To Sense with Soul

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 12:08

Tomorrow we will resume this elaboration of the aspects of the imaginable—what we're calling the aspects of the imaginable, these aspects or elements of what makes an experience imaginable, the constituents of that constellation. We'll resume that tomorrow. We just really got going, but we'll pick that up tomorrow.

I just want, for now, a very short sort of interruption to that, also for the purposes of clarifying or fleshing something out, hopefully in a helpful way.

Briefly, this word "imaginal"—several people told me they just don't like the word. They don't relate to it, or it's a funny word. It also can tend, because of the word "imagination" in English and how we think of that—really how we conceive of imagination in our culture and its place in our whole implicit philosophy—the word "imaginal" tends to suggest something that's happening inside me or inside you, so-called intra-psychic. That's a word I really don't like, "intra-psychic." It implies that the psyche is somewhere in here.

But the word "imaginal" can suggest to people something, so I'm sitting with my eyes shut and a pink dragon comes. And that pink dragon, that imagination figure or imaginal figure, has very little to do—it's not something anyone else can perceive, it has very little to do with the world of the senses. Or perhaps there's some kind of relationship, but it's not of the world of the senses.

So the word "imaginal" can suggest that to people, but that's not what we mean. Or rather, it includes that kind of thing, the so-called intra-psychic images that come up. It includes that, but it also includes, another word I don't like, "extra-psychic." In other words, it includes—we can say, I perceive an imaginal pink dragon, I perceive you guys imaginally. I perceive these roses imaginally. These are things of the world, objects or beings of the world, sensed with the senses that everyone would agree on their form. They are white roses, whitish roses. They agree on the shape, etc. I can perceive them in a conventional way that everyone in our culture would agree on. We all see the same thing.

The conventional perception is just to see, you know, they're pleasant looking, very nice, they smell nice, etc. They're a biological organism, so that's about it. Conventional perception.

I want to introduce another term for the sake of having done with this misunderstanding of assuming—that sometimes happens to some people—of assuming that "imaginal" refers to something purely interior. So the phrase I want to introduce is "sensing with soul." Sensing with soul. I'm not introducing anything different, I'm just introducing a new vocabulary, or a possible new vocabulary. We

don't want to replace, we just add. So some people, and I want to use them almost interchangeably, say "imaginal" or "imaginable perceiving" or "sensing with soul." Pretty much the same thing.

For some people, the word "imaginal" will imply this more interior arising of an image. The sensing with soul, to me, the words, because we tend to think of senses as meeting the world, opens up or suggests a different direction. But really, they're interchangeable, pretty much.

So, the things, the objects, the beings, the world itself—the things, the objects, the beings of the world, and the world itself—when they, in any moment, to my perception, to my senses, to my knowing them through the senses, when they start to come alive with those aspects of the imaginable that we're going through.

When I sense a person, or a group of people, or my body, or the tree, or the sky, or my friend, and I see my friend—I see her, him, them, as angel. Same form. They look the same. Everyone would agree it looks the same. But there's the added imaginal dimensions. It's filled out. Do you understand?

Or this tree. Everyone would agree on the shape of the tree. Somehow I feel, I sense this tree's love for me. And most people think that's bonkers. Trees can't do that. But when the sensing with soul preserves the form and adds the dimensionality and the richness and the multi-aspectness and all the beauty and the eros and the love and all these nodes that we're talking about.

So it's a transubstantiation of the world in the alchemy of perception, sensing with soul. So that implies sensing.

We have at least five senses, right? Sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing—plus the mind. In Buddha Dharma, the mind is a sixth sense. The mind that thinks, the thinking as a sense, or the perceiving of thought, the sensing of thought as another sense, and the sensing of image, an intra-psychic image. So it spans all that—imagining, thinking, smelling, seeing, tasting, touching, and hearing.

Generally speaking, when we sense with soul, we encounter the same shapes, colors, or forms as conventional, socially agreed-upon perception, but it has that filled-outness. It has the same shapes, colors, or forms as conventional perception, yet it possesses that quality of being filled out.

Catherine, you may not have caught it—it slipped out a couple of times, I think, in the opening talk or something—but we wanted to introduce "sensing with soul" as an idea. For some people, it will be more helpful. They'll think, "Oh yes, that's what we're doing." It's not just this. We actually don't mind what words you use. This is really all for the sake of understanding.

When you say "imaginal," people ask, "What do you mean by imaginal?" Of course, if you say "sensing the soul," that would also beg the question, "What do you mean by soul?" We could be here a long time, but I don't want to be.

So sensing the soul means all that. It means sensing in a way that soulfulness is happening. In other words, all those nodes, or some of those nodes, to some degree—that movement into that activation of

those nodes is happening.

What is soul? You could say soul is just a shorthand for soulfulness, for that constellation of experience. Then soul, in that way of conceiving it, is not a thing. It's just a kind of experience—soulful experience—which means all that we're elaborating.

In English language, mostly the word "soul" has the idea of an entity: my soul, your soul, the soul does this or does that, or whatever. In Buddha Dharma, we're a little bit shy of some entities. And typically, soul would be one kind of entity in Buddha Dharma that we're really shy of—really, really shy of. Self is bad enough. But people still use the language of self, and we need to. I would say it's more than a conventional shorthand. You know, I say, "I feel sad." We need to care for the self. It's an experience we have that's a valid, important, deep dimension of our experience, or direction of our experience—the self. Same with soul. Same with divinity, or deity, or God.

We can entertain the sense of these things as entities—self, soul, divinity, deity. I know it's empty, but I can relate to it as an entity because I know it's empty. Do you understand? I don't have to be afraid of these words. I use them, actually—show me something that isn't empty. We use words and concepts all the time. It's a pen, it's a rose, it's a candle, it's a chair. Buddha Dharma, with the teachings of emptiness, says all this is empty. There's none of that stuff, really. So why all this allergy to words like soul and divine?

So we can use soul as just shorthand for soulfulness, which is just a kind of texture, flavor, richness of experience.

And we can use soul, I think, with the implication of entity, if you like, knowing it's empty. And what kind of entity is soul? Soul is the, we could say, the organ, the instrument that senses soulfully. So the whole definition, that's fine. Deep definitions do that. They go around in circles.

So where is this organ? I can't find it. And it's empty. It has no inherent existence. But I can talk about an instrument or an organ that can sense with soul, that does sense with soul.

When we talk about soul-making, we say I'm making soulfulness. I'm fabricating—in technical Dharma language, I'm fabricating a sense of soulfulness. Or there is the fabrication of soulfulness. I'm soul-making. What am I making? I'm making soulfulness. I'm also making or building that organ, that instrument. I'm building my capacity through practice to sense soulfully. Do you understand?

So soul-making. The more I sense soulfully, the more accessible it becomes to me. So I'm actually making something. I'm making my instrument. It's being made. I'm participating in the making, in the fashioning, in the forging of this organ, this instrument of perception. Wonderful thing.

Do you understand? So the main point I just want to say is this: we'll start using these words freely. Sensing the soul, freely and interchangeably. Sensing the soul, imaginatively perceiving, imaginal—it's all pretty much the same.

So far?

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