Wisdom and Desire

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 52:53

There is nothing more significant, more powerful, more central in the determination of our being, our life, our experience—nothing more significant, powerful, central—than how we are with desire.

How we are with desire, our relationship to it, our ideas about it, our logos about it, our skill or lack thereof, shape our self. They make us, they shape us this way or that—how we are, what we do, how we seem, the very sense of our being. They shape our life. That relationship shapes our life and shapes our world, opening it or closing it, coloring it this way or that. Desire is a maker of worlds.

Whenever there is perception, whenever there's experience, there's actually desire. We can't get away from this forever. We're always making something because there's always desire. What, though, are we going to make? What can we make? What freedom do we have to make this or that?

So this whole question of desire—what does it mean to open this up as a question, as an exploration, and bring wisdom in relationship to desire? Sometimes we're a bit too simple with this. So desire is something just to let go of, to get rid of, the quieting of desire, and that's what the path is about.

Can I do anything, anything without desire? Anything at all? The simplest: can I go to the toilet without desire? Can I practice the path? Can I live my life and have a full life? Can I love without desire? Certainly, can I be in an intimate sexual relationship without desire? Can I work well without desire? Is there art, is there creativity without desire?

On every level of our being, from the most complex and involved to the most subtle, I cannot get away from this, and I cannot get away from what it's asking of me. I can try to bring a simplifying answer to it, and maybe that reassures something in my heart and my mind. But if I'm awake, I very soon bump into the rub that that simple answer or conceptual structure doesn't actually fit my life. It doesn't actually work with the range and the power and the subtlety that we need.

So what is your relationship with desire? That's the big question. What are your ideas about desire? Maybe some of them will be conscious, some of them will be unconscious.

Sometimes in Buddha Dharma we can have this view: desire is not good. The path is to end desire somehow. And desire is always connected with vedanā. So desire is always kind of chasing pleasant or trying to get rid of unpleasant. But is that really the limit of what desire is? That it's something in relationship to the tonality of pleasant and unpleasant, either chasing the pleasant or avoiding the unpleasant? Certainly sometimes it is. Does that really capture the fullness of the human psyche's relationship and motivations of desire?

Is the only desire that's kind of acceptable a desire for a decrease in suffering? So how are we thinking about desire? How are we delineating desires in our understanding? We've got to have some desire because otherwise we wouldn't come to retreat, wouldn't book a retreat, wouldn't come. Maybe the only desire that's good is the desire to end desire or the desire to decrease suffering. So we can kind of have some discernment about desire, but we put it into two camps. And everything else is—it would be better if I didn't have it, but somehow I do have it, and I kind of arrange my life with it.

Do we live like that? Do we really live, if I look at my life, do I live in a way that follows this discrimination of "the only good desire is a desire to decrease my suffering or the suffering in the world"? I mean, there is that desire and that might have a lot of power, but is that really—are we really living like that? I'm just talking about honest and discerning self-reflection now. So I might have an ideational structure, I might have got it from Dharma teachings or somewhere else.

Is that really what's going on? Is that really what's happening in my life? Is there some kind of cognitive dissonance here? Do we need a bigger and perhaps more complex psychology around this thing called desire, this force called desire?

And what are the asks? What are the demands? We are born with this force called desire operating in our life. What is being asked of us here? Is it just the quietening of that? Is it just to put everything else aside as much as we can and just have the desire for the decrease of suffering?

Can we begin to discern different kinds of desire and different kinds of relationship with desire and different kinds of ideas about desire? So we talk about—I'll get back to this soon—but we talk about craving and eros and discerning between them. And can we discern between those two? Can we guide, if we're stuck in craving and the contraction of that and the pain of that and the tightness of that—can we actually, is it possible to allow that to open up, to skillfully guide it so it becomes eros, something much more beautiful, fruitful, open-ended, not contracted, fecund, in the best possible way? Do we have that skill?

So there are questions of discernment here and questions of skill I want to come back to. But let's again pause on the discernment thing.

Most of you here, after you've been—if you come to more than, I don't know, three retreats in your life—you probably love something about all this path and practice. What is it that you love? And what is it that you want? And is it really, again, is it really just to suffer less?

In a way, it's a little ironic or paradoxical or perhaps not fully honest that we have a terminology that talks always, with all its brilliance through the Four Noble Truths, about reducing suffering. And so we've probably got—my contention is we have all kinds of things going on that we desire and what we really love and why we show up here and are willing to sit through all the difficulties and walk through all the difficulties. Is it just because we want to reduce suffering?

There are plenty of people who relate to meditation like that, but usually they go to an evening course and learn a few techniques to suffer less. And that's great. And that's really important. Learning how to suffer less is really important.

But what is it that you're really wanting now? I mean, it includes that. But what else? What draws you here? Not just to this retreat.

Is it not that you are in love with a kind of beauty about all this? There's something about sitting this way and doing what you do that is beautiful to you. That you are in love with some mystery, some perfume of mystery that comes with all of this. And that in itself is not really about reducing suffering.

Is it not that you love love? And you love the goodness of heart and the beautiful qualities of heart. It's not just a functional relationship. When we're in love with practice, it's not just a functional relationship. "I come so that I can learn some things to reduce suffering." Yes, but more.

How many people have told me over the years, "Boy, when I heard the Heart Sutra for the first time, I didn't know what the hell it was talking about, but something—it's like, I want that." There's something ignited in the heart.

Many of you have this or talk about emptiness. "I don't quite understand." What's attracting you there? Is it just that, oh, that sounds like a very good idea that I could reduce my suffering by understanding that? Good, okay. That's not what happens. Something else comes into flame.

And I would contend, actually, the way I think about emptiness is you can understand it at lots of different levels. The beginning levels of emptiness, or the less profound levels, are very much about different ways of seeing that reduce suffering. As it gets deeper, it becomes much more about mystery, and I would say sacredness. There's a kind of beauty and mystical sense that opens up in the deep reaches of exploration of emptiness. Yes, that has an effect on suffering, but that's almost not what's driving a person to practice at that level and to be drawn at that level.

And yet somehow we don't quite acknowledge that or recognize that fully and give it its due and its place. And we just keep talking about reducing suffering.

Do you recognize that when you show up here and practice diligently, devoting yourself to practice over the years, you inevitably develop fantasies—multiple fantasies woven together—of practice, of path, of yourself as practitioner? These fantasies encompass the devotion to the tradition you walk in, the stream that supports, nourishes, and inspires you. They include practice itself, awakening, the Buddha, the teachers, the lineage of teachers. All of this has become imaginal for you to some degree.

And all that is beautiful. All that is, to some degree at least, erotic for you. There's image already there. Yet somehow we don't really acknowledge this. We don't say, "Hey, maybe this is significant." We don't have words for it, don't point it out. We just keep talking about reducing suffering.

So there are differentiations here—we'll return to this. And with these differentiations come the asks: What are the skills and arts that I can develop? What can I open up in relation to this whole complex mystery of desire?

Can you let go? Have you practiced that? This thing you're obsessed with, this papañca, this person you want who maybe doesn't want you—whatever it is—can you let go? We talk a lot about this in Buddha Dharma: let it go, drop it. How's your skill at doing that? Can you let go of those big attachments? Do you have enough practice with that? This is one of the foundational skills of all soul making. If you can't do this, perhaps developing this capacity needs to come first for many people.

And then, what about letting go at much more subtle levels? Yes, there's the big papañca obsession—this thing you want, this person you want. But then there's the whole possibility of letting go in meditation at increasingly subtle levels. Things you wouldn't even consider as objects to release, wouldn't even recognize as craving. The beauty of this movement into more and more subtle letting go, and what it opens up—yes, freedom from suffering, but much, much more. The beauty and mystery that opens up in relation to emptiness and fabrication and the unfabricated.

How is your journey with that subtlety, with letting go at increasingly refined levels? You might be listening and thinking, "That's so much to work on." How about seeing it differently: there are treasures everywhere. You are in the middle of the most glorious banquet buffet, and you say, "Oh, it's terrible. There's all this food I have to eat." Someone tells you, "It will be there. This buffet will keep getting replenished longer than you live." And you respond, "That's just terrible." But it's beautiful! I will never get to explore all the possibilities—partly because the territory keeps opening up more and more from a neuropsychological standpoint. And that's wonderful.

So there's that journey: letting go of gross attachments, then this exploration of increasingly subtle levels of meditative inquiry, revealing exquisite beauty and profundity.

Then there's another ask: Do you dare? Do you dare to follow the desire for what you love, even if it brings dukkha? This again relates to shaping our life. What happens to me, my life, my very being, if I don't? If I close that down and say, "Oh, that's dukkha. I might start judging myself if I don't get it, or I'll probably get hurt." What happens to my personhood, my being, my life?

Think about the Buddha's journey in that mythical story—prepared to endure tremendous suffering. Again, it's spoken of and conceived as his wanting the end of suffering. Or think of an artist's journey, the dedication, the frustration. Do you dare to follow the desire for what you love? There can be dukkha in that. Actually, there will be dukkha in that.

This is the question at the heart of it all: what is our relationship with desire really about?

There's a vast range of skills we could explore here, though we don't have time to cover everything now. We've discussed much of this territory before. In fact, we devoted an entire retreat called "The Alchemy of

Desire" to exploring these different aspects of desire. That material is available on the website, along with another extensive series called "Eros Unfettered," which delves deep into these subtleties.

One practice we developed that surprised everyone with how accessible it was, we called the OCD practice—short for "opening the current of desire." Without going into detail now, this isn't about eros as we're discussing it here, nor even primarily about the imaginal. It's about the energy of desire itself and how we can cultivate a different, more skillful meditative relationship with that energy. This approach opens desire in completely unexpected ways, bringing fruits we never could have imagined would flow from such a relationship. The possibilities are endless, and while that material exists, we don't have time to explore it now.

But here's the crucial question for our work with the imaginal: We have this phenomenon we're calling eros—a particular kind of desire that we contrast with craving. Can I recognize the difference? Can I discern when something is craving versus when it's eros? And further still—is it possible to learn how to transform craving itself? Can I open up that pain, that contraction and constriction, that sense of being blocked, and allow it to flower into eros with all its inherent beauty?

This is a genuine skill, and like all skills, it must be learned through practice. How do we learn it? By making mistakes, as we discussed in Chris's question last night. We have to fall down. We have to get burnt. How else can we truly know the difference between craving and eros until we actually experience getting burnt? "Oh, that's what happens. Ouch." But it's okay—it's all part of the learning.

We're playing with fire here. If you want to engage with this territory, you must understand that you're playing with fire, and yes, you will get burnt. That's perfectly fine. You'll survive. We all can.

There's tremendous skill possible in all of this, and so much depends on developing these capacities. This is why I keep returning to this fundamental point: so much depends on our relationship with desire—our capabilities with desire, our ideas about desire. This particular fork in the road between craving and eros is especially crucial, because it determines what worlds are born, what selves emerge, what experiences become possible.

We can learn enormously. We can develop real mastery in this art. But we will never be complete masters of eros. It's bigger than us, like all the gods—always bigger than us. This calls for a particular kind of humility.

So yes, there's mastery to be developed, artistry and subtlety that are genuinely important. And simultaneously, there must be humility in our relationship to these forces. Eros, emotion, the imaginal—they're all larger than we are. And thank goodness for that! Would you really want to master all the mysteries completely? Would they still be mysteries if you were their master? Don't we always want something bigger than ourselves? Something we can never fully wrap our minds around?

Eamon and I were talking last night, and he made me laugh when he said—I don't know if he got the same

response from the group when he mentioned it—but he observed, "Eros Psychologos... no one talks like that." And it's absolutely true.

Why all this Greek terminology? Yes, it's true—what the hell are we doing? But that's precisely the point: no one talks like this, or rather, no one thinks like this. We have a poverty of differentiation, a poverty of discernment. When we don't discern something called eros as separate from craving or other kinds of desire, we lack the language and conceptual framework to guide and support this endless and amazing opening. We keep putting everything back into the same box: "It's just desire. I like it. I want it." This doesn't open the avenues.

I don't know why the Greek emerges—I have no idea. But the differentiation itself is part of the world birthing, part of what supports that. Again, we're back to logos and all that. So yes, no one talks like that, but that's part of the problem: we don't have the language.

As I've said, look—it's already here. In the Dharma, we have this very simplistic way of talking about desire and letting it go and what the path is about. But just look, take some honest self-reflection as I talked about before. Is that really what's going on? Is there not already eros and already the imaginal air? And yet we don't have the language. That's why the language matters. This language will help to support and make sense of and open up these worlds.

We want differentiations, discernments, subtle nuances of recognition and ideas—and therefore words to communicate with each other—that support soul-making. We don't have that in the culture, in the wider culture and even in the Dharma culture. You might say, "Oh, that's fine, I'm not really interested in soul-making, that's fine." But there's a cost.

Consider how we think about desire in this simplistic view. We think it's either just ego or just chasing the pleasant on one hand—that's unskillful, and we try to get rid of that—or it's skillful, it's kusala, which would be like desire for metta and desire to end suffering. And that's it. There's this kind of bifurcation. With the skillful desire, we can say, "Hey, don't overdo it, don't push too hard." That bifurcation is actually great, that differentiation. But do we not need some more?

If I make just that bifurcation, those are the choices presented to me in my life. Either I'm just saying, "Yeah, I can't really hack the whole path, otherwise I'd be a monk or a nun. So really I'm kind of making a pact with—or just putting up with the fact, the recognition—yeah, I have some ego, and I kind of laugh at it. Self, ha ha ha, self does the silly stuff. And yeah, it would be great if I wasn't so into the senses and sense pleasure, but, you know..."

That conceptual structure—that over-simplistic conceptual structure—gives me choices that don't even make sense of my life.

So, eros. Catherine already defined it. Like I think I did with the energy body, maybe we can make a kind of narrower definition and a wider, fuller definition.

Catherine already gave the narrow definition. Among desire—which is a big, big complex thing—we make one delineation of this thing, this kind of desire that we're going to call eros. Then we make a further delineation between what we might say is just the basic narrow definition of eros, and then we'll open that up.

Basic narrow definition of eros—a small definition, if you like. Catherine already said it: any desire or wanting for more contact, connection, intimacy, opening to and opening and touching something—the beloved, the erotic other. Any wanting more of that.

So that's it. It's a very basic definition. The thing that's so significant is what happens to that wanting more. This arises for us as human beings.

We want more contact, more intimacy, more touching, more opening. But what happens when this natural desire meets our limited perceptions?

If I remain trapped within a narrow view of the beloved—this thing I desire and want more contact with—then it becomes flat, defined, confined to a box. This real self wants that real thing in a real world in real time. I want more of it. And I'm stuck in that conceptual prison, unconsciously assuming this is simply how reality is.

When this rigid conceptual framework doesn't budge, when I want more but see only flatness, then I must either suppress the desire—take the proverbial cold shower—or pursue it compulsively. I might pressure the other person, disregard the consequences of my pursuit, or endlessly chase similar objects horizontally. Flying from holiday to holiday, consuming more and more, regardless of what it does to the earth. I remain trapped in flatness, where more can only mean more of the same. The more is only horizontal.

But what if I'm not stuck? What if intelligence awakens? What if the imaginal opens up?

Then this eros wanting more begins to discover more by creating and discovering richness within the beloved itself. The desire starts to perceive not just this flat, boxed thing, but multiple dimensions. If the eros includes the imaginal sense, then this wanting more begins to create and discover depth in what I love. It becomes richer. I perceive more faces, more dimensions there.

You—if it is you I love—become alive to me with multiple images and depths and beauties. What a profound difference this makes! I receive the more because more is genuinely there for me. More delight, more wonder, more mystery, more faces, more complexity, more beauty. I get the more.

But then eros wants even more. And if this movement isn't blocked, the sense of the beloved grows exponentially—more faces, more dimensions, more mystery. If blocked, I'm forced back to horizontal seeking. If unblocked, the sense of things simply opens up, revealing inexhaustible depths.

This is such a crucial pivot. If I cling to the idea that imagination is mere nonsense—that I might have an

image of someone, but that's not reality, this person is simply like that and that's it—then even when the imaginal arises from the power of my eros, my logos rejects the imaginal perception. I'm thrown back into prison, and the energy must go somewhere else horizontally.

But when this repeated opening happens, beauties upon beauties and mysteries unfold gradually. Not necessarily all at once, but through this repeated expansion of my sense of the beloved, something profound begins to occur.

As I move in and out of these wondrous, beautiful, touching perceptions—so different from conventional seeing—this flowing movement gradually transforms something deeper: my thinking about reality itself, about what a person is, not just who this particular beloved is, but what a human being truly is.

In this questioning—who am I, what is my perception, what is this eros—the world begins to look different. Through this repeated movement in and out, this continuous striking of the soul, something fundamental shifts. My soul is touched deeply, and at some point within this process, the logos itself—the very idea of what the world is, what reality is, what the cosmos is, what the self is, what humanity is—begins to open.

So the logos grows, not just the eros. Not just the psyche in terms of imaginal perception expands, but the idea grows as well. And as the idea becomes richer, the sense of things becomes richer. Eros becomes even more inflamed, and the whole dynamic can simply flourish endlessly. This is what we call the eros-psyche-logos dynamic—potentially infinite, endlessly fertile, endlessly creating and discovering more beauty and more wonder.

As this process unfolds, if we return to Amon as our example, more elements of the lattice become illuminated. More and more aspects of the constellation light up. The experience itself becomes more fully imaginable. This dynamic ignites those different elements we've been discussing, but it also requires them to support the entire process. It needs a sense of beauty, it needs ideational structure, it needs all of these components working together.

We need sensitivities, permissions, understandings, ideational structures, openness of perception, awarenesses—we need all of this to support us in not becoming trapped in the belief that a real self desires a real thing in a real world in real time, with all the havoc that such entrapment creates. In our globalized world, with the technological power we possess and the spread of consumerist culture alongside a flat metaphysics that doesn't allow for this kind of opening and depth, we see enormous havoc being created.

People are taught they can have their desires, they're given economic opportunity and availability, yet there's no metaphysics or conceptual structure that supports anything beyond the rampant destructive consequences of endless consumption—because the worldview is flat and can only lead to more, more, more in a very real way. What we observe personally in individual relationships, we can see mirrored

globally.

I don't know that we need to become Greek, but I think we somehow need these concepts, this understanding.

Practice-wise, everything feeds everything else here. Once again, everything is dependent arising. Here I am—perhaps in meditation or in daily life—and I keep receiving images of someone I really care for. I want that person. There's eros present, and they come to me through images. This could be any imaginal figure or any object in the world where eros exists in the small sense.

At this crucial point, eros in the small sense—this desire for more—can move in either direction. It could become craving if it gets stuck in certain ways, or it can open into the larger sense and ignite the whole imaginal constellation more and more. So what supports this opening? How can I help it move toward eros rather than collapse into craving, open into eros rather than contract into craving?

One key insight is that all these nodes, all these elements feed each other. The more fully I bring my whole energy body into relationship with whatever I'm engaging—whether it's a person, an object, or something in my imagination—the more this supports the opening from craving into eros rather than remaining stuck in craving. This is genuinely good news, because it means there are many things we can do.

Generally speaking, what happens with craving is contraction—contraction of the mind around the object, contraction of the self-sense, contraction in the energy body. This is not so with eros as it opens in the full sense. Because everything is mutually dependent, we can work with opening the energy body more fully, engaging the whole body in relationship to this image or whatever we're working with.

What does this mean practically? It means knowing this object, being in relationship with my whole body, my whole energy body. This kind of embodied engagement supports the opening of eros rather than the collapsing into craving.

Now, this process will happen many times, and inevitably we will fall off the bicycle, we will get burned. But there are always ways of reopening, of returning to this dynamic. That's one approach.

Another support—and we could probably list countless others—is this fullness of intention.

"I want you. I want us to be in relationship. I want to have a baby with you. I want to go on holiday there. I want this. I want that. I want it to happen." And yes, very often that want can become oriented toward a real self in a real world. What happens if maybe that intention is there—there's a kind of small intention—but can I open up to this fullness of intention?

When I want you, or I want anything to happen in a relationship, what is it that I most deeply want? What if that could actually be—what I want is the soul-making? It seems to be you, but what I most deeply desire is the soul-making and the sacredness and the endless opening of that. Does that make sense? This isn't necessarily easy. But what happens if I can open up the intentions? What do I really want?

Sometimes people say, "I want—okay, it's not that thing or that person, but what I want is the aliveness or the juiciness that happens in their presence." Great, but I would say don't even stop there. You actually probably want something even wider and deeper than that. You want the fullness of soul-making, and that can be an intention.

This middle way of the imaginal again—where a real self wants a real thing in real time, real world—can I see that this that I'm wanting, or this that I have an image of happening and then think I would really like that to happen, is already happening? It's already happening. We are already making love in the imaginal realm if that's what I want. It's already, always happening.

And that recognition—that's actually to do with the eternality, sorry I skipped that—but that does something. I don't need to make this happen; it's already happening. It's a part of the imaginal sensibility. I recognize something, and that does something different to the nature of my desire. It opens up craving to eros; it helps to do that.

The one I meant to say was this "neither real nor not real." Can I find ways of playing with that? And again, actually get the sense. So it might come from emptiness. It might come from just, again, with these elements, we notice things. So if you look at—it's almost like you notice the fact that an image is neither real nor not real. It's not that you have to make it that. It's like if you just pay attention, you see, "Oh, yeah." Or when it's reified, you just remind yourself of that possibility, and then it has that quality of feeling neither real nor not real. That does something to how much we need to concretize this desire.

Is all this making sense?

I mentioned last night in the Q&A—there's lots of expansions potentially happening here. The expansion of all the elements in what we're calling the lattice or the constellation, to more or less degrees. The expansion of eros, psyche and logos. And the expansion of the imaginal sense from just the object, or expansion to self, other and world. So again, if it's just the object and not the self that's imaginal—the real self but imaginal object—that also causes problems, causes contraction. So is it possible to actually just check: where has the imaginal sense gone and the eros gone? And actually, is it possible to just allow it to include self and world? That more space takes the pressure off, allows more fullness, more beauty, stops the concretized "I want this, I need to get it."

Another one: grace. Just recognizing the grace in the sense of the erotic imaginal starts to open the hardness of the craving. It's hard to feel grace and feel contracted in craving for something.

The ideas—again, if I'm stuck with a certain idea of "desire is bad," then there's going to be all this dissonance in my sort of "want it and it's bad" and I don't have any kind of idea or conceptual framework about what is possible here with this desire. And maybe there's self-judgment as well and it's like, "I shouldn't be having this." Mess, contraction, not desire. So what's the logos that's operating? Can I check that and see if it can open out in some way?

The sense of eternality—that's huge. I mentioned that just now. Always already happening.

Humility and reverence. These are challenging territories. Humility—for most of us, it's a charged word, or we carry only a small understanding of what it might mean. But if that starts to fill out, here's another expansion. Each of these ideas, each of these elements can also start growing in our soul. What is humility? What does it feel like? What does it look like? I might begin with only a small idea of that. As soul-making takes hold of the idea of humility, that starts to become rich and wide. And as that gets going, again, it becomes very hard to have a small, tight, rigid craving. Something is softened, something is opened.

Now, here's a slightly different tuner. Sometimes there's this desire for something, and that desire starts to collapse in a kind of union. In other words, we desire something, we move towards it—even in our imagination—and then we just melt with it, which can be really lovely. That's a real option. But at that point—and some people define eros this way, as the desire for union, the desire towards oneness—that's not how we're defining it.

Many of these words are used in different ways, in different circles. We're saying eros preserves and needs a sense of twoness. It's in that erotic tension between the two that the whole imaginal can be born. If I collapse into it, it's wonderful and great and certain colors can open up, but it's a different experience than the erotic imaginal. There's something about preserving the twoness.

So it might be that what collapses the eros is simply a habit—perhaps a meditative habit or tendency—to just go to oneness. But eros needs two, and it actually creates more two. The same with the example of Amon—it will create more faces of the two. It preserves, creates, multiplies.

One last tuner for now. It's implicit in all I've said: the beloved other has elastic edges, soft and elastic edges. That's part of their mystery. It's part of their capacity to stretch. And because of that—because of both that sense of mystery and beyondness and their stretchability—that lets everything else be elastic. That's part of what eros is and does.

Someone wrote a note asking: Would you at some point specify what you mean by the fullness of image, or something being fully imaginal? Is the fully imaginal the goal of our practice, and what would be the other end, opposite of that range of more or less fully imaginal?

I don't know if the answer is already clear from what we've explored, but let me say a couple of things. Basically, eros and all these other elements—if eros is allowed to do what it wants to do, it wants to impregnate the psyche. It wants to enrich and complexify and deepen and widen what it beloves, its beloved other, and everything else, eventually. If it's allowed to do that, then what will happen is the object, the thing that we desire, will become more and more fully imaginal—by which we mean more and more of those elements will start igniting.

I didn't want to make it too much like "it is imaginal or it isn't"—too much of a black and white. Then

people go, "Have I got it? Have I not got it?" Think of it more as a direction. You understand? Things can be more and more ignited because they're becoming more and more fully imaginal. Then we don't get so on-off about it.

Why? What is the goal of our practice? Is it for everything to become fully imaginal? Not necessarily. It's a mode of seeing. It's a mode of being in the world that comes and goes at times, I think. What's the point?

If you ask me to sum up in a sentence what's the point of all this, I would say: to open up the gates of sacredness. To open them wide and far and deep, more and more to expand the senses, the sense, the felt sense, the experiences of sacredness in our existence, in everything, any possibility. That's the point.

Now, we can do all that by, as Catherine was saying the other day, letting go of all desire in relation to objects. "I don't want anything but the unfabricated, that which is beyond all sense experience." There can be eros for that, and there can be a desire for that, and there's a certain kind of holiness that goes in that path. We can have that, absolutely. It's not either-or. You can have that whole movement and that kind of sacredness, and it's awesome.

But there are an infinite number of other kinds of sacredness that have to do with things and particulars—not the fading of things and particulars into universals, but things and particulars and angels and the world becoming angels. And that is endless.

So it's up to us what we want, but the purpose is this opening up of more and more of a sense of sacredness. And why? Well, either you want that or you don't, or you could say it's what soul wants. Soul wants to sense that way. That's what soul's about. And the range of that—whatever sense we have, "this is sacred"—it just opens that up more and more and more: the colors, the dimensions, the folds and angles of what that means. That's the point.

And for that, we need to speak in funny Greek words. No, we don't. But we need these discernments. No discernment, no opening of certain gates. So we need to make these differentiations of desire, differentiations, recognitions of how I'm thinking about it, what I'm allowing to be possible, making the discernments, and developing the particular skills or arts in relation to all these different avenues, doorways, and discernments.

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