for us? What happens when we hear that word? How do we relate to it? Does it prickle us in an unpleasant way? Do we resist it? Does it have a soul resonance already for us? What do we think it means at the moment? What happens for us as that word becomes, and that concept of humility and our experience of humility becomes drawn in and involved in the soul-making dynamic, becomes itself an object of eros and an imaginal object? What happens to it and what happens when we start making, because of the soul-making process, we start making more and more refined discernments and discriminations within what we might call humility? Oh, there's this kind of humility and that kind of, and that color and that color. So we could easily spend a whole retreat on just that.

Or the whole relationship with desire. We talked a lot so far already in other retreats about desire and eros and all this. But we could back up and just look at, what is my relationship with desire? Am I stuck because I actually don't see it as a good thing, or only certain desires are a good thing, or it's not spiritual, or I'm afraid of it, or is it just completely out of control in my life, or what are the different kinds of desire? All that, we could spend quite a while just looking at where we each are with desire and our conceiving of it and our relation to it and our discriminations of the kinds of desire.

Or with the whole idea of conceiving and logos, which some people find so, you know, it's anathema to the spiritual path, or there's resistance to the idea, or afraid, again, might be one's personal relationship with, I'm afraid that I'm stupid, and you say all this stuff, and it sounds so smart, and I don't get it, or whatever, or thinking, I already know, I already understand all that, or whatever it is, or maybe there's a kind of rigidity, or we don't hang on enough to certain ideas.

So each of these aspects we could easily slow down and really, really explore just where are we each. And what do we need, and what's current for us right now as this particular aspect, as one of the many elements involved in the whole movement and opening of soul-making. What do we need right now? What do we see right now? What do we sense right now in relation to that? Where are we? What are we bringing with us from the past? What can we let go of? What do we need right now? To expand and explore each of these elements, aspects, or building blocks, if you like, of the whole soul-making movement, of the whole practice of sensing the soul and perceiving imaginally.

But I'm just mentioning that, and hopefully it will be something for the future.

Let's stop there for now.

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