Dukkha and Soulmaking (Part 1)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:44:41

This talk was initially planned as the second of a series of four. It's now the third of a series of five. In it, I would like to talk about dukkha and soulmaking.

This is, I think, a really huge, vast and complex subject. It's also what we might call an open field, an open subject, in that what we emphasize, what we conclude, and the paths we take and clear in this whole area depends a lot on conceptual frameworks and ways of looking that we develop and implement. What arises for us in terms of suffering in the context of soulmaking—how soulmaking addresses and impacts on suffering—depends very much on what we mean by soulmaking, what we mean by imaginal and eros and all these other words, and our larger conceptual framework. So it's open. We're in the process of creating and discovering our ways in all of this.

Because of that largeness and complexity, this talk is only going to look at some areas of this whole domain and some strands within that. Mostly what I want to focus on in this talk, which will almost certainly have several parts, is how imaginal perception, imaginal practice, how sensing with soul—the different ways, or some of the different ways—it can relieve and ease dukkha, bring about some relief or even ending of suffering. Similarly, within the whole soulmaking paradigm, I want to explore the ways that eros, or working with desire skillfully and with discernment, can do something similar in terms of freedom from suffering, relief, ease from dis-ease.

I also want to touch on what do we mean by dukkha? What kinds of dukkha are we talking about when we say dukkha and Four Noble Truths? What are our conceptions of dukkha? What possible conceptions of dukkha might we bring to bear, and conceptions of the causes of dukkha, and also of freedom from dukkha and relief from dukkha or alleviation of dukkha? In other words, the paradigm of the Four Noble Truths and how it relates to the soulmaking path.

A third area that I want to open up is to highlight some of the ways and areas where this kind of practice, soulmaking practices, this kind of work, this kind of exploration, asks us for care. We need to take care with certain elements. What does that mean? What's involved in that? Which elements? And how? There are certain things that we need to be aware of in the whole endeavor, in the whole movement and exploration. There may be certain aspects that we may regard as prerequisites—it's good if this and that are in place, if we already have a facility, a skill, a capacity, that we have that under our belt.

Without that kind of care, without those kinds of awarenesses, and without those prerequisites, it's sometimes possible that practicing with eros, practicing with desire, trying these practices, practicing with the imaginal, actually brings dukkha—because we are not taking care, there's not enough awareness of

certain aspects and areas, and not enough sensitivity and attention, and we don't have certain prerequisites. So that's another piece of all this that I would like to address, and that's what I want to start with: areas where we might need to take care, what that looks like, aspects and elements that we might need to pay attention to, to be aware of, and what might be prerequisites for this kind of path, explorations, and practices.

I think I've said before, I can't remember which retreat, sometime in the last couple of years, that one could say this soulmaking business and these practices are pretty advanced. Maybe that's true. It's a word I tend to shy away from myself, but we could say that, and I could go along with that. I think it's fair to say, using different vocabulary, that the soulmaking path, as we are unfolding it, outlining it, opening it up, describing it, exploring it, asks a lot of us. It demands quite a lot—a lot of know-how, we might say, a lot of skills or arts in relation to a lot of domains of our being and experience.

For example, with respect to our emotional life and the life of our heart and the needs of our heart, and with respect to body and energy body, what we're calling energy body awareness. With respect to being in a dyad or a tunus, in relationship with some kind of other—whether that's a human other, a totally intra-psychic imaginal other, an other in nature, whether we ourselves become in some way an erotic imaginal other to another aspect of ourselves. How we are in tunus, whether we lose ourselves, whether we can't connect, whether we have our body and our sensitivity there—all of that, that whole domain of sets of skills and awarenesses and arts.

It asks of us quite a degree of sensitivity in our mindfulness, of what we can actually pay attention to, notice, stay focused on, attuned to, really opening up the realms of subtle discrimination, subtle awareness. It's asking of us the art of engaging and entertaining conceptual frameworks without losing our body and the connection with our body and the fullness of that and the beauty and richness and juiciness of that, nor our heart. What is it to have all three aspects of our being—body, heart, and intellect and mind in that sense?

It's also asking of us that we have some capacity and some capacity for growth with regards to these qualities: humility and reverence and the awareness and sense of beauty and sensitivity to beauty. It's asking that we have developed or are developing the skills, the arts of handling energies in and through the body, of handling and working skillfully with our eros and the energy of our desire and the movements of our desire, that we can discern between eros and craving—such an important distinction in this kind of work.

This whole path, this whole journey and everything it involves, actually asks of us quite a set of relational skills, which I'll come back to today. We also need really basic insight meditation skills, like just the ability and capacity to drop something. Even if it's fascinating or beguiling or gripping or intense, can you actually put it down, let it go, let go of this image, let go of that eros?

In many cases, sometimes that's a skillful move within the larger movement of the path. And this work

also requires all the more commonly taught and spoken about Dharma skills: loving-kindness, metta, mindfulness, some degree of skill with samadhi, knowing what works for you there, some understanding and a little bit of skill with emptiness. So it's quite a lot, you know. Maybe that warrants the word, the epithet "advanced"—the adjective "advanced."

It's also probably fair to say that this path, these practices, these kinds of investigations and explorations—playing in this way—can and often does bring up a lot, so to speak. Or we could say it pushes on a lot in our being, in our psychological and psychic makeup. It opens and stretches a lot. Whether that's in terms of our heart, our emotions and our emotionality, whether it's in terms of energies that we experience from time to time, whether it's in terms of our views—the views we have of self, of others, of world, of existence, of desire, of all kinds of things.

Psychologically too, it pushes on quite a lot, or can bring up quite a lot at times. Certain things that have gotten stuck in us or fixated can arise. We're also including the possibility that eros does become sexual at times. Remember, eros doesn't only mean sexual attraction and energy, but it includes that. So it may bring up things around our relationship with desire, around our whole sexuality, and how that is for us. All this arises.

Now, many of you are already practicing in this way—introduced in this way, playing in this way—and have already seen, felt, experienced for yourselves just what kind of openings are possible here. Many of you are, I know, really, really touched and almost amazed and taken with this way of practicing and what it can draw into its orbit and include and redeem and transform and open up.

You will also realize, if that's the case, or many of you I hope will realize, that for all that beauty and opening and grace and gift to be possible in a way that's long-term sustainable, we need to inquire into what are the elements of this path. When the Buddha talks about the Eightfold Path, what makes this sustainable? He doesn't just say, "Go and be intensely mindful," or "Just zip through the jhanas," or "Just contemplate emptiness and let go." What actually makes this kind of path sustainable? What are the elements—the essential pieces of equipment, if you like—that we need to take on this journey?

As I said before, I want to walk a tightrope somewhat in some of these talks and really want to be encouraging. I don't want to be forbidding at all. Many of you have already been really surprised by just what is possible, even with a little bit of practice in these kinds of ways. But there's also this question of bringing a kind of maturity—psychological maturity—to looking at the whole path and what it might need. What is good practice in the long term? What is good taking care of myself, taking care of the soul, taking care of this path and these practices?

So in the context of really wanting to encourage and offer freely these teachings for the long term, I'm balancing that with a kind of encouragement also to reflect. Each one of us, if I want—if you want—to open in this way, to explore in these ways and move in these ways of soul-making, what do I need to develop? What do you need to develop? What are the essential elements of the path, or pieces of kit for the

journey?

We can be somewhat universal in answers to that, but a lot of it's quite individual as well. What do I need? Where I am right now as a human being with my history, the teachings that I've had, the practices that I've developed, the skills, the things I've worked through, my psychological history, my different capacities and needs—what do I need to develop now?

Me myself, right now, where I am—if I'm attracted to this path, if I want to open it up and move forward in a way that's really fertile and fruitful and sustaining and beautiful. It doesn't mean it's always going to be easy. Even if I have all these pieces and elements, even if I'm taking care in these ways, it will be challenging at times. But this really makes it actualizable, realizable—not just something that sounds good and exciting, or just some fireworks that flare up, look amazing, and then very shortly thereafter disappear without a trace.

I'll talk about some of these pieces. I've mentioned quite a few already, but if I find—or you find—that a foundational piece or an area needs some more work, it's quite possible to decide to focus on that piece for a while, or that area for a while, without forgetting or giving up on the bigger intention or the larger love of soul-making and that whole trajectory, that whole movement.

I keep that in sight. I know what I want to develop. I know where I want to go. I know what cools my soul and my heart. And I also see that right now this piece is important. Actually, that's quite interesting too, this piece. And that's part of the whole journey. If I want to get there, then I need to go over here. Maybe this bit is a little bit of rocky terrain, or it's a little dark here. I'm a little bit lost in a forest, but I have a kind of map. Or it's kind of uphill for a while.

Just that whole attitude of, "Okay, I'm not losing sight of the bigger picture of my soul's desire and that big calling and yearning. But right now, I'm going to focus on this one. I'm going to develop this piece. This is good." There's a kind of maturity in that, a psychological maturity in that kind of view. There's also a kind of maturing possible there of our fire and our eros for the path.

In other words, a wise or mature discerning longing to travel the path. A wise burning of our fire for soul-making involves at times actually going slower, actually staying in one place for a while and developing something or other—putting certain foundations in place, making sure we have the right footwear, if you like, or whatever it is.

This translates across many other traditions. For instance, in Tibetan Buddhism, there are extensive preliminaries for the bulk of the path, especially when approaching Tantric Vajrayana practices. Practitioners are regularly required to do 100,000 prostrations—hard work physically—before they even begin something that might seem more exciting or alluring. Or 100,000 mantra recitations. This is part of the maturing of the vision, part of preparing the soul, cultivating humility and patience. It's about maturing the fire, tending the fire.

There are those Zen stories where a practitioner seeks out a certain teacher and is made to sit outside the teacher's cave through snow and heat for three years. If they can stay steady, then the teacher says, "Okay, let's see. Let's give you some teaching." In the Jewish mystical tradition, many Kabbalistic lineages stipulate that you cannot study Kabbalah or enter into those mystical practices and teachings until you're at least forty years old. The people who arrive at that threshold have already been saturated with basic Jewish teachings, traditions, and practices—study of laws, rites, rituals. They possess substantial prerequisite understanding and education before moving into the more esoteric teachings.

There are parallels in what I'm suggesting. I wouldn't want to be so rigid myself, but it's really good to consider this maturely, this whole question of possible prerequisites. It's valuable to maintain a long vision with this work, to think about patience as a core element of any authentic path. Thoroughness—what does it mean to be thorough? To really be thorough because I love something, because I care about something. For me, caring about this path is also a way of caring about the world—they are indubitably, indisputably, totally woven together. There's a manifestation of deep care for the world in my caring for this path, in my caring for teaching about it. They go together.

If I love something, I'm going to be thorough. I'm not going to cut corners. I'm not going to build on shaky foundations. If I love my children and I'm building them a pram or a bed, I'm going to make sure it's solid. I don't want it falling apart, because I care, because I love them. The integrity of thoroughness really emerges from care and love—the fullness of love, the fullness of desire, the maturity of desire.

What does it mean to incorporate—I use that word carefully, meaning really to bring into being, into one's body? All of this knowledge and know-how and skills and capacities—emotionally, energetically, even conceptually—goes into the body, becomes incorporated. To incorporate good foundations, to bring honesty in terms of what's needed, where we are. A steadiness of dedication and practice that goes with patience, obviously. An unshaking commitment: "This is what's involved, I'm up for it." And actually one discovers that all the work, even when it's difficult or involves healing, is beautiful—it's soul work. In all of this there's humility and the willingness of the lover, the willingness of the devotee.

Some people approach things very linearly: they engage with the more commonly taught dharma practices, take care of themselves psychologically and address any healing that needs to happen, and then begin the emptiness and soul-making work. It's all very sequential, and that's wonderful if it works. For some people it's really good to think about things that way.

For others, it's not so linear. Many people will be called to this soul-making work and imaginal practice, sensing the soul, and actually almost start there. This makes things more challenging because then one has to develop all these other skills perhaps in tandem, or perhaps pause for a while to develop them. One might have some experience with soul-making practices and logos, really fall in love with it and see how fruitful it can be, but also at some point realize: there are some pieces here, some foundations, some incorporation that needs to happen. This can unfold in different ways—either by pausing in a certain

area, slowing down, or actually working in tandem.

But again, all this implies an honesty with oneself and maturity in a number of respects. And it's also something you can ask a teacher who's skilled in this kind of soul-making teaching, who's versed in that and used to it. You can ask, "Do you think I could... What do you think I need?" And it's not to say the teacher's opinion is some kind of decree, but it's good to have some input like that.

Among the elements or foundations or pieces that we've emphasized—that I've already in the past placed great emphasis on—is energy body awareness and skill with the energy body. And for some people, I would say actually maybe many people—in fact most people—developing that, I mean really developing it, takes years.

So on the recent retreats we've spent a day or two at the beginning focusing just on that and then really emphasizing it. We've asked people to have practiced with that before they can even come to the retreats. But generally, there's generally quite a lot to develop until one really feels comfortable and it becomes almost second nature. The energy body awareness and the different ways of working with it can really take years.

That's not to say that one can't have quite a lot of fruitfulness and discovery and benefit from that kind of practice quite quickly, but really kind of making it almost like second nature and normal for one to be grounded in the energy body with that whole awareness, with that whole range that's implicit in what we mean when we say energy body—from really dense, solid, kind of earthy element experience to very ethereal and everything in between.

And to develop the ways that the energy body is really useful in practices of samadhi and samatha and metta and just generally as one mode of mindfulness of the body, how useful it is in insight practices, gauging whether we're on the right track or not in terms of what's useful in any moment, and also in imaginal practices—all of which I've touched on before. This can take quite a while, and even if one just did that, it would be so beneficial, such a huge resource in one's life, in one's practice.

And then particularly the energy body with regard to caring for and skill with our emotions and our emotional life, our heart life. To me, this skill and art with an awareness of our emotional life and everything that goes on there and really knowing facility and flexibility with how to care for that—to me, this really is indispensable for soul-making. It's an absolutely necessary element.

Actually, in the way that I would tend to teach the Dharma—like everything in the Dharma, whether it's metta or whatever—I would also really emphasize a lot of development of the art of emotional awareness and emotional care. I think it's so important for every aspect of the Dharma, every aspect. So in terms of the way I conceive of the whole broad teaching of Dharma, I put that very, very centrally. I realize that not everyone does, not all teachers do, but for me it's a really key element in how I teach.

And just, again, tied in with the energy body, just then what it can then open up. Having that confidence

regarding one's emotions and especially how they are in the body. Having the understanding, having the facility and flexibility with working with them and caring with them—really, really important.

So I've talked a lot about working with the emotions and with mind states in the past, a lot. I can't remember the titles of the talks. If I try and remember now, there are talks called "Emotional Healing and Emotions" and "Freedom or Mindfulness of Mind States." There's a three-part talk, if I remember, called "Psychodynamics in Meditation." There was a whole retreat I did once, if I remember, just focusing on working with emotions. That was the main practice for the whole retreat. What's that called? "The Boundless Heart," I think. And every morning we gave a different kind of very specific instruction with regard to emotional awareness. It's quite sort of disciplined and circumscribed, each kind of practice there. And I think they were called "Working with the Emotional Body." And there are seven of them, day one to seven.

So there's all that available if you want to check it out and really develop this. And I really recommend that. Of course, it doesn't have to be those talks, and it certainly doesn't have to be me whose teachings you listen to on this subject. But I would really recommend—and again, it's part of the way I teach—that you develop, over time, so you're really comfortable with, you really have facility and flexibility with a whole range of approaches to working well with the heart life and the emotional life. There's another one called "Heart Work," I remember, in the context of a Metta retreat, so emotions other than metta, during metta.

But so that we have the skills, the arts, and the confidence—how rare it is for human beings to actually feel really confident that whatever emotions come up, generally speaking, I'm confident that I can work with it on my own. It's not that I'm closed to working with it in relationship and having other people input, sharing that with others or in group process or whatever it is. But I'm also confident that I myself can pretty much handle anything that comes up emotionally. That might mean that I have to grapple with it or play with it a little bit until I find just what approach kind of proves fruitful or helpful. It might be a challenge, but I'm basically confident.

And that's really, really possible. And so part of this, what I'm really encouraging, that we all develop this set of skills or the art and developing that confidence is a kind of—I don't know what to call it—just a sort of habit. Maybe that's the best word, a habit, a sort of automatic, ingrained habit of awareness of the mind state and the emotional state.

Someone was asking me about this recently, and I can't remember their exact question, but I found myself saying something quite interesting that I hadn't fully realized before. I think because I have paid so much attention to what I'll call my heart life, my emotional life—and I should note that emotions don't just happen in the heart area but actually occur throughout the entire body—from so much habit developed over years of psychotherapy, years of journaling work in a very embodied way, years of mindfulness and insight meditation where emotional awareness was central, and then incorporating it deeply into

practices we've developed with the energy body and other aspects of Dharma practice.

Because of all that accumulated practice, I think it's almost as if—and I'm sure it can't be literally true to say that in every moment I'm automatically aware of my mind state and emotional state—but it feels true to say that in most moments, there's just a sort of organic, automatic quality to this awareness as part of my ordinary consciousness.

Now, the point I want to emphasize is not anything particular about me, but rather that it's truly possible for all of us to become much more aware of our emotional states. We don't have to remain strangers to our own hearts, wondering "Oh, what am I feeling? I have no idea." I remember when that was certainly the case with me—either I was completely overwhelmed by an emotion, or I simply didn't know what I was feeling. I couldn't recognize that I was actually experiencing a particular emotion.

So while this development can involve a lot of work, it can become really just part and parcel of one's normal state of awareness—this ongoing awareness of what the emotions are. And by emotions, I use that term interchangeably with "mind states," which includes something much more subtle than what we usually call an emotion. I'm referring to the very subtle texture of mind and heart right now—perhaps a little cramped because I'm slightly tired, or on neutral keel, nothing remarkable, just a bit peaceful, maybe slightly bored, whatever it might be. This awareness encompasses both really subtle states and gross emotions as well.

So there's this development of awareness across the whole range. We cultivate both the capacity and willingness to feel, including the willingness to be aware of intense emotions and the ability to actually feel intense emotions—recognizing that the heart is big. And equally important is developing sensitivity to really subtle emotions, the capacity to notice them, to make fine discriminations between perhaps wordless, subtly different heart states and mind states.

Tied in with this awareness is the development of sensitivity to make fine discriminations between states we may not even have words for—these subtly different emotional and mental conditions. And then, as I've said, part of the whole art is really learning to care for them, having different approaches to caring and developing facility and flexibility with all of that.

This includes understanding my emotions, which is a vast subject. What does it mean to understand one's emotions? It encompasses quite a lot. One aspect I'll mention right now is understanding how the very conceptual framework we're entertaining at any time—whether we're conscious of it or not, whether we articulate it clearly or not—actually impacts the experience of emotion and how that emotion unfolds. In other words, an emotion is not separate from whatever I'm conceiving or whatever conceptual framework is operating at the time. That's part of understanding emotions—quite a deep and subtle part, though there are many other dimensions as well.

All this work with emotions takes time for most people, though not for everyone. Some people are

fortunate enough to receive this education in their upbringing from parents and school, or they're naturally gifted in this way. I don't feel I was. So it takes time, and that requires patience. It can take courage—the courage to be willing to feel what moves through the heart and emotions because it's intense, or because we're frightened. "What will happen if I feel this? What does it mean about me?" It also takes honesty. But it's so, so worth it to develop that art. So worth it. And it's really, really possible.

Now, I want to share just a couple more things about emotional awareness and the art of being with one's emotions well, caring for them skillfully. I spoke about having flexibility in different approaches, facility to engage different ways of relating to what's going on emotionally. I think this is worth lingering on a bit.

I'm emphasizing this partly because the Buddha did speak about emotions—we could say this is an element of the third foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of mind states, mindfulness of the citta. Different traditions and teachers emphasize different ways of relating to emotions and mind states within this third foundation of mindfulness. So it's very commonly taught, of course...

Actually, some people don't teach it, but it's generally quite common that different ways of relating to emotions within the third foundation of mindfulness are explored. However, you might have been exposed to, or simply out of habit, a somewhat narrowed range of possibilities for skillfully relating to what's going on emotionally. Through no fault of your own, or simply through habit or limited exposure, you may have narrowed down the spectrum of approaches and ways of relating skillfully to emotional states or mind states.

Some people have been exposed to a practice that encourages a very intense, narrow, laser-beam quality of attention directed toward emotions as they manifest in the body—focusing on vedana in the body or simply bodily sensations. This approach can become the predominant way of paying attention to emotions in meditation practice. Sometimes, for practitioners who engage extensively in this kind of meditation with considerable intensity, this becomes their primary way of attending to emotions in daily life as well—this laser-beam focus on sensations.

For some emotions, for some people, at certain times, this approach can be tremendously beneficial. The amplified energy of attention, the intensity and focus gathered into mindfulness and directed with great concentration toward sensations in the body—whether in the throat, around the mouth, the heart, or the belly—can be genuinely helpful with particular emotions at particular times, partly because of the energy involved. I've discussed this previously, so I won't elaborate further now.

At other times, or with different emotions, this becomes a quite unskillful way of paying attention. Sometimes it simply obliterates what's happening, causing us to lose touch with the emotion entirely. We fail to develop any degree of nuanced awareness or sensitivity regarding what's actually occurring emotionally. Sometimes it's actively unhelpful for the emotion itself, burning it in a way that adds hurt to painful emotions or creates additional wounding. Through this laser-beam focus, we miss something of the bigger, more delicate picture.

A second possibility involves much more delicate awareness. We might still focus on the bodily sensations of the emotion, but it's as if we have a dial for the intensity of our attention. We can turn it all the way up to ten for laser-beam intensity, or all the way down to one for the lightest possible touch. I've used the analogy of a feather touching the most delicate piece of cloth—the attention just barely makes contact, very light and gentle.

Something like sadness can be quite a fragile feeling. Not only do we feel fragile when sad, but the actual feeling itself possesses fragility. We need to approach it with very delicate attention in order to learn about it and care for it properly. Part of the art involves developing this capacity—like having a fader switch or dial to adjust how delicate or intense our attention to the emotion's sensations will be.

A third possibility shifts from attention as a beam directed outward toward sensations to attention as a quality of holding. Metaphorically, the attention becomes like hands gently cupped, with the sensations or emotion resting lightly within this holding—safe and gentle, but not crushed within the cupped hands of awareness. The awareness itself contains this quality of holding.

This leads to a fourth possibility: infusing the awareness with kindness. I remember teaching a retreat years ago when someone coined the term "kindfulness," which some people now use. It's mindfulness, it's awareness, but with the kindness dial turned up. This too can manifest in many different ways, with various qualities, because we can be kind to the sensations, kind to the emotions themselves—which is slightly different from sensations—and kind to the self who is experiencing the difficult emotion.

This kindness introduces a quality of softness. I've used the image of gentle, warm water lapping against a sharp rock. The kindness infusing the awareness laps gently against the difficult, hard emotion. It's this softness around it, this warmth, this contact between difficulty and kindness that actually promotes healing.

We could distinguish between possibilities where one pays attention purely to sensations. In this mode, awareness shows no interest in the story, no interest even in the self—the "poor me" and the sense of self having these emotions. It's not particularly concerned with identifying exactly what emotion this is, because sometimes we don't know, sometimes there's no word for it. Even when aware of the emotion, attention remains focused at the level of sensations—less concerned with what the emotions are and less concerned with what the self is.

Again, this is useful, but if it becomes the only way we ever pay attention to our emotions, that becomes quite limited and probably not psychologically healthy in the long term. However, it remains an excellent option at certain times.

Then there's a sort of middle level focus, if you like, where we're not so much getting into the story, not so much getting into the self, but we are caring for this emotion. We really have a sense, with the sensations, what the emotion is. So there's a sense of more richness or fullness to the experience. We're not going for

this kind of reductionist attention, which can, as I said, be really helpful at times. We're going for something more medium range, if you like.

So it's really—I really sense this is sadness. I'm not getting into the story of it. I'm not getting so much into the self that's constellated with the sadness. I'm just saying it's just the sadness with the sensations.

And then another one, perhaps this is the seventh. This list, again, is not exhaustive and not so clearly delineated, but I hope you can understand what I'm getting at. The seventh possibility is that we actually allow the self and the sense of self. We include the sense of self in the emotional awareness. So yes, the sensations. Yes, the emotion. And yes, the self.

Again, what can often happen with mindfulness teachings is that we kind of get the sense that self is not okay, or it shouldn't be in the picture. Story is certainly not okay. Self is not so okay. And we kind of get used to just the sensations or just the emotion. And again, really good practice—really good to have that gear, have that facility to be able to look in a way that just kind of looks underneath the self, so to speak. It's just this emotion with these sensations. And that's what I'm mindful of, and that's what I'm with, and I'm just steady with my attention there.

But often what happens with long-term mindfulness meditators, people who have been kind of schooled in the mindfulness tradition—and again, this was something I'm sharing from experience, something that I got into in my early years in practice—we kind of think, "Hold on, I have to recalibrate the lens possibilities here on my awareness, on my attention."

Another possibility is actually letting the self constellate, including the self. So the attention includes the sense of self and the care includes the care for this self. So it's not just this emotion or these sensations. I'm caring for me. It's me who's feeling sad. It's me who's feeling grief. It's me who's feeling angry. And that me, right now, needs care. Yes, I know it's empty. Yes, I know all that. But right now, we're addressing that self. We're including that. I'm not kind of focusing so closely that I don't see that.

So that's another possibility. When we open that possibility, the seventh possibility, then we could say, well, that actually splits into a few sub-possibilities, because we could say, well, which self? Self is a fabrication. So again, in other words, self can be fabricated a lot or a little or this way or that way. So if I say I'm going to include myself, which self? This opens up all kinds of possibilities.

One possibility, and again, if you have these kinds of other pieces of practice under your belt, it can be really, really helpful. One possibility is knowing that the self is empty, I know that the self is a construct, but let it be fabricated quite lightly, so that here's this sadness, and here's these sensations, and I'm aware of them, and I'm caring for the self. But the self that I'm letting arise is quite light. It's not a really heavy, dense, contracted self. We'll come to that in a minute, that possibility. But one possibility is knowing the self to be empty and just letting it be fabricated a little bit. So you have a kind of light sense of self with the sensations and with the emotion. It's a lightly fabricated self, so to speak.

A second possibility, if we go back to this—well, which self if we're including the self in the emotional awareness? The second possibility is an imaginal self, or a self that's, if you like, imbued with imaginal perception.

Part of that, remember, is the imaginal middle way. So to say an imaginal self is not the same as a habitual self-image that is viewed as real and believed in—"I'm a loser, I'm a failure, I'm this kind of person, I'm bad," and so forth. An imaginal self is not a reified self-view or habitual self-image.

But a second possibility here, in the larger possibility of including the self-awareness, the self-care in the caring for emotions, is a kind of imaginal self. So this loneliness that I might feel is the loneliness of that wanderer. This weariness or courage or nobility is the loneliness of that warrior. And it's mine. In the way there's this infinite sort of echoing and mirroring that we talked about—this part of the imagination—it's mine too. But it's this warrior. So it's this warrior's or this wanderer's emotions, or it's Avalokiteshvara's compassion, Avalokiteshvara's empathy, or Jesus' heart, the sacred heart of Jesus. All kinds of possibilities there—obviously infinite possibilities—but it's not the same as just the habitual, problematic, constricted, over-solid and reified, believed-in self-image.

A third sub-possibility of this seventh possibility of including the self in the awareness of the emotions and the sensations is actually, you let the self be reified. It's okay. As I've said many times, in the big picture of things, we know the self is empty. But at times, it's important—and certainly probably for a lot of people, for long stretches of their practice—it's important to just inhabit that view of a reified self and relate to that healthily, relate to that in a way that's fruitful, rather than just say, "I can't have self-awareness, I can't have a self-sense, I can't have a self-view."

Until there's really quite a lot of emptiness understanding, having a reified self will be very, very common. And even to the point of "I don't even know that it's empty." So it takes quite a lot of emptiness practice just to let it reify at times, and somewhere in our awareness we know that it's empty, but we're not leaning on that knowledge of its emptiness. And that takes quite a lot of practice.

So for many years, probably for most people, it's going to be mostly dealing with a reified sense of self. "I've heard this thing about emptiness, I've glimpsed a little bit about it, but not in any way that really makes too much difference yet." Given that's the picture, I need to find ways of relating to the reified self—either with the whole story that goes with it, or the stories that go with it, or just the self without the story.

Can you see there's all kinds of possibilities here? The reason I'm mentioning it is just because in some interviews in the last couple of years, I became aware—oh, that's really interesting. People are, especially people who've done a lot of mindfulness practice, have gotten into a habit of kind of paying attention to sensations or bare emotions, so to speak, but without the kind of caring for the self. It's like, oh, there's a whole dimension missing there that's really important. Because again, if you miss some of these things out, it will have consequences.

There's all these possibilities, and again, there's the possibility of facility and fluidity and flexibility with all of that.

So just to dwell on that last possibility, the third possibility of the seventh: sometimes with a reified self, and that's okay, and sometimes with the story—the story that I'm believing and this real self that I'm believing and all the pain of that and the history. And still, that's the perspective. That's the conceptual framework way of looking. What's the healing, opening, fertilizing, helpful way of looking at that, of relating to that?

There's a set of three talks that I mentioned—the psychodynamics in meditation talks, if I remember. A lot of those talks were really dealing with that, a reified self, and just some of the skillful ways of looking and conceptions and approaches regarding the psychology and the emotionality of that. And as I said before, anything I refer to—this is such a huge area, the emotions. It's so endlessly rich and fertile. So whatever I mention here, it's only part of the bigger picture.

Sometimes what happens, though, when we include the story and the reified self, it's always going to be from the perspective of some psychological framework or other, some school of psychology or another, even if we're not aware of what it is or that we're doing that. As I said, we can't help bringing in a conceptual framework—in this case, a psychological conceptual framework.

What I want to return to also in this talk later on is the need, I think, on the one hand, not to lock into any particular psychological view. "The view of this kind of psychological school looks at it this way and interprets things this way and this is the truth of what happened. Or this one does it this way." You start to realize there's all kinds of different conceptions and all kinds of different approaches and all kinds of possibilities. And to really be open to that and not too quickly lock into a certain view and then just become entrenched there as "this is the truth of me and my history and the story and this is the true fact of what happened," not realizing it's an interpretation according to a particular conceptual framework and that there are others possible.

Having said that, it may be—it may well be—that at certain times on our journey, individually, each of us may need to kind of lock into a certain view and really dig in there with a certain psychological view and interpretation and way of working, whether it's this or that way. It might be necessary just for our particular larger trajectory, that for a time we look that way, hopefully at times. Then after a while with that, we can kind of say, "I don't need this anymore, and what else is possible?" And then it still becomes an option, looking that way. But we're not so locked in, entrenched, and effectively imprisoned by something that can be quite narrow-minded, and if I think back to some of my history, quite dogmatic sort of entrenchment.

So oftentimes what happens is people get fixed on a psychological system or logos and not realize that depending on the logos, depending on the psychological conceptual framework, different experiences in different directions actually unfold from whatever is going on and whatever history we have.

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The main point there was that in our awareness of and care for the life of the heart—the emotional life—we want to include at times the possibility of including the self and self-awareness in various degrees of fabrication and directions of fabrication in our awareness and care.

Let me touch on just one more piece about working with the emotions. I mentioned those seven instructions working with the emotional body—I think they were called "a sequence of seven instructions and guided meditations." Just to say, if you do feel moved to check them out or you find yourself doing that, I want to say a little bit about them. They're very circumscribed in what they're trying to do.

Again, anything we say about emotions is an infinitely rich and infinitely expanding area for human inquiry. Human beings, I think, are never going to exhaust the infinite possibilities of ways of understanding emotions and ways of relating to emotions. It's just one of the deep mysteries of human existence—our heart life.

Those particular seven exercises on that retreat are really quite tightly focused sets of practices, partly given exactly for the reason that what often happens in regard to our emotional life is we're all a bit at sea. Either things are too subtle and we don't have the awareness needed to notice what's going on, or when something intense is happening, it's so big and we're so thrown about by it that we can't really get a grip on it in a way that's helpful and fruitful. So those practices are deliberately very narrowly focused, very tightly circumscribed.

One way of looking at them is to regard them as exercises. It's a bit like practicing scales at the piano. Potentially they can prepare us or develop our facility and capacity to work well with strong and live emotions when they arise. So it might be that the practices themselves feel a little funny—some people love them—but one way of understanding what they are is they're just like playing scales at the piano. So when you actually go to play the pieces that you love or you're improvising and you're in the heat of the flow of the moment, you have the facility to work well both with intense and also with subtle emotions and experiences in the heart.

But not just that—not just as exercises. They can also be regarded as practices in their own right, which open up a few directions. One is they can potentially open up to us the world of subtle experience, subtle energy and subtle emotions. Again, this is often an area that human beings, for lots of good reasons, haven't really developed that subtlety in relation to the emotional life—of noticing and caring. So that possibility can be opened up through those practices. It's an avenue into subtlety, into making subtlety accessible.

The second way they are practices that can actually open up their own fruits and realms and directions is that you will probably find, if you really spend a little time with those seven exercises, that they can—at least some of them—lead or will lead to some samādhi, and oftentimes really quite deep samādhi, when the practices are sustained.

I can't remember if I explained it there, but it might be that one starts with, let's say, a little bit of sadness in the heart, or somewhere else in the body, and one's paying attention to it in a way of finding the right kind of frequency and modulating the attention in a caring way of finding, "Oh yeah, that really helps." Being with it and being with it, maybe it goes through a few different phases or needs and you respond to them. And then maybe one just keeps focusing on it after all that. And the whole thing, just through the caring, appropriate focus, can just gradually get more and more subtle, more and more quiet. It's not that we're denying it. It's not that we're out of touch with it. It's not that we're telling it to behave itself and "don't be so damn silly" or anything remotely like that. But just through the sustained attention and the kind of appropriate and caring attention there, the whole being, including the emotional, just gets more and more subtle, more and more quiet, goes into some kind of samādhi.

So those practices—one of the possibilities of opening there is as a way into samādhi.

Thirdly, for now, I just want to mention this. Again, if you do happen to play with those seven practices, with those instructions and recordings, it's possible that through playing with them, what becomes much more evident than is usually the case for human beings is the dependent arising, the dependent origination and dependent cessation of our emotions.

Those practices, because they're so circumscribed, we're very clear what we're trying to do. When I pay attention this way, when I think that way, when I pay attention like that, then I see the emotion getting more difficult or more easy or softening or being blended with care and transforming or healing or whatever. So through being quite precise and focused and sustaining what one's trying to do in the meditation in these seven instructions, the dependent origination of emotions is revealed to us.

And dependent origination, as you will know, is a crucially important insight. In regard to emotions, I view it as—it's not the be-all and end-all of what we need to understand with regard to emotions, but it's so, so important. It's so crucial. It makes such a difference to our lives, our practices, and just our whole understanding of ourselves and others when we understand that. It's not the whole truth, it's not everything, but it's a really important strand.

So we've mentioned just briefly a lot of factors. We've dwelt a little bit on the energy body tonight and a little longer on the emotions and what might be involved in this sort of prerequisite or need for emotional awareness and emotional care—the skill, the art of all of that and the range, flexibility and facilities there.

A little bit related to that, or partly related to that, I've noticed something over the past couple of years, and that is that for many—I don't know if it's for most people, but it might be most people—soul making happens perhaps more readily in relationship with other human beings, especially those also interested in soul making, than it might on one's own. It happens more in relationship, or more readily in relationship, for many people.

Or, what we could say more accurately, is that eros and image are activated, and perhaps activated and ignited significantly, in relationship—particularly in relationship with other people interested in soul-making—more than they might be when one is alone. People are different, and there are exceptions, but I would say this generally holds true.

The question, though, is whether eros is activated just in its smaller meaning along with image, or whether the eros is really allowed to activate and ignite the whole Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic—the whole soul-making dynamic that fertilizes, enriches, complicates, widens, and deepens through their interplay and interrelationship. Is that whole soul-making dynamic actually ignited and turning in a way that sustains? Or does something merely flare up quickly and then fade out, fizzle away?

Sometimes something flares up with great intensity—whether eros or image or both—and then it breaks down, or something short-circuits, so to speak, or a fuse is blown. Or it simply gets snuffed out by receiving the wrong kind of air or environment, or by something heavy landing on it, to use these metaphors.

So it's often in relationship that this happens, and the question becomes: what actually allows the eros and image that might arise in relationship—just from being around and interacting with other soul-makers, doing this kind of work—what allows that to be genuinely soul-making in a way that can be sustaining?

Because part of the way problems can arise—where the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic is disrupted or inhibited or squelched—is exactly in relationship with each other, or around relationship with each other. Sometimes that's precisely where we run into difficulties.

What this means, again, is that we need, or it's really beneficial to have developed, our psychological awareness and emotional awareness—not just in ourselves, but also of others. That doesn't mean telling other people what's going on for them or anything like that. But it means being able to have that awareness in relationship, and some degree of sensitivity to another. Perhaps that's a better way of putting it: sensitivity and openness to another's psychological, emotional, and energetic process, while we have our own awareness, sensitivities, and capacities.

All of this, plus what I think soul-making work asks of us—and I think it does—is relational skills, as I

mentioned earlier. This includes communication skills: really being able to communicate well with another, to listen well, to work through difficulties well, to communicate difficulties with precision, to be sensitive, caring, and appreciative—all of that.

If we unpack this a little further: when soul-making happens, as we've said, eros is a factor. Eros tends to arise or be ignited when soul-making is occurring, and we might catch that flame from another or in a field, whatever the case may be. Even if we're not working deliberately in an erotic, imaginal soul-making dyad—even if that's not the case—there can be, just in the field with the eros that's arising (which might be eros for something else entirely), in the way that the soul-making dynamic can work, as we've described in past retreats, the eros might spread to be directed toward or in relationship with a fellow soul-maker. So I didn't start with it, but now I have an erotic, imaginal connection or ignition with this other soul-maker.

It's really good to be aware of this as a possibility. And then this asks us to consider what tends to happen when there's eros and someone becomes image for us: all our patterns, or some of our patterns around intimate contact with other human beings, get elicited, triggered, activated, and ignited as well.

For some people, this might be fear of rejection. Just as soon as I have eros and this person becomes alive for me as an erotic, imaginal other, that kicks in my fear of rejection, or my fear of getting hurt, or my fear of loss—some kind of fear, or a projection of rejection, or an anticipation. It's not even that I'm waiting for it to happen; I just assume that it's already happened.

Or I find myself, or I find the other one, bringing in or dragging in needs that don't really belong in this relationship. These are perhaps, so to speak, old needs, or needs that belong in a different kind of relationship where a whole different set of rules are established and understood. Again, we may or may not be aware of this, whether in ourselves or others.

Then there are the other person's patterns and reactions, and how I react to their reactions, and my patterns when someone else responds—all of this is possible. So again, to have some awareness, some skill, some sensitivity, some discernment, some willingness with all of that is really, really useful.

One element within all this that I've talked about before—I can't remember in which retreat, it might have been in the Re-enchanting the Cosmos retreat—is just what happens for us as human beings. I very much think this is endemic in modern, globalizing Western culture: what occurs around being seen, being seen by another, and being seen by another who's important to us.

For many people, there's a curious and painful mixture in the being of a kind of need to be seen—an intense and deep need to be seen, a wanting to be seen—and a fear of being seen. To be seen deeply, fully, openly. All of this gets mixed in a way that's confusing and uncomfortable and causes all manner of shuttling back and forth, opening and closing and hiding.

In the way that I see the soul-making work and understand the nature of soul, I would say that soul—the

soul, your soul, my soul, or the divine in me—wants to be seen. It wants to be seen. It wants to express itself, to manifest itself in the world and to be recognized for what it manifests. It wants its particular beauties, its particular way. It refracts the divine, to go back to past talks and what I was sharing there. It refracts the divine light and luminosity in its particular style, the way it sings of the beauty and the depths and the infinite creations and discoveries of soul and divine. It wants and perhaps needs that to be seen.

That's what I would call a healthy soul desire and healthy need. But at the same time, being seen—I think in our culture, because of the culture of individuality and, well, actually all kinds of reasons, including in many ways a kind of brutality in our culture with regard to some aspects of soul and sensitivity—for lots of reasons...

Being seen can be very loaded for us, for some people, for many people. It carries with it, it brings with it a lot of pain and confusion that's often unresolved. And what's often unresolved as well is this mix of motivations and needs.

So we get quite, as I said, confused. Sometimes the being seen is more an ego thing. I'll go into this, hopefully, in this talk. And we want to be, you know, we want our ego to be boosted, or we want to hide, or we're ashamed, we're riddled with shame, or we have this core feeling of being bad, and so we want to hide that.

At the same time that we recognize that we know somewhere our soul's beauty and that is the beauty of the divine and not separate. And our particular soul's beauty, the particular way that that divine beauty comes through us, that divine mystery comes through us, expresses itself in and through us. And some part of us knows that too.

And so it's quite common to be really quite confused, and confused by the messages we get in the culture, certainly, but also confused just in our own psychology and heart and soul, because of our history with all that.

And in all of this, again, if we just linger on the relational skills piece, if you like, of soul-making, we don't sometimes realize just how sensitive we are and how sensitive is the other in relationship, how vulnerable is, in some ways, how vulnerable is the soul, and how vulnerable is the soul of the other, in some ways, or at some level, let's say. And so again, here, there's a lot of self-honesty, there's a lot of sensitivity and awareness that is asked for.

And fourthly, we could mention, which we've talked about before, the ask of handling erotic charge and sometimes handling sexual charge, sexually erotic charge. You know, is that okay with me? Is that okay with the mind or does it meet some kind of censorship or some kind of inhibition or block? Can I handle it appropriately and keep the boundary? How to do that? What helps with that? Do I even notice what's going on with that? And then we've talked a lot about what helps there. May or may not go into it again on this set of talks.

Similarly with desire, we talked a lot about how to handle the current of desire in a way that's actually helpful. And similarly, how to, if you like, handle or relate to images when they arise. Because we've said so many times, if I reify and literalize and concretize this image, oftentimes, most often, it's going to cause some problem. So can I relate to the image and allow it to become fully imaginal and allow the imaginal middle way, the theater element, to open up if it needs to?

So handling all that, eros, desire, the imaginal skillfully, handling, as I said, our own energies and emotions and psychological patterns. So all this, we could say, is part of the, all these things, factors are part of the prerequisites, if we use that word, the foundations for fertile and sustainable soul-making in relationship with others. And as I said, for many people, that's where it actually tends to happen.

So this deliberate soul-making diet where there's deliberately the investigation, the opening, the exploration, the focus on the inclusion of the other as beloved erotic image and opening that up with mindfulness, sensitivity, care, creativity, and discovery. We're not teaching that yet. That probably is something I wouldn't hesitate to add the word advance to.

But there's elements of some of the same skills that will be necessary for that, kind of in a maybe less urgent need, just because, as I said, where most people will most readily have the soul-making be ignited is in relationship with other soul-makers.

So, again, please, I don't want this to sound discouraging. I don't mean to overwhelm you. All of this is possible. So you may go, boom, boom, boom, that's a huge list and blah, blah, blah, and there's all this stuff, but it really is possible. And interesting to develop, and really, really useful stuff to develop, but it's definitely possible. It's definitely possible that we grow in these capacities, we gain these skills, we develop these arts. Absolutely possible. I'm not talking about anything that is not possible at all. What would be the point of talking about it if it wasn't possible?

A little bit related is, or very much related, is, and I don't know whether you've noticed this with these practices and with talking with others about these practices or in some of the dyad work we've done on retreats and stuff, is something about, I don't know if you've noticed, how vulnerable it can be, and sacred as well, and there's a relationship there. It's vulnerable because it's sacred.

How vulnerable it can be to share images with another person. So this to me is really interesting. Sometimes a person might share a trauma history or some kind of psychological difficulty with others or in a group interview or with another practitioner or something. And that seems often, sometimes seems often to feel less vulnerable and intimate for many people, maybe most people, than sharing imaginal images that are really potent for oneself. Even though one is likely to identify less with an imaginal image than if we say purely human or flatly human history or condition or fact.

So even when one's identifying less with the imaginal, when that imaginal image is potent, it's actually somehow more vulnerable to share it than to share a really difficult psychological thing we have or some

even abuse history or trauma history. It's quite interesting.

So the imaginal has intrinsically, as we've said, a quality of autonomy and otherness from self, this imaginal figure, for instance. And yet it is bearing that to the world and standing connected to it, but apart from it. So bearing it, but feeling I'm connected to this, I'm standing with it in my sharing. And bearing it, opening it, sharing it with the world, standing connected to it but apart from it, that seems vulnerable.

Despite this otherness and autonomy of the image that's intrinsic to the imaginal, I've touched on this before, but again, to me it suggests, from a slightly different perspective, that what is most essential and important to the soul is not the flatly or simply human identity. There has to be a better way of putting that.

Traditional developmental psychology, or what's common for developmental psychology, is to put this flatly or purely human identity—and not soul and soul-making—at the core of its theories. It's always talking about this kind of human level self, flatly human level self, and the hurt there. That's the core of the theories and the driver of its processes. I may return to this later on.

But you know, it's interesting. I've noticed this a lot with people. Revealing the angel, so to speak—revealing the angel is harder, closer, more intimate, truer and more authentic, even in its patent fictionality, than revealing the flatly conceived human self, the self of normal human discourse, of conventional psychological discourse. Revealing the angel seems harder, closer, more intimate, somehow more authentic and truer than revealing the flatly conceived human self.

And this leads me to a final point about something I've mentioned before—a word called *temenos*, which is another Greek word that means a kind of sanctuary or the enclosure around an orchard. Sacred space, protective space, something like that—*temenos*.

I'm mentioning it now because of the relational piece and the care that's needed as an element in relation as an element of the care for our soul-making and soul-making practice, because a lot of soul-making happens relationally. And also because of what I've just said about how vulnerable it can feel to share images with another human being because of the sacredness involved there.

In other words, it's not helpful to just spout out an image without taking care of the space that I'm in, the relational field that I'm in, the timing. Where's the other person at? Are they paying attention? Are they being respectful? Are they open? Are they sensitive? Am I paying attention? Am I attuned? Am I in touch with my body? Am I just rushing it? Am I present? Am I showing up? Am I in relationship? Is it the right location? Is it private enough? All kinds of things. Really, really caring, again, for the soul and for this work, and for the image, if you like.

Again, if an imaginal figure is a person—and we're talking about an imaginal figure, and that includes this tree that is in the park where I go for a walk, and my sense of that tree, my sensing that tree with soul. Everyone can see the tree, everyone can feel the hardness of that bark, but a lot of people will not be

sensing it with soul, and even sometimes I won't be sensing it with soul. Whatever we're talking about here, we're talking about a person and something worthy of respect.

So a *temenos*—you could say *tabernacle* is another word, or *sanctum*—is needed to support the sharing of images in ways that are soul-making. So we might share an image, but again, if we want that sharing to be soul-making and possibly even fertilize something for the other person and for ourselves in the sharing, then *temenos*, *tabernacle*, *sanctum*—some kind of care for the space, the field wherein that sharing is happening—is needed to care for the soul, to support the soul-making there, and the persons involved, and to respect all that: respect the soul, respect the imaginal perceptions, what's sensed there, and the persons.

And these words are words that are associated with religious ritual, temples, and sacredness in the past—the *temenos*, the *tabernacle*, the *sanctum*. Obviously we get our word *sanctification* from that word *s anctum*. Just as one would treat a divinity. Just as one would treat a divinity. And again, this doesn't need to be too heavy or too rigid. But there's something of a kind of reverence for the relational field, for the sharing, for the space that's really important here. Just as one would treat a divinity, a God—just as one would be and create, be in the presence of a God and one would create for the presence or in the presence of a God.

Now, someone might say, "But that sounds like some kind of religious dogma and realism, like you're saying this is divine, you're saying you need this thing." If someone were to say something like that, we could explain it more like this: We could say that in order that you have the sense, the perception, the felt sense of divinity arise in a way that is soul-making for you and or for another... And the sense of divinity, remember, is an aspect, an element, a dimension of the imaginal constellation of the sensing with soul that we talked about in the way that we're using those terms.

In order that you have that sense, that actual experience of the divine—at least the dimensionality and movement into the sense of divinity of the erotic, imaginal other, of what is sensed with soul—you need to treat an image in a particularly caring and respectful way. That is, with some kind of temenos, as I've just described.

This is not religious dogma, nor like you need to perform some special rite. It's simply a psychological insight: you need to care for this stuff. You need to care for these experiences. You need to care for these senses that you have of things. And you need to care for yourself and other in relationship around them. It's just a psychological insight. It's also an insight into the dependent arising of perception.

In other words, if I don't care—if I don't care for this possibility of a certain perception, in this case a perception of divinity—that perception of the divine either won't arise, or it won't arise in the other, or it won't get communicated. Or it might be there to start with and then will be dissolved because it doesn't have the vessel, if we use the alchemical term. It doesn't have the temenos, the tabernacle.

So a temenos can be supported by actually ritualizing the time and space. That's one way of supporting it—creating a ritualized space together. This may involve candles and incense; it may not. But it might, and such things might absolutely serve the intention. An interview, actually, between a teacher and a student, is also a kind of ritualized space. There's a form, and you sit a certain way, and there's a time frame, and there's a very specific intention, and there's a kind of focus there.

At the same time, though, a formal or ritual space does not guarantee a temenos. So the presence of the temenos is actually a subjective thing. It's not something you can objectify. Just because I burn some incense and light a candle and burn some sage, I'm not necessarily creating a temenos. It's a subjective thing—an experience, or if you like, an element of experience that one or more people have.

And it depends also on the qualities of attention, sensitivity, openness, emotional attunement, conceptual attunement, emotional energy, body awareness. All these factors are actually really necessary elements in creating a temenos, in establishing a temenos. Without any one of those, it will probably fall apart. That's partly why I said an interview works, because a lot of those qualities are gathered together there in the interview format.

So it's not so much the rituals themselves. As I said, these factors—these factors of soul, factors of consciousness, factors of intention—are themselves more likely to be gathered together and supported through establishing some kind of ritual or special vessel or space. In other words, the burning of the candle, the incense, does help sometimes to gather those qualities of consciousness and qualities of intention. But it's really those that make the space.

One last thing about temenos for now, related to what we just said: I don't think there are definite rules in establishing a temenos. As I said, nor is it that a temenos is only or always created by or in a formal space or time.

Rather, the soul-making that is possible in relationship through sharing images and perceptions is fragile. It's easily fractured. It's easily smothered. It's easily covered over, it's easily withdrawn, it's easily deprived of its ground, or if we borrow our alchemical metaphor, its incubating vessel. That's another word for a temenos—it's an incubating vessel.

So, for example, some kind of pressure emanating from one person to another, from one party to the other—some kind of demand, some kind of need that is not openly expressed. So I'm bringing this need and this demand to this interaction where an image is being shared, either I'm sharing with you or you're sharing with me, and either it's not okay or it's not really clear that that's what's going on. Or it's got other, more less obvious or slightly murky complexities attached to it, this need or this demand that I'm bringing, that I'm not quite aware of.

That's enough. Something like that, that kind of pressure or influx, is enough to puncture or collapse any possibility of temenos there. And then the soul-making in that moment, and what the other person can

take in, and what can ignite in them, and what happens to one's own soul-making—all of that is compromised.

So again, with the temenos, part of that is in the realm of relational skills. The necessity of relational skills, sensitivities and attunements in order for soul-making to be possible in relationship with another is clear. It's part of what's involved in creating a temenos.

And soul-making is helped by a temenos. Sometimes we're deliberate in the creation of that. Sometimes it's very easy, just a very easily established thing. Other times we have to take a little care and find our way to create the temenos here.

But again, all of this—actually everything I've said tonight—I really want to be encouraging and not discouraging.

And at the same time, I want to point out there's this and there's this, and this is the way to really care for this. If you love, if you feel drawn, if you have the desire to explore these things, it's good to take all this into consideration and build these capacities. Sometimes that's slow and gradual, and sometimes it's much easier, but it's all doable, it's all developable—everything that I've talked about is accessible.

To walk this path and to develop these facets and these building blocks, these foundations, is such a gift. These are gifts to oneself, all of this: the emotional awareness, the energy body awareness, the relational skills, the taking care of spaces, the awareness of all that and the capacity to tend and care for all that. All of these things that I've mentioned and others this evening—such a gift to oneself for one's practice, for these particular practices, for one's wider practice, and for one's existence, for one's life.

And I think you can probably really hear that it's also a gift to others and actually a gift to the world to develop this. Really doable, really developable, really possible. The fruits, the bounties, the beauty of all this are there for us if we want them.

Thank you for listening.

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