# Sensitivity, Receptivity, and Respect in Soul Work (Q & A)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:05:52

We've covered quite a lot of ground already, and as you can see, there's much to this work. You've thrown yourselves into it, so I welcome any questions or reflections you might have.

*Lauren's Question on Narrative versus Iconic Images*

Lauren asks if I can say more about the difference between narrative images and images that are more—what's the word I use more often? Images that stay with something that's not so narrative.

Yes, I have mentioned this distinction, probably not for a while. I call one type a "narrative image." At first I wasn't sure about the terminology, and I actually spoke to a friend who suggested these words.

A narrative image is something that moves in time—it moves from a beginning, from a situation, through a series of events in time to some kind of resolution or conclusion. Often it stars guess who? And that's part of the problem.

In contrast, I call the other type an "iconic image," which is more eternal. This relates to that element we discuss—eternality or timelessness. But I really want to get away from dogma and give this back to you as an exploration. See what's the difference in your experience when you entertain narrative images and stories in meditation, with all the sensitivity we've been discussing, compared to an image that just sort of—either it doesn't really go anywhere, it's almost like a timeless snapshot of something, or a little period of something. Or it may be a narrative image, but there's this sense that it's always happening. In other words, the beginning is happening at the same time as the end, and it's not really moving toward some catastrophic thing or triumph.

The reason for this distinction is that often narrative images star "me" and work in a way that builds and solidifies the self-sense, the ego-sense, not making it so imaginal, not making it so "neither real nor not real." They tend to get reified—to be about me and about my life and about what I'm going to achieve. Not always, but this is the tendency. There's a quality of happening over time and space.

An imaginal image, by contrast, tends to be more—not static, but as I said, eternal, timeless. There's something condensed or distilled about it, some important essence that carries messages more than could be conveyed in a narrative, more than could be conveyed for a self that makes this journey and then achieves something.

Does that make sense? Again, I would give it back to you as an exploration. Open it and see if you can feel the difference and the difference in effect. My sense—I don't know what you'd call it, my positing—is that there will be a kind of richness and depth and mystery in the more iconic images. They will touch you deeper and be an unfathomable resource in ways that extend beyond just yourself, giving more of a sense of what we call soul.

*On Meeting Imaginal Beings*

You mention characters on a journey that you meet at different points—the same character doing different things in different situations. That sounds wonderful. It's all really fine. Again, I would just give it back to you: What feels soul-making? I know we're explaining it has this quality or that quality, but what we really want is your firsthand experience of feeling that difference. You might not be able to articulate it, or maybe you can now with some of this language, but it simply has a different sense.

I would wager that you're going to prefer that sense to anything else, even if the other kind makes you more assertive or efficient in life. There's going to be some attraction to this soul-making quality over and above anything it gives you on a practical level. You can just follow that.

In terms of the images you're describing—meeting characters in different situations, having different kinds of interactions with imaginal beings—that sounds great.

*When the Mind Creates False Narratives*

I'll add one more thing: sometimes an image is actually not a narrative image, but the mind makes it into one, or thinks it is. I can only think of one example right now. I was walking on Dartmoor, near where I used to live, and the earth reached up these tentacles toward me with a kind of desire toward me. It was a wonderful image, really beautiful. But that was it—a brief snapshot. The mind could add extra elements, like "it pulls me down to what?" But that addition would be unnecessary. The power was in the iconic moment itself.

To dissolution, to union, to something. But actually it didn't. It was the moment of reaching, you know. Does that make sense? It's like, I was thinking, "Oh, this is an image about union," but actually it wasn't, because it never got to union. The image was preserved the *tunas*. Sometimes the mind jumps to a conclusion that's not actually there in the image.

How does that relate to the concertina? The more imaginal any image gets, the more this quality of timelessness is apparent, and it becomes almost a way we recognize an image. All the images in the concertina—it's like they're just there in the shadows. Usually you can't even make out what they are. Sometimes they may be related to this person in front of me.

I'm looking at my friend, my beloved, sensing her with soul, with imagining, and I can sense that there's almost like a selection of images available, kind of like a halo or cloud of available images. But any one of

them is always already happening. It's going to be eternal.

For instance, here I am working in this dyad and looking, and there's the Eros, and I sense her as the cosmic mystical queen—whatever—and I might be in that image. I start to get involved as the cosmic mystical king, and there's this dyad there, and it's beautiful. That's one image, but it's always happening, and whatever they do is always happening. It's almost like you're tapping into something that's always happening.

But in relation to her as an object in this example—or it could be a tree or whatever—there could have been other images. These are what's waiting in the concertina. They will probably also have this sense of always already happening. It's as if you're tapping into some kind of more eternal level of things.

So Zazie is asking about an image that came on the last retreat—the most profound experience of your life—an atomic bomb, all the nodes, all the elements going off, tremendous opening. Since then, nothing has quite lived up to that sort of technicolor extravaganza experience. There's disappointment and comparison and craving, wanting that kind of intensity of opening again.

This is really important. An image is autonomous. It's like you're in relationship with a being. It's really helpful to think of it this way: this is another being that I'm in relationship with. Imagine if you and someone else were close friends or lovers or whatever, and you just had this amazing experience.

If you treat them with respect and care, you receive one response; if you approach them with demands or manipulation, you encounter quite another. This is simply the natural way of dependent arising in the imaginal realm.

So yes, that intensity was wonderful. It might have been exactly what you needed at that particular moment, what your soul required then. But that doesn't mean it's what's needed now. Further deepening, further opening, further refining and nuancing and widening—all of this may not come through intensity at all.

This points to something important about practice in general. Sometimes we become tremendously impressed by intensity, mistaking it for the measure of profound transformation or opening or learning. Sometimes intensity does indeed catalyze deep change, but often it simply remains just that—intense. We can fall into seeking intensity as a marker of significance when it may indicate nothing of the sort. This is precisely where wisdom must enter.

The second consideration involves the relationship between jhanic experience—mystical experience in general—and imaginal experience. Often, when someone practicing jhana and deep samadhi breaks through to a new state for the first few times—perhaps their first jhana or whatever territory is new for them—the experience feels like a dam breaking. It seems completely effortless and utterly mind-blowing. This might happen several times. And then the real work begins.

It's rather like falling in love, where everything feels magical and effortless for the first few months, and then the deeper work of relationship begins—or doesn't, as the case may be. That's where genuine depth can emerge.

In jhanic experience, what happens next is that the feeling of complete effortlessness gradually shifts. You begin noticing incredibly subtle differences and discovering subtle ways to shape the experience. This is where the real learning and authentic relating unfolds. The same principle applies to working with images.

Again, it's worth contemplating this quality of autonomy and personhood—and sometimes even recognizing that this is bigger than me. Therefore, I might ask: am I subjecting this being to my ego's demands? If I do, there will indeed be consequences. This doesn't mean that if I don't make such demands, the intensity will necessarily return. Rather, it's about entertaining a different conception, a different way of playing with relationship.

Consider this possibility: This is bigger than me. It contains more than I can possibly understand. It's both grace and mystery. I will never fully comprehend it with my ordinary mind. How would you relate to such a phenomenon? Certainly not by trying to make it serve whatever small, self-centered ends you might have.

Does this make sense?

Within the larger scope of practice, you're going to open and learn and grow and change through various means—sometimes through intensity, sometimes through one image repeated many times, sometimes through countless brief, one-time images. All of these contribute to your unfolding.

How does this sound? Rather than simply putting down that seeking quality, can you pick up something else—a more skillful way of entering into relationship, not just with that particular image, but with all images?

There's something here, I think, about a very common misunderstanding regarding intensity. Sometimes people fear intensity entirely—I don't sense this is your issue, but some practitioners need to learn: Can you bear a little more intensity? Can you open to a little more energy? But making the mistake of equating intensity with liberation or transformational experience—that assumption definitely needs questioning.

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"Great, thank you. Chris, yes, please."

"Good afternoon. Thank you." Chris pauses. "So this happened before we even mentioned anything about pilgrimage."

"Oh, that's interesting as well, isn't it?"

Chris shares that just yesterday, completely spontaneously, an image of three pilgrims appeared in consciousness. There was a kind of halo around them, and they were carrying shepherd's staffs with curved hooks. His mind immediately judged this as "a bit hackneyed, a bit clichéd," leaving him uncertain how to proceed. When the pilgrims began to move away, he wondered: Should I engage? Should I follow them? Or is this just my ego creating fantasy?

"There are several things to consider here," I respond.

I don't even want to use the word mistakes, but we've got to be free enough to just try things and see how they feel. So if you hear me giving examples where I say, "Oh, then I tried this, no, that didn't feel right, that wasn't helpful," so I revert, or the image changes, I try something else and it doesn't work. It's okay to feel like, "Oh, that wasn't quite the right thing," or "I'm putting too much pressure on it."

I think you've got to feel free to just see what happens, play and see what happens.

Some of you may not feel this at this point, but there's a kind of superabundance of images. If you feel like "Oh, I missed it with that one," it's okay. On the other hand, maybe bringing it back deliberately and just hanging out and seeing what resonates with you—maybe walking with them, maybe just whatever it is—you can find your way back more deliberately to that and just try and see what happens.

But I don't think there's a kind of right and wrong. One of the things I'd really like to communicate on this retreat is the willingness to experiment without a sense of right and wrong and just see what happens. I think the key word there for me is experiment, which implies doing a range of things.

Sometimes what happens is a person might show up, and I've been working with images for ages—it's what I do—but there's actually a fairly fixed way of relating to them, and there isn't that experimentation there. There are different images, but how they relate to them is quite fixed. Does that make sense?

So this is the thing: don't be afraid—I don't even want to call them mistakes—don't be afraid to just try different things. You'll get a feel for what feels more soul-making. We learn in comparison to what doesn't. So in a way, maybe you have to go on a narrative and then make them do stuff and push them around and then realize it doesn't feel right.

On the other hand, as we said in some exchanges, it's not as a rule that me making stuff happen means it's not going to be soul-making. It might be. So it's not like anything can happen, but I'm going in there with a sense of "Well, let's see, let's play a little bit and use my intuition as to what might feel soul-making."

And then it's interesting—the fact that you had that image and then Catherine introduced that thing last night, and several people have said that they have an image and then the world seems to do something very similar. Great. That opens up all kinds of questions, which is beautiful, and I'm not going to say much more about it.

"I feel really at home in the imaginal. I feel very excited about all the images. There's something about

inspiration—I can't quite put my finger on it, but I kind of feel the world of possibilities."

About eros and inspiration? They're definitely connected. There's no question. We haven't talked a lot about eros on this retreat—we have in the past in other retreats, and we could talk endlessly about eros and beauty and what it does. But eros, by definition, is a kind of alive state. It's a state of ignition and awakeness and interest and fire, illumination, all that. So all those qualities go with a state of inspiration. There are just those parallels.

But I think more than that, a state of inspiration or artistic inspiration has eros in it. There's a sense—I'll say this from my experience artistically, and if it doesn't fit yours, that's fine—but when you're inspired with something, you're kind of in love with this thing that you're doing.

Someone asked Stravinsky, the very prolific composer, "What's your favorite piece that you've written?" He said, "The one I'm writing right now." In other words, it is part of the creative process to have eros about this thing. It's got this mystery and this attraction for us. You understand?

And I would say—we've mentioned this but not fully explored it—that when there is eros for other, whether it be a piece of visual art or whatever it is, or an object in nature or an internal image, if we don't get in the way, at some point the self becomes imaginal as well. And so the artist at work, or that meditator inspired, has an image going on, a fantasy of themselves doing the work, doing the practice, dedicating themselves. Do you understand?

To some people that sounds like ego, that sounds like, "Well, I'm not concentrating on the thing because I should be lost in the object." No. There's actually—this is what happens, and we may talk more about this on the retreat—the eros spreads. And you'll notice when you're really inspired, then you go for a walk or whatever, and how does the world seem? The eros, the soul-making, will spread: self, other, world, everything. So everything becomes imaginal and becomes an object of eros, infused with eros.

So then I, as the image of the artist painting or whatever it is, I become an object of eros for myself. I become image for myself. And this to me is absolutely beautiful. So all that goes on in inspiration. Inspiration, I think, is full of eros.

We haven't lingered on it too much, but there's—Catherine talked about it—this idea of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic and how it works together, but that we can get in the way of that in many different ways and stop it from doing its thing. So sometimes what happens is we stop it from coming back to ourselves. Catherine mentioned this: we stop—the other is divine and imaginal and we're not, for instance. And that's kind of lopsiding the whole process, and it doesn't move so well. It doesn't deepen and grow so well.

So there's all that. And then we can talk about eros in terms of fire analogies, also water analogies. It's a very juicy state, you know. And you'll feel that in the experience as well.

But I'm not sure if this is what you're after. Okay, good. So is there more there? Yeah. Where is it going to stop? Right. Yeah. So the question is, where is it going to stop? Is it a question of curiosity? Is there concern? Or is it not really a question?

But that's—in the conceptual framework that we have, that's a central principle: that if we don't get in the way, it won't stop. What does that mean, it won't stop? It means, similar to what I just said—okay, I start something, whatever thing it is, a piece of art that I'm doing or someone else's piece of art or a tree or a person or an internal image as an object of eros. It might start there. It could start with the world though. It could start at any place.

And then that becomes erotic, imaginal, other for me. And in the process, in the—I don't know what you call it—the movement, the involvement, the dance of eros-psyche-logos, it starts to involve me, as I just explained, and then the world, and then other objects, and then even aspects of me.

So then it's like, then even—for instance, my eros becomes, not just me, but aspects of me. Like for instance, my eros becomes an erotic imaginal object for me. My eros is seen and felt imaginarily, and with all that it starts to have dimensionality and divinity. My eros—is it mine, or is it God's, or the Buddha nature's, or whatever.

There's something—it will keep finding new faces of belovedness and new aspects and new complications and new folds in whatever it is. And if we don't get in the way, it won't stop. So there's an endlessness that's possible here.

*[responding to question]*

That's really important. So Maisie is saying, particularly towards the end of the day, mind just starts whirring up images, lots of images, very quickly, one after the other, and none of them seem particularly deep or anything. They're sort of interesting at a certain level, but not particularly soul-making or interesting.

To me that sounds like a particular type of mental tiredness, which I also get. Some people, when they get tired, everything just kind of stops in their mind. And other people, when they get tired, it gets a bit faster, this kind of thing. So it sounds a little bit like that, towards the end of the day.

It might be then there's a time to kind of let go of those images and come back to body and something much more simple and nourishing. And your mind might still wander—it's a bit tired—and just see if you can work with that kind of gathering the energy rather than trying to figure out now which one of these images and why aren't they meaningful and that sort of thing. Does that make sense?

So sometimes you get a sense, despite what I said about doubt and everything, sometimes you get a sense that this thing or that thing is not really worth particularly following. It's just sort of flotsam and jetsam of the mind that's floating around because of tiredness.

*[responding to another question]*

So if I understand it, Nicole's asking that there's a lot of eros that's comfortable and lovely and all that. And the question is about eros in regard to long-term projects, which there's a sort of personality inclination to want to commit to and to stay with, or long-term relationships or whatever. And is there something to be said about eros in relation to long-term projects?

I think there's something again about including the dukkha. I'm tired tonight so I can't really think of examples, but you gave an example of me writing my book, and several aspects became image there. Again, the book itself became image at a certain point. And then the writing of the book, including the difficulty of it and the isolation and things like that.

It might be that you're not looking for something that doesn't have dukkha in it. The image of the one who perseveres, the one who trudges endlessly through deserts or whatever it is, the one who shows up no matter what—all this can become image.

The way we're using it, imaginal image and eros, they kind of imply each other. Where there's eros, if it's left to do its thing, images are born and get deeper and get more varied. And images by their nature elicit eros, evoke eros, and so the whole thing starts mutually inseminating.

But it might be that there are images of whatever they are for you—for this long-term dedication, this willingness to be there when it's dry and when it has a cost and when you'd rather be doing something else. All that can become image. It might be an image that's other, or it might be you as image, or mixtures of all that.

And the other thing—it's a little harder to articulate—is that you can't have images all the time. That's part, for me, that's part of the grace aspect, so that we feel we're given an image or we have access to something and then it goes. If it was there all the time it might just get a bit ordinary, you see.

We can—it's as if, let's say, taken as an image of the long-term sort of commitment—someone who just has got to trudge, she has got to trudge through this desert to get to wherever, and they just need to walk. But there are little oases on the way, and sometimes the connecting with an image is like hitting an oasis for a while. It kind of can hold you more firmly. It's not going to be all the time necessarily.

Does that make sense? Is there a piece missing? Are you sure?

So if... I actually do work in my life. I do. It's not a problem that I have, but I guess it's like—I don't know if this is a correct concept—but if there is a love or something...

The question is: when we love something, is there always an image underpinning it?

It depends on how you mean "always." So I would say yes. When we really love something and we're devoted to it—maybe those two words, love and devotion—there's an image there. And I think that's part

of... There's an image operating and driving that. You could say the drive for it is coming from the image as opposed to being a result of the love. That's a certain way of looking at it.

I would say to realize that is a certain level of psychological awareness. It's not an awareness that everybody has or that society kind of realizes or whatever. I would say that. However, so that's the "always" in that sense. In every instance there is. However, at times we lose contact with an image. And then there's just the dryness and the slog or whatever it is. And that's where these oasis businesses come in.

Yeah, and that can even form another level of image. Again, if you go back to the timelessness, it's like looking at your life from beyond death. You look back at the totality of your life—these periods of long dedication with periods of aridity and periods of inspiration and periods of non-inspiration, and the willingness to continue in the periods of non-inspiration. Do you get what I'm saying? That can become image. It's like a different vantage point on the aridity. Aridity, aridness, whatever.

So that's also connected to this time thing. And actually, just as a general point, that's sometimes a really skillful thing to do: to come out of your life and look at the totality from after death, so to speak. You see the totality of your life, and it can become image. You become, again, you become image for yourself. Your life becomes image, becomes pilgrimage, becomes image of devotion, etc. Hopefully, depending on how we live and all that.

I can't see. Is that Mewa? Okay.

Yeah. So if I try to understand, other retreats where there's a lot of intensity to the whole process and the images and things, and this retreat less intense but perhaps more subtle and more, getting more nuance. And then when Catherine did the seven steps exercise, was it that lots of different images were coming out very rapidly?

No. Okay. I missed the last bit. Another logos once.

Yeah, yeah. So, if I understand you right, following Catherine's instructions this morning and what we played with there, there felt the sense of trying that with different images and a sort of losing the sense of grace and the sense of replacing that with a sense of, "Oh, there's a kind of automatic process here that I can sort of do," and that lost the sense of beauty and specialness and mystery and grace. Is that?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. So, I mean, a couple of things.

Continue beautifying this talk (part 8/11). Maintain the same tone and style as previous parts.

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One possibility is that Catherine and I were just talking briefly—it's not really a formula so much as an invitation to recognize something almost miraculous. Rather than a series of steps, consider this: can you

see the beauty in each element itself? For instance, the practice that really struck me this morning was asking forgiveness—saying sorry. That deeply touched me, this offering of apology on behalf of the human species, certain cultures, and myself.

Rather than approaching this as step-by-step instructions—one, two, three, seven, ignition, takeoff—these are invitations to learn about practice and the mystery of participation in the imaginal. When my humility and willingness to say sorry becomes genuine, that act itself can become image. Rather than a technique, it transforms into something imaginal.

Your identity as soul-making practitioner can become image as well. This isn't a technique of mastery but a mystery of initiation, involving both art and grace, where you yourself become image. Your participation in something utterly mysterious—the profound levels of what participation means—can become imaginal.

The wonder lies in recognizing that everything can potentially become image. Within that recognition, you as practitioner, you as participator, can become image. This business of participation—the final node we've explored—remains the most mysterious of all the elements. The meaning and profundity of our participation in reality, truth, perception, in what things are and what opens up—sensing and feeling into that can become soul-making. This differs entirely from having a set of techniques and tricks to switch things on. It operates at a completely different level.

Let me check how we're doing time-wise. I'm tired, but not in a way that prevents continuing—more that I recognize I'm not quite as sharp as I usually feel. I'm comfortable with that if you are. Should we continue with a few more questions?

Matt asks about our use of the word "image," which we've employed in various senses without careful distinction. There's image in the usual sense—like the tentacles emerging from the earth I mentioned earlier. Then there's the sense of something becoming image, which carries different meaning entirely.

For something to become image means it begins to be perceived imaginally, sensed with soul. Many of you have experienced this arriving at Gaia House—something here was initially just a something, and at some point it begins to be perceived with beauty, dimensionality, mysterious depth, and all the rest. This could happen with a person who starts as simply a person you like or dislike, or relate to functionally, but then becomes imaginal for you. There develops an eros toward them—not necessarily sexual—a profound beauty, mystery, unfathomability. Rather than just a person, they become imagery, meaning something you can never quite articulate, carrying resonances in your soul with beauty and depth.

Roxanne raises a fascinating question about expectations in practice. She notices that when working with images toward soul-making, things never unfold as expected. She might begin with heartbreak, wanting to visualize something dark like a monster to match her feeling, but instead a beautiful image emerges—not something she was reaching for, but what naturally comes, offering profound meaning.

This points to something essential about imaginal practice...

That's what elicited and opened the soul-making—the image that actually came to you, rather than the image you thought you wanted. Is that so?

"Yes, and it seems I keep encountering this. We were going through the seven stages, and I was practicing, and I just thought of an image..."

Is there a problem here? In our logos, the images are autonomous—they're like people with their own intelligence and sensibility and care. All of which sounds like what you're experiencing. To be surprised, I think, is part of the territory. So it sounds great.

I think in different ways people will be surprised, and recognizing the autonomy—this is why we make that an element, recognizing the autonomy of the image. Look, if I could make everything do what I think I want everything to do, it wouldn't be very fulfilling or rich.

In relation to the first thing you said about feeling—was it sadness? Grief, okay. Grief and heartbreak. And then the image that arises is beautiful. But if we go back to what we said with Gladys, I can also become image in relation to the image that arises for me. So I am heartbroken and a beautiful image might then touch my heartbreak. The whole thing becomes the image, rather than just that part. You understand? You can begin to feel that actually what the image is, is that beauty in relationship to your heartbreak, in contact with it. The whole thing is image. Does that make sense?

"Yes, yes."

So again, not thinking, "Oh, that doesn't seem right." It's the two together. It's great.

Okay, maybe one last question.

"It's something about the way in which the image has more tolerance—that's clear. Yet sometimes, particularly when that image arises from a personal experience of suffering or whatever, there's a sense in which it's arising from the ground of my own experience. The image is arising with its autonomy, and yet I'm also there. I guess the confusion is about the connectedness between the image and myself. Sometimes the image might seem something totally separate from you. But it also always feels very personal. That raises the question about what you said before about the image—there's a sense that it's always been there. That's the thing. It's always been there, and yet it's wisdom from this personal experience."

So if I understand, Margaret is asking two questions. There's a sense in which an image feels autonomous, and yet it also seems like it's part of me. That's one. And the other is about images being timeless, while I can also see that they arise from personal experience.

All these are true. An image is me and not me. That particular sense of it being me and not me is more

characteristic of images than either "it is me" or "it isn't me." There's some quality—it's me and not me. So that's exactly right.

When we say autonomy, it's almost like you can lean on that element a little bit to grant the image more space, to stop it collapsing into being just me. But it's never to the point where it feels like this has nothing to do with me. Actually, sometimes there is that sense, but usually that's where the infinite echoing and mirroring comes in. Usually there's some sense that this image, strange as it might seem, in mysterious, infinite ways, echoes in my life and my life echoes the image. The image echoes my life and they mirror each other.

So it's about subtle leanings. As I said, some of the elements in this lattice, this constellation, feel like they say the same things in different words or overlap.

And some of them feel a bit contradictory, you know. So does that make sense?

Similar with the timeless and the reflecting—usual modern psychology holds that an image arises because it's reflecting something that happened in the past. I think what's really potentially exciting and a beautiful thing to play with is: what happens if we turn that upside down? My life is a reflection of image.

The causality is—we're so used to thinking of causality in a certain way. It comes out of this scientific way of thinking: the past causes the present, and something that happened externally will cause an internal image to arise. What if we just play with that?

There's this Greek word called *telos*—it means the cause comes from the end. So this, if you like, the angel out ahead or something, the future causes the past. We can say, "What's all that?" But what if we can just play with that as a poetic idea and see what happens? So that my life is an expression of certain images. Certain things happen to me, certain choices are made, certain things are expressed because I am expressing certain images. I can say more than that—I am called on to express certain images.

Now, if I say "that's the truth," then maybe that's a little too tight. But you can play with turning things upside down. Do you understand? And I would say, if you can play with that, it's quite a different sense of things, and something very beautiful opens up. We can keep the other one too, and go back to the traditional or more common way of thinking about causality: "Yeah, this arises because of a cause in the past," etc.

Is this making sense to people?

And of course, traditional dharma understanding involves understanding causality in the present—my relationship with what's happening makes something arise right now in the present. So causality is really interesting. Most of us find it really, really hard to shift our concepts of causality from this kind of linear thinking where past and external events determine everything. For instance, "the events of my childhood caused this." It's not saying they didn't, but it's just saying there can be tremendous liberation, tremendous

healing, and a tremendous soul adventure to sometimes play with turning that on its head.

Just play with that as a concept and see what that idea, very lightly, does to my imaginal sense, to my sense of existence, to my sense of what this life is, to my sense of—for instance, what Nicole asked about—dedication to something. All of that.

I can see my life is caused by—it has divine roots, it grows from the divine, the images of the divine, the gods, the deities, the daemons, and they express through me. They want something through me. Something to play with.

"Can I ask another question?"

"Sure."

"Which is around the me in the image. So I'm hearing—every time I go to the image, I become part of the image. Is that...?"

So the question is, every time you've had an image, somehow you enter the image.

"Yeah, so the imaginal other is related to me in the image. It's not necessarily related to me. There's an image of you in the whole... Yeah, so is that right?"

Yeah, all kinds of things can happen in terms of the self-sense. So it could be—just to delineate a few—it could be exactly what you're saying. Here's this imaginal other, and then I get an imaginal me interacting with the imaginal other. One possibility. Fine, beautiful.

Or that image is relating to me sitting here, as me. Or, as someone was reporting earlier, it's just that image—there's no me. And that image is just doing their own thing in their own world, doing their own thing. And that's where it's a bit more subtle. It's like, "What's this got to do with me?" Sometimes it's just not that apparent.

And sometimes those are oftentimes the most inexplicably beautiful images as well. This is where this infinite echoing and mirroring—it does have something to do with me.

Again, it's me and not me. And in some mysterious ways that image is refracted into my life and my life echoes that image. So that's a possibility—all kinds of possibilities. I don't think there's a fixed way that this happens.

The beauty lies in remaining open to these endless reflections, these infinite mirrorings that connect us to something vast and mysterious. Whether the images arise as clearly connected to our personal journey or appear as strangers living their own lives in distant worlds, they each carry something essential. Each reflection, each echo, offers its own teaching, its own invitation to see more deeply into the nature of experience itself.

This is the profound intimacy of imagination—how it weaves together the personal and the universal, the familiar and the strange, the self and the not-self. In these quiet moments of receptivity, we discover that the boundaries we typically maintain begin to soften, and we find ourselves participating in something much larger than our ordinary sense of who we are.

Let's rest in this understanding together, allowing whatever wants to arise in the silence to simply be present with us.

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