Heart Art and an Introduction to Image

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 56:23

Good morning everyone.

So this morning there are actually two areas I want to try and cover in this session. It's quite a lot—as I said, it's perhaps a little dense in terms of teaching at the moment. I can share a few things about these two areas, and some of it will be in the form of simply: there's this, this, this, this, and this—not necessarily elaborating so much on each point, which brings me back to something I'll address at the end of today.

The two things I want to discuss are: first, taking the energy body teachings a little further, specifically with regard to working with emotions; and second, beginning to talk about images.

Yesterday we introduced the idea of the energy body and the practices of the energy body with a particular orientation towards developing and moving in the direction of samadhi—cultivating a kind of well-being in the energy body through integration, harmonization, and energization. We emphasized that direction of intentionality.

Within that framework, when there is anything at all pleasant or comfortable or even lovely in the energy body—or in the emotions as well, such as joy or peace—these will reflect in certain textures and energies, certain wavelengths, if you like, in the energy body. When anything like that is present, there is the possibility of leaning, inclining the attention towards resting in that, enjoying it, developing it. This is a direction towards what we call samadhi.

So here's this—maybe it's just a kind of light sense of open peace, but I can feel it harmonized throughout my whole body. Well, I can open to that. I open my body to it, I open my consciousness to it, I open my awareness to it. I endeavor to be intimate with it, to really get close to this texture, to relish it, to taste it, to know it—really touch it, touch it with the body, this loveliness, whatever it is. It could be extremely lovely, mind-blowing, or it could be quite subtle. But the intention is to nuzzle into it, rub yourself in it, open to it like you're sunbathing. Become intimate with it and basically enjoy it. Yes? "Thou shall enjoy"—it's the first commandment of samadhi practice.

Work with the whole energy body. It's really about turning on a hedonistic attitude and getting into it, bathing in it. Involved in that is what we could call a tuning. We're tuning, as I said, to a certain wavelength of energy. Let's say the wavelength of this kind of peace, or this kind of lovely tenderness, or this kind of effervescent joy. In energetic terms, it's a certain wavelength. And I'm tuning to that wavelength with my attention—but actually with my whole being, with my body, with my focus, with my mind. Everything's tuning. That's the wavelength of that particular loveliness that's available right now.

Like tuning a radio dial, you're tuning to this.

As I said yesterday, the energy body will not be—cannot be—lovely all the time. It cannot be open all the time. It's just not the way it works. So within the intention of developing samadhi, within that track, there is the possibility when the energy body is not so open—when it's a bit twisted or contracted, when something's a bit tight, or when it's just not really available, when it's a bit agitated—there is the possibility to gradually develop skills to work with those difficulties and knots and contractions so that they open up and the whole system moves back towards some kind of loveliness.

This is a whole art in itself. I've talked about it elsewhere, and you can certainly ask about it. I'm just mentioning it now. So there's actually skillful relating to this difficulty with intentions like: "Okay, how can I maybe finesse it or nuance it to open up, to soften, to move basically towards something more comfortable, more pleasant, more characterized by well-being?" It's a skillful, deliberate intention. It's not a grasping or a forcing.

So that's all available. But as well as that intention towards samadhi and working with the difficult, there are other intentions. One might be: "Well, here is this difficulty, and maybe it in itself has a certain kind of intelligence. Maybe there's something in the middle of this difficulty that I need to honor, that I need to open to and be with, and it can somehow teach me something—I don't know what. Maybe it has a treasure in it."

This opens a whole realm of possibilities in itself, this slightly different attitude. What is it to relate skillfully in that sense to what is difficult? The intention here is not so much to change it, but to somehow honor it and see what might be learned, if anything. Or just to be able to be with it. That's all. Just to be able to be with, to bear with, to hang with the difficult.

So there are lots of possibilities, and I'll just offer a list here. One possibility is actually learning to focus. Here's this tightness in my throat—I'm not sure, is it an emotion?

Is it a grief? I don't even know yet.

Okay, it's possible to very delicately focus the attention right on those sensations and just train them there. And then the question is: how much? Laser beam or really delicate? What does it need?

And within that, I'm letting it be what it is. This moment and the next moment, I'm not saying, "Come on, I can just nudge you so you can be nice." That's fine. That's not like, it's not Buddhist to do that. It is Buddhist to do that. It's just different options, different orientations.

But in this mode, it's just allowing it. It's like, just like that with the hands, a little bird can land there and then it can fly off and see what's next, and it flies off. This is the atajas, a very delicate allowing and holding. That's one possibility.

Another possibility might be, again, to bring in the whole energy body. But the energy body, the space of

the energy body, forms a context—a space, really—for this difficulty. So here's, let's say, I don't know, I've got this tightness in my belly or solar plexus, and again, I'm not sure: is that—am I anxious? Or—don't know yet. Well, maybe I do know.

But I can then open up the energy body awareness and let this difficulty sit in the middle of this—Joe used the word "body bubble"—this space of the energy body awareness. It gives it a different context. Do you understand? It puts it in that awareness. And oftentimes there is, in that larger awareness, there's a certain kind of—sometimes there's a certain kind of okayness. So it kind of holds it in a certain way.

We can—third option—we can learn to hold the difficult in love, to bring in or, let's say, access a quality of metta or compassion or tenderness or holding, again, around. So this difficulty, this contraction, this hardness, whatever it is, this knot—again, it's almost like it's held in a bath of something else, some warmth, some tenderness, some care. So this painful shard of rock is touched by something different. And you're just letting those two things come into contact with each other, the difficulty and the lovely warmth. And you just put them together without forcing anything to happen. You understand?

I should mention—I mentioned it somewhere or other, but I can't remember when—but for those of us who've done a lot of training in mindfulness, it's often the case that when we come to work with emotions, we use a very skillful approach, which is: "Okay, let me find—I see my mind is blah, blah, blah, all over the place, and there's all this stuff going on. Let me focus"—again, I tune the attention to the sensations of the emotions. So I say, "Oh, here's this heaviness in my chest or whatever it is. And I say, can I, in my mindfulness of the emotion, can I just look at the level of sensation?" And in a way, everything simplifies. You familiar with what I'm talking about? Yes? Wonderful.

And sometimes what can happen is that a person who does a lot of mindfulness practice, insight meditation, actually that becomes almost their only option. It's like one mode of relating to the emotions. What's it missing? One thing it's missing is it's missing self and story, right? Because part of the whole idea of mindfulness is let's just kind of leave that out, okay?

So for some of you, it might be interesting to introduce, again, open up the concertina, the fan of options. So what is it to be with this emotion in this kind of bare mindfulness, supposedly bare mindfulness way? No story, no self, it's just these sensations happening in the moment. Great, one option.

What would it be, though, to let it—to bring yourself in contact with that whole constellation of emotion, including the self? So it's not just sensations and just emotion, it's me having the sensations. And that's important. Catherine talked about yesterday, a practice with "no self, no self, no self. I just want to kind of ignore or get rid of the self." It won't be full enough, rich enough, juicy enough—just psychologically, let alone soulfully. So sometimes we go into a mode—we open to a mode that includes self, and that might include story.

And then there's further differentiations. What kind of self are we talking about? A reified self, or a self

that I also know is empty? A self I see as image? Do you understand? There are different kinds of gradations of the mix one can put into this, if you feel ready to explore that kind of thing.

Dependent on that—dependent on what kind of self and how much self, if you like, is there, and how much story, and what the attitude to the story is—the experience unfolds differently. Is this the reality, this story? Or does this story also have the liquidity in it to be sensed as image? Dependent on all this, the experience unfolds differently. It's dependent arising.

All that is in the beauty and the art of what we can explore with the difficulties. Slightly different emphases and angles, and different experiences open up. Different kinds of healing are available. Sometimes healing won't just happen from looking at those sensations all day long. Actually, something is not getting healed because there's not enough self in it, and there's not enough story, or the story is too rigid. So again, there's no right answer, no right way to do it. You can't just do this one thing for the rest of your life and expect everything will be fine.

Sometimes, as another option, we can bring an image to meet the emotion—just as we bring the metta, for example, tenderness to sit around the difficulty. We can bring an image. Maybe you have imaginal figures that you already sense love you and you love them. So you can bring this image. What does this image perhaps communicate to you in your difficulty? It witnesses you there. It sees you. How do they see you? Can you see how this image is looking at this dukkha? Can you see and feel how you are being gazed at?

Again, there's a kind of alchemy that happens when I put the difficulty in contact with something. Just rattling through a list here.

Another option is turning the allowing dial up to eleven, as they would say in Spinal Tap. Meaning, here's the difficulty, and I'm not just kind of letting it be in the usual mindfulness sense, which is great. I'm totally—the thing I'm completely interested in is how much can I allow this? How much can I let go of completely, even the smallest trace of aversion or resistance? That's what I'm mostly interested in. That's a very skillful way of being. Some of you know what happens when you do that. It's an extremely interesting thing to try.

Again, rattling through the list. Sometimes, in fact often, an emotion—difficult and lovely—has a kind of dynamism in it. It's a vortex of moving energy, if you like. Because of that, you can feel that dynamism in the energy body. This rage or this frustration or whatever it is—you can actually feel a kind of power and dynamism in the energy body that's related to the emotion.

Because of that energy, it can give birth to an image. Sometimes this is extremely gross—the dynamism and the power that is associated with this emotion I feel in the energy body, and lo and behold, then I become a fire-bellowing dragon. Wonderful. The whole thing has moved. Or it can be much more subtle.

I'll give you a little example. Catherine mentioned that I've been—I don't know why it's arisen, but I've got all kinds of problems with my hormones now, different hormone levels. I can't remember if this was

before or after I started the medicine, but either way, I've been feeling pretty strange lately. So let me just share this with you.

So I was meditating in the morning, feeling utterly confused and discombobulated, lacking in mental capacity recently. It's possibly a consequence of a thyroid problem—question mark.

Sitting this morning, I felt into the difficulty. This is what's happening, and I feel this difficulty, this whole gestalt of the difficulty. It's mental, it's physical—everything. I feel the difficulty of it. I feel it as difficulty. I see there's some aversion to it—subtle, but definitely there. I sense the contraction, subtle contraction in the energy body in relation to it. It's in my chest, in my throat and chest that accompanies this.

I tried to work with it in different ways, but the mind was not very focused, which was part of the original problem. Then somehow, out of my willingness to be with it and to be intimate with the difficulty in this open way, suddenly an image came.

The image was of an old king sitting in a room alone—well, almost alone—sitting in a room that looked very much like the living room in my house, which I wasn't in at the time. He's alone in that room, except that there's this very small baby monkey with him.

He has on this mauve velvet cloak, he's very old, and he wears this mauve velvet cloak and a crown, but the crown is really not very fancy. He's lost his powers—he's lost his powers. He's really old, and his mental and spiritual faculties are compromised. He's pretty confused as well; maybe he has dementia or something like that. He's completely lacking in energy.

And he has to see something now. Despite his state, he has to get clear about something, or gain some kind of clarity about something: that his kingship is not his. It was given to him by the divine, by the earth, by the Buddha nature. And nor are his spiritual or mental powers his. They're not his. They never were.

If death is coming, this is a time of relinquishment. Somehow his heart needs to understand, his soul needs to understand—a time of relinquishment, anatta, and seeing: this is not self, this is not mine. And in a way, entering the very simple state of the erasure of one's mental and spiritual powers. The simple state—just all that goes. And the erasure of these qualities and the gifts that were bestowed on him.

The little monkey, this little baby monkey, climbs onto his chest. You know how they do. So he's very lost and doesn't quite even know where he is, confused. And this little baby monkey climbs onto his chest and presses itself—the way very young babies can, when they're old enough to communicate love, their love, not just receive it. They can communicate this love.

So it presses itself against him like a baby, with a very young child's loving—very pure, very innocent, very sweet.

This is what I tune to. It's that interaction. It's one of the things I tune to. And it's something very lovely. You can hear it's sweet and soothing and pacifying. It brings a lot of tenderness and another level of

okayness with what's happening.

I give you this example for particular reasons. Sometimes when I choose examples, there are different motivations. One is that the dukkha is involved. This wasn't an image that just went around the dukkha or ignored it—like, "Oh, that's all right, but look at this wonderful thing that's happening here." The dukkha is involved. It was part of the crucible that gave birth to the image. And it was still there at the end of the image. It wasn't like the monkey climbed onto his chest and suddenly transformed into some handsome young prince ready to rule another kingdom.

The dukkha stays. It receives other harmonies with it, other dimensions.

It's one of the reasons I'm choosing this image. It's more than simple anatta practice—more than simple "not-self, not-self." Beautiful, wonderful practice though that is, there's something more here. It includes that, but it's more.

The self—and you can obviously see the parallels there—the self becomes image. There's a real, I felt, a real relationship between me and this king, my state and this king. The self-sense moves towards an imaginal self-image. Do you understand?

We can say there's letting go, but in a way there's more than what we traditionally understand by letting go. As I said, it's got whole other levels of dimensions and echoes and juiciness around it. These are some of the reasons why I choose this image to share.

This soul-making conceptual framework includes many possible angles and approaches and intentions and directions within it. Like we said, I can do samadhi, I can be with difficulty, I can look for image—all kinds of possibilities.

When we talk about emotional awareness in this larger soul-making paradigm, the purpose of our emotional awareness is not only to reach peace. It's not only to reach peace. It's not only that we work with our emotions so that they can purify and the only emotions we end up having are the four brahmaviharas. I'm not saying it's not that—I'm saying it's not only that.

There is also in this process, in this journey, the movement towards the invitation to sanctify what we tend to regard as unskillful or impure emotions. What does it mean to sanctify rage? What does it mean to sanctify fierceness, to let that become image and holy, to find the holiness, the holy roots of these kinds of emotions?

Hysteria. Hatred. James Hillman said, "You've got to hate something." Actually, on a soul level, there's something very wise there. Gotta hate something. What does it mean for hatred to be given these extra dimensions?

Roaring. What is holy roaring? Madness. What is holy madness? The sanctification of being also madly in love. Priapic—the eternally horny. What is that? What's the holiness in that to be found in the echoes

there?

These things can become image, can find their archetypal roots. And it's not that then we identify with these things, but it's that something is opened in the range of soul-making, something is opened in the soul-making with them. And the range of—this is so important—the range of our sacredness is opened, the range of our senses of sacredness is opened, the range of our images and the range of beauty and duty is opened. Beauty and duty.

So it's not only in this framework that we're saying, "Have your feelings, be connected with your feelings, be mindful of your feelings on your way to peace." There's a bigger invitation here.

Sometimes a person is working very diligently, with a lot of care and goodwill with their flow of emotions. Often with this typical sort of mindfulness mode where you're focusing on the emotions almost as sensation without so much story and self. But it's just going on, and the person is tracking their emotions, and it's actually not very fruitful or helpful.

I don't know if some of you have ever had this kind of relationship with difficulty, where it's just, "I'm aware of it, I'm aware of it, I'm aware of it, I'm aware of it." So there's a certain clarity there, and certainly a certain mindfulness, but there's no—going back to what I used to say—there's no dynamism. Nothing's happening. It's not going anywhere in that process. Something is stuck, and the wheels are kind of going round and round in this difficult emotion.

Sometimes—I'm mentioning this because maybe four or five people have mentioned something similar to me in the last month or so—sometimes with all that, there's actually frustration at the whole process. "I'm not supposed to be frustrated because I'm supposed to just be okay with what is." No. I'm fed up.

Maybe I need to feel the power and the dynamism of feeling fed up. So I'm concentrating on everything else, but I'm feeling the fed upness. It's there. I'm somehow not clocking it. It's somehow not allowed or what? Or just I'm not used to feeling it. So maybe I need to feel that and allow it and allow its energy. Or sometimes maybe I need to vocalize. What does that sound like when I let my body express that frustration? Or again, feel it in the body.

Sometimes this tuning into the dynamism and allowing the dynamism—or even allowing yourself to express it—gets things moving. It loosens things. I'm not talking about catharsis. I'm not talking about getting rid of, purifying. Here's this emotion and if I kind of primal scream or whatever, then it is released. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about loosening something so that an alternative flow or an alternative circuit can be found or introduced.

So sometimes working with difficulty—and it might already be, there's already an image or it might be without an image—at some point it's like, can I sense where is the dynamism in all this? What is it? Where's the point where there's power and movement in potential? And actually tune into that and allow that to move things.

Again, we're not trying to get rid of. We could say in a certain language, we're tuning to and supporting a kind of native intelligence in the difficulty. I'm not buying the dynamism so it will kind of bugger off. I'm actually... there is an intelligence here in this frustration, in this whatever it is. And so in this way, possible flows of energy and emotion are opened by feeling it in the energy body in this way and allowing it, feeling it to its power, the movement there, the dynamism. Different than this "allowing on 11" practice that I talked about before. That will actually do something different.

So sometimes feeling the emotion as energy, and the energy moves, and when the energy moves in the energy body, the self-sense moves. Energy body, self-sense—all these things are connected. I let the energy move, the sense of self will change. And sometimes when the sense of self changes, an image can come, sometimes.

So I use this word "dynamism," not that all images are something so dynamic, like that image I shared of the old king and the monkey. But out of the sense, in that case, of weakness, of lostness and loss of power, an image was born. There was something liquid in going to the image.

End of part one. Is that okay? I said there's a lot to get through. Is that okay? All right, part two, about image.

We use this word "image," and so if you just imagine right now... imagine, just however you are able to imagine, don't worry, you don't have to get in the lotus posture. Just imagine a toilet that you know well. At home, or where you've been staying regularly, or even upstairs, or wherever it is. Imagine a train station or a bus stop you can imagine well. Imagine maybe someone who would be a neutral person in the metta practice would fall into the neutral category.

So these are all images, you could say, they're imaginary, even if it's not visual, you have a sense of something. Actually, there's a way in which we can call any perception an image, any perception at all, in a certain way of using language as an image. So you just looking at me right now or looking at your hand or the room or whatever.

What do we mean when we use this word "imaginal"? What's an imaginal image? There's a problem with language here, but just because it's a mouthful to say "imaginal image" every time, mostly when we use the word "image," we mean imaginal image. Occasionally we don't, just to keep you on your toes.

So it's actually—there's quite a lot, it's quite a lot of richness involved in what does this mean, this word "imaginal," in the way that we are using it in these teachings. So for us, there's a gradual evolution, a gradual development of understanding what's involved in the richness of that idea.

What we mean when we use this word "imaginal" is far from a simple black and white determination of whether something is imaginable or not. Probably the toilet wasn't imaginable, but rather than making such stark distinctions, we can speak of a spectrum. Things can be more fully imaginal or less fully imaginal, instead of simply asking "have I got it or have I not?"

Part of what we mean when we say imaginal is that certain qualities are endemic or intrinsic to the imaginal. Beauty is there. Eros is there. There's a sense of meaningfulness that reaches beyond just a meaning or even several meanings. There's a kind of inexhaustibility to imaginal images—I cannot reduce them to just this or just that, or even to a handful of discrete things. There's a sense of dimensionality, of unfathomability.

Love is present with the imaginal, flowing both ways. An imaginal image is sensed as autonomous at a certain level. It's not just a part of me, nor am I in control of it like manipulating a puppet. Often there's a sense—we could even go a step further—of personhood to an image, even if it's not depicting an animal or human. It has its own kind of personhood.

Humility emerges as part of this constellation. When there's an imaginal image present, there's a sense of humility in the relationship. I am somehow humble before this image. And duty arises—in some way, I owe something or am being asked something by this image. With all this and much more, there's a profound sense of soul-making occurring.

So when we use the word imaginal, it encompasses all of this and more. These are qualities that arise in relationship—it's not as though the image by itself possesses these qualities in isolation. The humility resides here in the subjective pole. The beauty feels like it's more over there in the image. But the imaginal speaks to something about the relationship between my experience and this phenomenon, whatever it may be.

Let's consider humility more closely. Here's an image—perhaps fantastical, with dragons and all manner of extraordinary elements. But something about it lacks juice, fails to touch me deeply. There's not this sense of profound soul-making present. Perhaps, and I offer this tentatively, one element missing is humility. I check and discover I don't feel humble before it. I lack that sense of reverence. Sometimes simply noticing this absence allows something to shift. Something changes in my relationship because now humility enters the dynamic, and the whole experience opens up and transforms.

When we speak of the imaginal, we're truly speaking of a relationship, an entire constellation of relational dynamics. This means that something can begin as fully imaginal—rich with all this juiciness and depth—but if I'm not careful with the relationship, it collapses and becomes flat. Whatever eros was present transforms into craving and clinging. The whole experience becomes brittle, one-dimensional.

But the opposite movement is equally possible. Here's something that didn't begin with much juice or soul-making potency. It felt rather flat. There was definitely a good dose of craving present rather than eros. Yet as I attend carefully, working subtly with the relationship, the craving transforms into eros, and the papañca—the mental proliferation and flatness—becomes imaginal. This is part of the art and the alchemy involved.

The imaginal quality depends entirely on the relationship, the conceptual framework, and the way of

looking present at any given moment. Today I want to explore what we might call intra-psychic images. But we should recognize that we can sense the tree outside, this very moment here in the hall, or even our own body in imaginal ways.

The senses can be sensed imaginatively. The world can be sensed imaginally, and others can be sensed imaginally. We could call that extra-psychic. Right now, let me say a little about intra-psychic images—those that are apparently more internal.

After a while, this whole distinction will lose its meaning: intra-psychic, extra-psychic. Everything gets sensed with soul. Everything becomes—the world becomes imaginal, potentially. But for now, let's make that distinction just for teaching purposes.

When I say "image," it's not necessarily visual. There's a problem in language. In English, we say "image" and you immediately think visual. It's not necessarily visual. It can come predominantly through any sense, or a combination of senses, or sometimes in ways where I can't quite locate the sense, or there's a kind of synesthesia involved. All these are possible.

If it's visual, the visual detail is often not very important. If it's aural, sometimes the sonic detail is not important. So the clarity of form of an image is not the most important thing. We're not doing visualization concentration exercises. What's important? Soul-making is. The sense of soul-making.

Sometimes the image is very vague, but the soul-making sense is there. So it's not like I have to get clearer about what the image is, or see it clearly. Do you understand?

Let me give you an example. This is another hormonal one. I was struggling with the effects of hypothyroidism—not sleeping, a very unpleasant buzzing energy in the body, heart rate really fast and thumping. In all that, it was hard for me to get a sense of my depth of resources, or even depth of perception. I felt somehow thin, spiritually thin, not easily settled, not much calm.

So I focused on the sensations and sensed the dukkha—this is just what's going on. I recognized this dukkha and opened to it. Eventually, after a few minutes, I decided to play with seeing it as empty, and me as empty—some *anattā* practice. It fragmented into aggregates and sense elements, and I mixed that with a sense of the emptiness of time.

Then there was a sense—one of the possibilities—where my whole life became like slides, like film stills. The whole thing was there all at once: frozen, timeless moments of perception and experience. The perception of it and me was empty in this way, at least at that level. It helped ease the dukkha. There was considerable release and some quite pleasant space opened in the experience.

There was a sense of the possibility of some *samādhi* because of this softening. But actually it didn't feel personal at all. What I had done was look at something in a very universal way, moving toward a universal experience of the dukkha. There was a kind of universality, and the space that opened was a

kind of universal space.

Then my mind wandered briefly. I remembered that I'd moved house recently and found a box of old tapes from years ago—some from when I was a music student. I had put some on, and it wasn't very good. Anyway, my mind wandered in the meditation to that memory from two days ago. Then my mind drifted again. There's a reason I'm giving all these details.

My mind drifted off again to hearing some music internally—improvised jazz lines that I could see, given my musical training, as melodies on the guitar manifesting immediately. There was a kind of fluidity in all of this. Actually, it was a kind of daydream; I was just drifting off into a little reverie. But with it came this fluidity of improvisation and way of being, and because there was a relaxation of mind and focus, it was actually really lovely—this quality of free-flowing music sort of in the ether, if you like.

Then something shifted. I sensed, it just came: I am this music. I mentioned this the other day—I am this music. I am the music I make. My being is, my person is music. I am played. I am being played. My life is music. It's really hard to articulate in words. My essence is music.

And it's personal because it's this music. At that point, the music I was hearing was not that clear. The soul-making sense was in this different—I don't know, is it an image? Because it's not clear what sense it's in. It wasn't like I really hear this music clearly at this point. The image sense is there's an image of self, really an idea of self, but there was the soul-making sense.

This is where the juice is. This is where the soul makes itself. So I allowed the perfume of that to move through my being and allowed myself to be touched by it. And it's personal because it's this music—a particular music, as if my life is these sounds, these melodies, these harmonies, these rhythms happening in time and eternally. Given to me as me and created by me, given to me and made by me, and created contingently on, dependent on, in interaction with the circumstances of my life—the situations, the events, all of it.

So the emptiness sense I had worked on a few minutes before was still there, but now it was added to by this very personal poetic sense of this existence—this existence in this very different sense of it. Including the dukkha and including the challenges—they were part of the music. You understand? All of it, all of it. And there's this tremendous beauty here, and a big relief of the dukkha, like a whole other level.

The sensations are still there. I'm not going for some fade-out where the sensations disappear and everything. It's not doing that. It's taking it in a certain direction where the dukkha stays, but it's made holy.

Again, why this example, when we could choose how many others? Because the form of the image is not clear. I could have chosen to really hear that music clearly so maybe I could write it down later, whatever. No, that wasn't where the soul-making was. It was in a much more amorphous sense of things.

I choose this example as well because, again, it came from dukkha and it included dukkha. It included a couple of moments at least of the mind wandering. And you know what?

It's okay. There was the opportunism. The mind wandered, it was like, whatever. It's not a problem. What it wandered to became image, became fertile soil. There's an opportunistic responsivity in the practice. It's not about "Can I just really stay with this one thing?" Again, there's emptiness, but actually it's more than emptiness that we're talking about. Again, the self has, in this case, very much become image, but it's not clear what's the—it's not a visual image, it's not particularly an aural image.

And also, this example, because implicit in that, or actually more than implicit, is a whole kind of, if you like, a kind of anthropology and cosmopoiesis. Say to a scientist, "I am music." They say, "Well, I'll put you under a microscope. I don't see it. I can't hear it." There's a whole implicit kind of poetic anthropology. What is a human being? What is this cosmos? So eros is wrapped up in the whole imaginative sense.

The soul-making sense is what's important. When I first started teaching imaginal practice, I think I gave a series of talks somewhere and then someone came to me and they said after a few talks, "Oh, I know what you're talking about. You're talking about ghosts." And I was like, "Wow."

So on the last retreat we did—some of you were there, not at Gaia House—I was in bed at night and suddenly someone came into my room and I sort of sat up and turned around and it was this little old woman. We sort of looked at each other and she just turned and went out. And afterwards I said, when we were packing up, the people that were helping clear up, who worked there, they said, "Oh, did you see the ghost?"

And I was like, "Oh, it's funny you say that," because now that instance, there was nothing soul-making in it at all. There's an image, if you like. It was weird. Slightly. It was kind of, yeah. But there was no soulfulness there. It's not imaginal. It's something else, okay?

We were here once in a teacher meeting and someone took a photo of one of the teachers—it doesn't matter who. And I guess it must have been on a digital camera or something, but they saw the photo right then. And it had, in his chest, it had a kind of ball of white light. And some people were like, "Oh, something refracted wrong in the light." And other teachers were like, "Oh, a deva."

Now, probably for the people who said it's just light got in the camera somehow, it's not soul-making. But some of the people who said, "Oh, it's a deva," it was like, "Oh, it's a deva." It wasn't soul-making at all. It's just like... So it's the sense of soul-making that matters. Actually, either one—the mystery of light and refraction could be soul-making. It's not in the thing, it's in how we relate to it and what happens in that moment, whether it's soul-making or not.

Let me zip through some practice possibilities. I'm talking about intra-psychic images. How can we work with them? How can we kind of support contacting them, etc.?

Number one: play with any practice that liquefies—any practice like samādhi or emptiness practices that you know or mettā. Actually, what they're doing in technical language is they're fabricating less. And in that less fabrication, there's a kind of liquefying. So you do that and you enjoy it. And then after a while, you can kind of just come out a little bit, just relax the attention a little bit. Everything has got kind of liquefied and that can be a very fertile kind of ground out of which images may arise.

Second, I've already touched on, is an emotion that's there.

Whether it's difficult or whether it's beautiful, has enough energy in it that if I feel it in the energy body, it can give rise to an image. It's got some generative energy in it. So through the emotion, emotion has energy wrapped up in it. That energy felt in the energy body can give rise to image.

Third, I used to, when I was first trying to explore all this, what I found really helpful was imagining, actually deliberately imagining going to certain places. And there were places where I would just wait and an image would arise. After a while—one, I don't do it anymore, but one that became quite common for me was somehow a prison cell down in a basement. And I would go down and I would be in this prison cell as the prisoner, usually, and then different images would come. But it might be under a big tree or down another staircase somewhere. It might be a certain place that you go that just becomes the place where you can meet images.

Fourth, you already have plenty of images or potential images in your life—people, historical figures, places. Gaia House might be an image to you, or certain teachers, or memories. There's lots in your life that's already potentially imaginable. Sometimes you can deliberately bring that. I never met John Coltrane—he's an imaginal figure for me, or other musicians, loads of people. They're historical figures, but they function in my psyche as potential imaginal images. So you can bring them.

Fifth, might be you've worked before with an image and it felt fruitful, and you can deliberately bring that back.

Sixth, a dream that feels like it's really touched you in some way—potentially you can bring that and work with that dream image.

And seventh is a prescribed image. Sometimes we're teaching and we just pick up on an image or offer an image or an image from somewhere else, a tantric deity or whatever. That's another option.

In working with an image, the awareness—you want to keep including the whole energy body and the emotional state and the fluidity of that. It's okay, as I said, you're going to lose focus. It's fine, you just come back. No big deal.

And what we're really tuning to is the sense of soul-making. That tuning to the sense of soul-making—implied in that is that mindfulness and sensitivity are very much part of this practice, very much. And again, there's a sense sometimes of which direction in this image, which direction or what

aspect of it gives the soul-making. So if I go back to that music image, I could have gone more clearly to hearing the music more clearly, but that wasn't really where the soul-making was at. So it's a sense of guiding that way.

You guys look tired, so I'm going to stop, although I have more to say. No, there's seven, but there's other stuff I was going to say. I mean, it could be that you're not, and you're just looking that way. Let's somehow find a time later to finish this. We'll jiggle things about and I'll find a time to say the rest of this.

Let's just sit just for a minute or so together.

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