# Dukkha and Soul-Making (Part 8)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:21:36

We've been talking about dukkha and soul-making and that whole nexus between the two—how they bear on each other. This draws in, of course, the structure of the Four Noble Truths and our interpretation and conception of them, and their relationship with soul-making, because the Four Noble Truths deal essentially with dukkha: its arising, its causes, its release.

We began this exploration many parts ago, looking at and drawing attention to the ways it's sometimes possible for imaginal practices or soul-making practices—if they're related to in the wrong way or if we don't quite have the right pieces in place—to actually give rise to dukkha. Then we moved on to examine some of the ways and aspects of how imaginal perception, sensing with soul, can actually release dukkha and relieve suffering.

If we stay with that piece a little longer—the way soul-making practices relieve dukkha—we've talked extensively about individual instances and what's going on there and how that works. We could also make an observation at a larger scale.

It seems to me that it's much less likely for the inner critic to arise, or the kind of suffering of ego measurement to arise, in the context of or in relation to soul-making practices and that whole soul-making path. It's much less likely for that kind of suffering—ego measurement, inner critic—to arise there than it is in relationship to, say, emptiness practices, or the movement and quest for the unfabricated, or jhana practice and the exploration of the eight jhanas that the Buddha referred to, or the whole search for stream entry or other stages of awakening.

This is just an observation, and it makes a lot of sense to me why that might be so. At least the way we have been presenting it, this soul-making business is without any final goal. Unlike jhana, or the unfabricated, or stream entry, there are no stages of progress or a final goal mapped out. I would actually rather conceive the path as more open-ended that way.

So there aren't these gradations of progress, stages of progress by which one measures one's progress, nor some final goal that one can say, "I've arrived at, I haven't arrived, my friends arrived, but I haven't." In the absence of that kind of ladder of measurement, the ego structures around measurement and the inner critic have no scaffolding on which to fabricate themselves. And so that whole pain—so difficult for so many people in our culture today, the whole pain of that inner critic and self-measurement and ego comparison—really doesn't arise so much. It seems really not to arise so much in the soul-making movement and soul-making practices.

As I said, this is something we'll return to. But today I want to dwell a little on a larger level, talking about paradigms and conceptual frameworks with respect to dukkha and how we conceive of dukkha and the causality of dukkha.

Let me share something from an interview some time ago with a student who asked to talk about soul-making, imaginal practice, and that kind of thing. I have her permission to share this, as usual.

Quite a lot came up, and she was telling me as part of the interview about experiences she'd had in relation to eros and image from her childhood through her adulthood. She shared that she came from a childhood where her parents quarreled quite a lot, and that wasn't something she liked at all. She really wished that they hadn't quarreled so much and found it difficult and unpleasant.

She also shared that perhaps when she was around eight, she used to go to bed and, awake in bed, would have these fantasies or images—it was a little vague, but something like some men taking her or dragging her down into some kind of mine or coal mine, and then doing sexual things with her or to her. I don't think she used the word abuse, but we were exploring this a little bit, and I asked her what that felt like, or what its effect was, and what exactly they did, and she couldn't remember what the effect was, or what her feeling about it was at the time.

Let's just slow down here. I don't want to ride roughshod over this. I know that just hearing that kind of image, just as an image, can have quite an impact. There's been a lot of news recently about sexual abuse and actually the exposure of that in Hollywood and the film industry and elsewhere. So just take time here and take care of yourself if that brings up difficult stuff for you.

What I want to focus on here is something about images and conceptual frameworks. This is an instance of an image. In an instance of actual abuse, it's really important, of course, that it needs to be exposed, addressed, confronted, and healed. And that healing actually involves not just the victim, but also the perpetrator, who can only do such things when there's some kind of wounding at some level in the psyche.

Here I'm not dwelling so much on that, but I want to make a point about images and conceptual frameworks and assumptions around causality. I'm aware that even just sharing that as an image can have an impact, so I want to take care around that.

She also shared that she was raised as a practicing Catholic in that household with a Christian education. And she also had in her youth fantasies of what she called sexual union with God. Again, they weren't very specific fantasies, but they were definitely there.

As she grew up and still in the Catholic faith, she shared several things which showed how she was not—and never really seemed to be—a weak character, easily dominated in life, nor dominating either. She had this Catholic upbringing, and around ten years old...

She had a Catholic teacher, a woman she deeply loved and admired. One day they were waiting together

for confession when this student noticed her beloved teacher wearing furs—a coat or scarf of some kind. Without hesitation, she challenged her teacher directly: "Why are you wearing dead animals? Why are you wearing furs?"

The Catholic teacher was visibly stunned by this question. She actually got up, went to consult with her colleagues, and returned after several minutes with her response: "God told us to subjugate other animals."

Right there and then, this student lost all interest in Catholicism. There was a spirit in her willing to question authority and make her own moral decisions. Even though she loved this teacher dearly, she recognized that this path was not worthy of pursuit.

Later, something remarkably similar occurred when she became involved in the Zen tradition and began meditating. She questioned a roshi or teacher about the Japanese army's use of comfort women during World War II. This teacher gave her an answer that basically justified this abuse of women by Japanese soldiers, claiming it wasn't wrong.

Once again, this student immediately dismissed any authority she had granted to this teacher and that entire lineage. She lost interest and moved elsewhere, eventually finding herself in the Insight Meditation tradition.

There too, she experienced another pattern—having erotic feelings and even sexual images in relation to a female teacher, though this wasn't her typical sexual orientation. Similar experiences occurred with teachers of different genders.

Why am I sharing all this? This was part of a much larger conversation, but what I want to dwell on here relates to my earlier point about images, conceptual frameworks, and assumptions about causality.

During that lengthy interview, we explored that initial image of the coal mine—that sexual image of being dragged or taken down. One piece I brought up was the myth of Persephone, which you may know. Persephone was a young, beautiful goddess out with her friends on a mountainside in spring, picking flowers. As she stooped to pick up a particularly beautiful bloom, Hades, the god of the underworld, either disguised as the flower or somehow using it, snatched her and dragged her down into his realm.

What follows is a long, complex myth involving her mother Demeter's grief and desperate search. The outcome is that Persephone becomes Hades' wife and queen of the underworld, dividing her time between the upper world—our world of earth and nature—and the underworld, the realm of spirits and souls. She spends half the year in each domain.

I'm drawing here from James Hillman, who uses this myth as an archetypal presentation of what he calls the initiation into the underworld of soul. In his view, this doesn't necessarily have anything to do with sexual violence or sexuality per se. It's a myth of being pulled down—of apparent innocence being drawn

into an entirely different dimension involving darkness that is actually about soul. The underworld is the realm of souls.

This relates to death and the seemingly pathological sides of the soul. As I mentioned in an earlier talk, Hillman maintained a real emphasis on the pathological—the necessity, in his view, for the soul to pathologize, to create complexities, ensnarements, and entanglements in dukkha.

So this myth of Persephone being dragged into the underworld, where she eventually finds herself completely in her element, represents an initiation into the underworld of soul and soul-making. It's not about evil, not necessarily about sexuality in Hillman's interpretation, but about a movement at some point in one's life into the realm of soul—including its pathology and darker dimensions.

I was sharing this perspective during our conversation, and we explored together a possible interpretation or conceptual framework to bring to bear on these memories and images the student was sharing. Perhaps this was the beginning of this kind of initiation into a darker form of soul-making.

By "dark," I don't mean evil—I don't even necessarily mean sexual, although it might be in this case, given the fantasies of sexual union with God and the eros toward different teachers. But this represents an initiation into different kinds, different faces of divinity. Persephone's mother is Demeter, goddess of earth, fields, agriculture, and earthiness. Hades is god of the underworld, of shades, ghosts, and souls—a very different kind of divinity altogether.

They are both gods. Hades is sometimes also Dionysus—they are sometimes equated. So the myth functions as a kind of initiation, an opening into suddenly a different realm, different kinds and faces of divinity, different theophanies, different kinds of beauty that are darker, more complex, more shadowy, involving death and the metaphor of death and the soul meaning of death.

And so could it be—and again, I'm not insisting on this, just opening up a possibility—could it be that what is initiated by the arising of these images for this young girl are the seeds or the prompting of a movement that may take decades to mature in the soul? Just as I think in the story of Persephone and Hades, it took her a while, it took that whole process a while to mature and reach—not agreement, that's not the right word—but a new point of balance, if you like, with her being queen of the underworld.

Could it be that, as I've pointed out, this soul-making—one of the ways I feel it's very important to see it, or one of the most important aspects of it—is this expanding of the range of the sacred, opening to more kinds of beauty, more kinds and places and directions of sacredness and divinity? And that includes, for some people at least, opening to the dark and maybe the sexual and maybe these kinds of divinity and beauty, and the possibility of sensing, engaging, and being worked on by those directions, those dimensions, those colors as soul-making—opening up and discovering and creating beauty and divinity in those directions and dimensions, with those faces and those kinds.

So that would be a very different kind of theory to "explain" the arising of these images than some of the

more familiar psychological theories that we're exposed to.

So it's really this business about conceptual frameworks and ideas and assumptions about causality that I want to just open up a little bit and bring into our consideration. Very often we might hear someone share something very similar—like that image from a young time, an image of being dragged or taken underground where something sexual happens—and we might very easily infer conceptions of causality. "Infer" means to carry in—from the Latin—we sort of carry in conceptions.

Now this, of course, is related to what I've kept emphasizing over and over again: that concepts and conceptual frameworks imbue our perception. They're involved in any way of looking. Most of the time we're not conscious of exactly what conceptions are involved. Most of the time we don't have much flexibility with what conceptions are involved, but they come in, they are inferred, they are carried in, and they color, shape, and determine to a large extent what we then see—and of course how we feel about it, how we react, how we respond.

So often we hear something like that—an image like that—and almost without being able to help ourselves, the mind brings in conceptions of causality. And causality usually functions in terms of from past to present to future. Something must have happened before she was eight years old to give rise to these images. So something in the past gave rise to those images, and there's a causal explanation based on temporal priority—versus, as I mentioned the other day, what we might call a teleological explanation or teleological causality, if you like, where somehow the being, the psyche, and what arises is pulled toward something, or pulled—for example, one explanation was that the image arises and it's pulling us toward something that we don't even quite know what it is. It's pulling us toward a certain possibility, toward a certain opening or direction or door of soul-making.

So in that teleological view, the cause, if you like, is in the future. But it's not a finished fact in the future—it's a very different way of conceiving of causality, a very different conceptual framework. Rather than the view—which could be a very possible and viable view of causality—that this image arose for her when she was eight years old because something in the past happened that caused her to have such a pathological image, or what many people would interpret as a pathological image.

And that too is open to questioning, because when I asked her, she actually couldn't remember what the feeling of those images was. It might have been that she enjoyed them, that they were beautiful and rich. It might have been that they were distressing—maybe a combination. There are much richer differentiations we could make between possibilities of how it actually felt for her, what effect it had, but she couldn't remember.

The question is: could we, in a teleological way, rather than assuming something happened that was difficult and gave rise to this particular pathological expression, this particular pathological image—could we consider that actually in the seeming pathology of this image, the soul is, in a teleological way, drawing us toward something? The seeds are in the future. This is the seed being planted from the future, opening

up or leading us, inviting us to a door of—in this case—wider, deeper, and different kinds of soul-making.

So one of the points I want to make is: can we look at and question, can we be aware of and then also question whatever tendencies we have of assumption and leaning and narrowing of interpretation or concept regarding causes in the psyche and for the psyche? Can we acknowledge and be aware of how much cultural conditioning there is that creates habits of assumption, tendencies to lean this way, tendencies to narrow the conception and assumption in certain ways?

So there's quite a lot to this, but let's slow down. For the most part—except perhaps in times when we're attempting to practice a very close, very narrowly focused, microscopic awareness or mindfulness or so-called "bare attention"—and in a funny way, for all the clarity that they seem to bring, they also bring their own kind of blindness. When you're myopically staring at something so close, you tend to not see the bigger picture.

But for the most part, human beings, in our awareness of things, in our mindfulness of things, in our everyday awareness, we see and experience things with and through some lens that involves concepts of causality. The causality, as I said, is part of the conceptual framework that goes on—most often not explicit as thinking, not even that conscious—but then it can become conscious, or we elaborate on it, or we draw it out as a conclusion, or we insist on it. But whether we do that or not, it's woven into our actual experience, our actual ways of looking.

Ways of looking tend to include some or other concepts around causality. When we hear about a student's images from childhood, we naturally tend to see them as results and/or as causes, or at least as nodes in a causal network of other events, inner and outer. This is either the result of something inner or outer, or it's the cause of something inner or outer. This is simply part of the way we tend to see the world. It's part of the way consciousness works, for the most part, unless we really try to make it otherwise at times, with certain ways of looking.

So whether those images the student shared with me are considered the results—as representations of some actual abuse or trauma—perhaps she was sexually abused, and these images are telling her that story, a replay or representation of that experience, or a metaphor for some other kind of psychic abuse or trauma or ongoing situation. They might be considered either representations of actual abuse or trauma, or the result of her psyche's response to that actual abuse or some kind of ongoing traumatic situation in her environment, in her upbringing, in her family.

For example, a response of avoidance through papañca, through daydreaming. Her parents quarreled—did you catch that bit? Did the mind connect that? Her parents quarreled. So this creates a difficult environment, and she's avoiding that kind of psychic pain through daydreaming, through papañca, and through craving for and grasping at the pleasant vedanā of this kind of sexual, erotic fantasy.

Or the images might be considered the result of the soul and the eros seeking what's possibly its natural and fundamental movement and inclination to create and discover new and other areas, other realms, aspects, colors and faces for soul-making—in other words, the divinity of the dark and of the sexually erotic in this case. These are very different ideas about the causality going on.

However we are considering it, we usually see and experience what we hear in this case—these images—as a result of something or other. The mind tends to put it in a causal network. And likewise, we will always tend to see it, sense it, interpret it as causal, as causally implicative of something or other.

Psychological theories and conceptual frameworks come in, and we say, "Oh, this is going to be causal of the perpetuation of that trauma." In other words, if as a little girl she has those kinds of fantasies after this or that trauma and woundedness, unless she attends to it and has help attending to it properly and understanding it correctly—understanding why she's having it as a result of this abuse or whatever—then that trauma is just perpetuated in the psyche and in the nervous system, unless it's attended to and understood "correctly."

Or from a more narrowly classical Buddhist perspective, indulging in those kinds of fantasies would just be reinforcing tendencies of craving, aversion, and the delusive habit of papañca, of daydreaming. Never mind the cause of these fantasies—these kinds of images you're having are just building craving for that kind of sexual pleasure, or aversion to what's actually going on in the moment, the way things really are, or it's just the delusive habit of papañca, just daydreaming. Imagination is nothing but that.

Or again, they're causal—they're the first movements, the first shoots from the seed towards opening different directions of soul-making, perhaps in a Catholic upbringing, towards certain colors of soul-making, certain directions. Perhaps this was the first little shoot coming out of the seed of a different direction, opening up a different direction.

These perspectives are quite different in terms of causes and causation—what might be the causes of this kind of image and that kind of indulgence, if we use that word, and what that might cause, where it might be going if it carries on, if one practices that, if one indulges in that.

We're always, or almost always, seeing things in terms of causation and in terms of past and future and the connection between things or events, past, present, and future. How we are conceiving and perceiving a thing or event in terms of its causation and its effects, or the range of possibilities we are considering as its potential effects—what we bring in, in terms of those assumptions and concepts about cause and effect, and the range of possibilities that we even admit into our conceptual framework in terms of potential effects—that determines, that's part of how we actually approach that thing or event, what we then do with it and to it, how we respond to it.

How those images and that psychic fact—that fact of the psyche of these images arising and whatever feelings—how that is then steered depends on our conceptions. We're participating in its evolution in time

through our inferring, our carrying in of different ideas, concepts around cause and effect and that whole nexus between past and future and present.

Because we participate in perception that way, and we participate through conception—through different kinds of conception, we participate in perception—we then participate in the evolution of things in time. In this case, of images and of souls and of perhaps sexuality and eros and all kinds of things. We actually create and discover the effects of something by how we interpret it conceptually.

So that's an example of one level of the way that we cannot help but participate in perception. Our participation determines what we see, because how we conceive of the past in relation to the present determines what happens in the present, what we perceive in the present, what we emphasize in the present, and then what unfolds in the future, because it determines all kinds of aspects of how we relate to it.

What I'm wanting to do is open up this whole range of discourse, open up areas and directions and themes for us to consider, for you to consider. Open up the conceptual framework a little bit. Part of that, as I said earlier, is wanting to draw attention to—and hopefully we can all be aware of—just how much we are culturally conditioned in the conceptions that we bring to meet existence, every aspect of existence, from the most seemingly simple material aspect of existence to the most complex and spiritual, including the psychological and the imagination and all kinds of things.

Just to be aware of how conditioned, how culturally conditioned we are. We bring in certain ideas just because we are surrounded by certain ideas or we've been educated with certain ideas in either the larger culture or different subcultures. Then we form habits of assumption, habits of leaning, tendencies and habits to narrow down our range of assumptions.

and concepts operating, and thus what we do with things, how we respond to things, what we feel needs doing, how we conceive them, how we feel about them, all of that.

So to me this is particularly interesting around what arises psychologically for people, and also around pathology—in other words, suffering and dukkha. Sometimes I'm really saying this and pointing this out for the sake of opening up a plurality. I don't want to replace one conceptual framework around causality with another conception around causality, declaring this one's true and that one's not, this is better than that one. I'm really interested and I really hope you can hear this—I want to open up to the possibility that we can actually broaden our range of conceptions and actually learn to see things in different ways and move between these different ways of seeing things. That's the point of all this. I don't want to replace one with another in that kind of rigid movement.

But sometimes what concerns me a little bit is when I sense there's this kind of narrowing going on and this quickness to assume and a sort of lock-in to a certain psychological framework that carries with it all kinds of assumptions that somehow we've stopped questioning.

So from this point of view, and in the spirit of wanting to open up to a plurality, sometimes I wonder why is it that so often—among colleagues and perhaps in the wider culture, in the wider psycho-spiritual movements—the universal experiences and traumas of physical birth and intrauterine experience, or even sometimes the biological fact of the sperm struggling to penetrate the ovular wall, these kinds of physical material facts are given such emphasis?

I've heard people describe feeling in meditation the dukkha of the desperation of the sperm trying to penetrate the wall, experiencing that as suffering now, reliving the pain of that, and believing it's influencing their life—that if they can re-experience that in a certain way and relate to it differently, they'll be freed of the suffering that's being perpetuated in their life right now as a result of that thing in the past.

Sometimes I have no problem with the possibility of that. Sometimes where I get a little bit nervous is just how quickly it can shrink to this emphasis on the past. The past is causal. So why is it that those kinds of things—the trauma of birth, physical birth, the intrauterine existence, the struggle and desperation of the sperm—are considered more significant and more causal for what I experience and feel now, in my case fifty-two years later, or someone else decades later? Why is that given more emphasis and regarded as more significant and more causal than, say, my reading about an oil spill a month ago, two months ago, off the coast of somewhere thousands of miles away?

Why is the focus on the individual and the past of the individual, going back and back and emphasizing the past, given more significance than my reading about an oil spill and how that might cause pain in my soul right now, how that might affect the way I am in relation to the world and the whole patterns that get constructed if I'm exposed to that kind of thing, if I'm in a world that exposes me to that and also exposes me to the kind of seeming lack of care where these things go on and it seems like it's kind of okay, not really that big a deal on the scale of humanity's concerns?

Or my awareness of the demise of the number of birds in Europe—massive demise, even just in the last ten years. In the last twenty years, you know, just at Gaia House, there's a lot less birdsong, a lot less birdsong. Or the demise of forests and Amazon rainforests and actually all kinds of forests everywhere. Or the overwhelming amount of plastic pollution—even today and yesterday I was reading about this massive investment or cooperation between the Trump administration and large fossil fuel companies, ExxonMobil, agreeing to build a hundred-and-eighty-billion-dollar investment in new plastic-making factories in the Texas and Louisiana coastal areas, right when we're in the middle of all this news and alarm about the extent of massive plastic pollution and how long-term and pervading that is.

Why are these things sometimes not brought up for consideration as things that are causative of my dukkha right now? Causative, as I said, of whatever cramping I have in relationships and self-expression, or the pain for some souls when one looks at the world and moves in the world, and it seems that one is surrounded everywhere by an emphasizing and prioritizing of comfort and convenience and pleasure

and security, way beyond actual material needs. Everywhere there's this kind of automatic juggernaut running on of just prioritizing those values—comfort, convenience, pleasure, security. They are values, but those values are emphasized, and then seeing, witnessing, moving in a world that for decades has and continues to emphasize those kinds of values and what that gives birth to, the concrete material things and facts and artifacts that that gives birth to in the world.

And the pain of a soul, maybe can't quite even articulate: this is my pain. I'm somehow trapped in this kind of Kafkaesque world where this goes on and so few people even seem to feel it as a concern. And those kinds of values—comfort, convenience, pleasure, security, the lower-level values—are emphasized and prioritized and invested in in this almost unquestioning way, it can seem to a soul in the world. They're emphasized over and above values like beauty and soulfulness and love and truth and exploring what does that mean, what's that journey into opening up more beauty, creating and discovering more beauty and truth? What does that mean? And what are the domains of truth and love and the kinds of love and the manifestations and the expressions and the courage to explore all that?

So all these are different kinds of potential causes of suffering, of dukkha, of pathology, if you like. For me right now, for a soul right now in this world, just as much as what happened in my birth or how it was with my mum when I was a certain age, and certainly going back even more in the womb and with the sperm.

Can we open it up, if it needs opening up?

Can we open it up?

So I have this question sometimes, and yes, sometimes a little nervousness around what appears to me a kind of shrinking and narrowing of concepts, assumptions, and the habits that accompany them. In those ideas that give real priority to what happens in physical birth, what happens in the uterus, and the sperm, it's worth pointing out that those kinds of associations and memories are actually quite conjectural.

They're usually suggested to or interpreted first by some authority figure—a psychotherapist or physical therapist of some kind—and communicated that way, then introjected into the client's experience. Only then does one begin to feel, "Oh yes, I feel this." I'm not denying the truth, but I'm questioning where it actually comes from. What's the mechanism? What's the social mechanism? We talked about how images and soul-making can be communicated in a field—this can too. Again, one wonders about truth and origin.

Whereas the pain around, let's say, oil spills and environmental degradation, and the obliviousness or lack of care that compounds such environmental degradation—what this does to a soul—oftentimes no authority figure needs to point this out. It arises more independently, it seems, at least more independently than sitting in a room with an authority figure who tells them what they're probably experiencing.

In this narrowing down of emphasis to the material past as causal, always bringing in that conception or leaning that way, we can see—from a certain perspective—the dominance of what I called in an earlier retreat the "fantasy of origin," something Nietzsche described. We're somewhat obsessed with how things start: "This is the origin of this now, and it's in the past." We also see, related to that, this logos—this conception of temporally linear causality. The past causes the present, and the present will serve as past cause to the future.

Also wrapped up in this narrowing, though more obscured in the way it's embedded, is the whole history of the modern construction of self. As I've pointed out in previous retreats, how we feel ourselves, how we think about ourselves, and our actual experience of self now in this culture is really quite different from other cultures in the world at present, and from what it was even in these same places in the past.

The way we feel ourselves—we take it for granted. The whole sense of our own individuality and our own individual trajectory, with all the conception of causality wrapped up in that—this entire understanding has a history. It wasn't always that human beings felt themselves like this, assumed that who they were and what a self is and how people feel. This whole sense—it's not even an idea anymore, but has become a visceral sense of what the self is as normal experience.

But again, please, I'm saying all this not to replace one psychological paradigm with another and claim this one's better, more real, or more true. I'm actually more interested in the narrowing, and my hope is that we can open up our views and open up the kinds of conceptual frameworks we can bring to bear and entertain.

It would be extremely silly for me to say that the past doesn't affect the future, or that trauma in one's past or difficult conditions don't affect future growth of a human being. That would be really silly. So I'm not denying that; I'm not denying the importance of those kinds of approaches to looking, healing, and thinking.

What I'm really interested in is opening to a plurality of conceptions—a plurality of conceptual frameworks and causal theories and causal thinking. What happens if we can open up to this plurality and move between different conceptual frameworks? What would that give us? What would that offer? What would that open up for us?

That's really my interest—not to disregard one and replace it with another at all. Each becomes a paradigm, a conceptual framework, a sort of lens that we can enter into regarding this or that suffering or experience, and move between these frameworks.

I think—I can't remember whether I've just written about this recently or shared it in a talk, so excuse me—but I'm not going to elaborate on it fully. However, I would say it's quite possible, using the concepts of eros and soul-making, to construct or discover a kind of psychology, including developmental psychology—a psychology of human development based on eros and soul-making as the primary drives.

When Freud made his psychological theory, it was based on the primary drive of the pleasure principle, with Oedipal fantasies as the foundational images. That was the basis of his theory—the whole developmental impetus in a human being was the pleasure principle seeking pleasure, and how that interacted with family situations and the larger situation of civilization and its laws. These two forces, often in opposition to each other, and what ensued from their contact, determined human development. But what was primary there was the pleasure principle, along with the Oedipal fantasy.

Someone like Douglas Fairbairn, a Scottish psychoanalyst who came much later, placed contact rather than pleasure as the driving principle. This is what the infant wants—contact. Someone like Kohut, in his ego psychology, places self-coherence as primary. The fundamental drive or impetus in the psyche is toward constructing a coherent and stable sense of self or ego.

So we have very different ideas with different psychologies, different psychological paradigms of what is fundamental—what's the fundamental drive. You can hear that, of these three examples—there are many others—the closest sounding to what we're talking about would be Fairbairn's emphasis on contact. The drive for contact, the impetus for human connection drives psychic growth and human development in that psychology.

Contact—you'll recognize from our definition of eros—wanting more contact, more connection, more intimacy, touch, penetration, opening of the beloved other. It's just that for Fairbairn, that contact is more limited in what it means.

It's construed in what we call more of a flatly human way. In our paradigm, it's possible—my point is it's possible—to construct a whole developmental psychology and also a psychology of pathology that's based on eros and soul-making as we are defining those terms as the primary developmental impetus, and then see what comes out of that. That might be really interesting to do.

And in what ways can that... for instance, we talked about the soul-making dynamic getting out of balance with the eros-psyche-logos, or with self, other, world, or whatever. What kind of pathology, what kind of developmental difficulty, or arrest, or imbalance would that give rise to? You understand? I'm not going to go into this. I'm just pointing out something for the sake of a larger point.

So if we talk about developmental psychology, that whole paradigm, or just the psychopathology, or those two paradigms, then we can regard a developmental psychology that focuses on causes in the material past and just goes back, back, back as much as it can to the sperm and maybe even to past lives and whatever, as one possible way of looking, way of conceiving among other options. Can we regard it as one possible angle of direction, way of looking, way of conceiving, conceptual framing, among other options.

So often it seems to me, at least nowadays in the circles I move in—it may be very different in other cultures—but so often it seems to shrink to that, though. It's not one among other options; it just becomes a kind of mononarrative or monoconception. I only have one pair of glasses, and at a certain point I forget

that they're even glasses. As I said, sometimes that can become too narrow. That kind of lens can become too narrow. We might miss then the political, social, cultural, environmental causes of dukkha, psychological distress, developmental bending out of shape—and also physical.

It's quite... I think way before I got cancer I pointed out in a talk just how I felt it was really dangerous for people—oftentimes people who don't have cancer or some disease that modern Western medicine has a hard time curing—oftentimes people jump in there and say, "You have this disease, you have this cancer because you haven't dealt with some emotion from the past, you haven't processed it," etc. And it's a kind of gross assumption or a heavy accusation to bring in. And in a way it's really a step too far of this narrowing, or it's an example of a step too far of this kind of narrowing down of the causes of dukkha.

So we neglect to see, well, you know, there's a pretty mind-boggling cocktail of pesticides in our environment. Our air is polluted. Our water, our food. And we forget that because we've somehow narrowed it down to this certain range of causes in the past that actually focus more on the individual and the individual's story, wrapped up into that, constructed, if you like, by the whole construct of the modern, if you like, Western construct of self.

And also sometimes there's a narrowing, and much more often a narrowing, regarding the notion of temporal causality being in the past, as causal of present and origins being in the past. So what if there are just different options available to us in terms of conceptual frameworks? How does it feel when I say that, when I suggest that it could even be possible?

You know, one of the things I'm really quite interested in is the philosophy of science, and in science you can have—in fact you often do have in different points in history, and right now we have—different theories that have equal explanatory power and equal predictive power. And there have been times in history even when two or even three or four theories explain the same physical phenomena, but in very different ways, and predict the same things, but again, for very different reasons.

Then in the realm of science, in the world of science, what tends to happen then—this situation exists and it exists regularly in the history of science—then scientists seek to move towards a consensus where they decide, we now favor this theory. This theory edges it over that one at some point, either because we find different predictions and we do experiments and we realize that this one predicts what happens better, or for other reasons. I'm not going to go into this now, it's actually quite interesting.

There's also, if we talk about conceptual frameworks or theories and truth, there's also, again, I think very interesting debate that's been going on for decades around what actually is the status? What's the link? What's the connection between a theory, a scientific theory, and reality? And we might kind of introduce that kind of thinking here as well, or that kind of questioning.

So there is—forgive me if I get the name not quite right—but there's something called correspondence notions of truth. It means that one believes that this theory or the elements of this theory correspond to

actual elements of reality. And that's what you're aiming for when you construct a theory, and that's what you're achieving when you achieve a theory that works, or you're hoping for that. So the theory is actually just a representation, a kind of one-to-one representation of—it corresponds, there's a correspondence of the elements of the theory and the elements of reality.

And there's a different kind of notion of truth that philosophers talk about, and that's called a coherence notion of truth, or coherence emphasis, or something—I can't remember. But what that means is that it's not so much that the theory, the elements of the theory correspond with elements of fact or physical reality. Actually, what you've got when we say this is a truth or this is a theory that works is that the elements of the theory fit together in a coherent way, but more than that, they fit together with other theories that we have, so that they fit well with our sort of, and in a coherent way with our, if you like, family or set of theories and conceptual frameworks for looking at the world and interpreting existence.

So that to me is quite interesting, and what if we reflect in those kind of ways? So some of you have more of a bent to think about these things conceptually, and I think actually it's—for me, it's part of the whole soul-making dynamic at some point to actually ponder these things and kind of exercise one's muscles there. It actually is soul-making.

But if we bring in these concepts or these different notions of truth in relation to the soul-making paradigm and how that may or may not affect our thinking and reflection and use or movement between all these different psychological theories and theories of human development and psychological development and theories of psychopathology, etc., and theories of why dukkha arises now and all that.

And some scientists, so for instance Einstein, actually pointed out that you never really know if it's truth that's being revealed by a theory. And again, also in a different way, Einstein's point was, being a scientist is a bit like being a watch—having a watch, an old-style watch—and you're kind of, you look at the face of it, and you look at the hands and the rest of it, and you can kind of hear it ticking, and all that. And you're really kind of guessing or constructing theories for what's actually going on inside.

But you never really get to see what's going on inside to finally corroborate your theory. And he said science is always like that. We might get to look deeper, so to speak—it might feel like we've got more access to the interior because now we have electron microscopes and other advanced instruments. But actually there's always a level at which you cannot see. So there's a sense that we never really know whether a theory corresponds to reality.

In a very different way, quantum mechanics and what's called the Copenhagen interpretation is saying that our physical theories are not really about what is there. They're about what arises in experiments—what happens on the needles and dials and readouts in the laboratory. The theories are really about that.

Richard Feynman, who won a Nobel Prize for his quantum electrodynamic theory, also said something

similar in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. I was trying to find it before this talk, but I couldn't locate it. But I remember him pointing out how interesting it is that you can have quite different theories that have similar explanatory power and similar predictive power.

Philosophers—many contemporary philosophers—are even more keen on this idea of opening up or questioning the whole relationship between theory or concept and fact, or even perception and so-called reality. There's a long history of this in Western philosophy with Hume and Kant and Nietzsche and even more so later on.

What we have here in all this is the recognition that different conceptual frameworks explain what we witness, explain what we observe in the human being, in our lives, in our experience. Different conceptual frameworks explain that differently, and they lead us in different directions. Maybe that's a better way of saying it—they point us and prompt us in different directions.

Different conceptual frameworks explain what we observe very differently or somewhat differently, and they also direct us in different directions. What I want to suggest and even hope for—partly helped by realizing the thorough and deep and radical emptiness of all things and going into that extensively—is that it's possible to realize there is no ultimate truth of things, no perspective on reality where one can say, "This is how this thing is."

That understanding extends from there. One realizes that and it extends from there. That understanding goes deep, and one realizes it extends also to conceptual frameworks. This doesn't mean they're all equal—we'll return to this in the final talk of this series. But one senses that there is no possibility of arriving at some ultimate truth in that sense.

One begins to sense through these kinds of practices—through emptiness practice, but also through soul-making practice—one really senses one's participation, as I've emphasized several times, one's participation in perception, one's participation through conception in what arises, and even deeper than that, one's participation in the truth, or in what reality is.

Maybe through that—maybe it's already accessible to you through some other facility or natural inclination—it's possible that we can open up for ourselves this flexibility of conceptual frameworks. We are actually free to move between different conceptual frameworks and become adept enough in different conceptual frameworks. We're not relating to any of them as "this is the real one, that's not the real one," or "this one is true, that's not true," or "this is the final explanation of things, of what we see," or "this is the final explanation of human psychological development," or "this is the final explanation of human suffering or pathology or difficulty."

But we can have, conceptually and practically, this flexibility. It's really available to us. Each of them, we recognize, has a different emphasis, a different way in, a different angle. Perhaps we could say it opens certain doors and directions more, and perhaps others less, and delivers certain fruits more and others

less than an alternative one.

But we can, at times at least, entertain a conceptual framework because it is a conceptual framework that stimulates and supports an open soul-making. It's not so much about truth and this being the final reality. It's a conceptual framework that works to stimulate, support, nourish, and open soul-making for us.

That would be one conceptual framework among others in the ways that we relate to dukkha, in the ways that we relate to our ideas about human development and what it is to develop well and how that can be impeded or contorted. It's one paradigm among others, one conceptual frame we can entertain, we can adopt, move in and out of.

Wrapped up in that idea is a kind of meta-conceptual framework of flexibility among conceptual frameworks. There's a higher level idea that it's actually valid and valuable and helpful and really legitimate to move between different conceptual frameworks—whole different paradigms about psychology and development and pathology and suffering.

A meta-conceptual framework. And for me, that meta-conceptual framework is also a framework that stimulates, supports, encourages, and nourishes an open soul-making. To me, that's actually part of the soul-making paradigm, the larger soul-making paradigm—that there's this flexibility between conceptual frameworks. And that idea has its place in soul-making.

Thank you for listening.

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