Of Hunger and Humility

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 16:01

Can you hear me okay?

I think the first thing I want to say—we're not going to talk for very long now—is simply thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for showing up in the full sense of the word, in the ways that you did, for engaging, for playing, for working hard. Just thank you for your practice. It's very beautiful.

I'm quite aware that some of you will have come and thought, "Yeah, thanks, it's interesting, but maybe it's not really for me." And that's really important—to make that distinction, and make that choice, and have that freedom, and follow what calls you.

Some of you might feel that there are some things here you could use, and some of the ideas and probably more some of the practices we've been offering will be added to your repertoire of what you do in practice in a somewhat piecemeal way. And that's fine too, of course. You're very welcome to that.

And then there'll be some of you for whom there's just something about what we've been talking about and what we've been trying to unfold together here that feels completely natural. There's something—it's almost like putting words to something that several people have said—putting ideas and words and a kind of framework for what the soul does anyway, or was doing anyway, or was pulled to. And you'll be hungry for more and hungry for all of it, and hopefully there are teachings and practices that you can begin to get your bearings and navigate with in all this.

I would say that there is a way in which what we've been talking about is really natural. In our language we say soul-making is natural to the soul. It's what the soul wants. It's what it does. And there's a way in which the path of soul-making expands and grows very naturally. It's what it does if we don't block it, if we don't get in the way. So in a certain sense, what we've been doing is just highlighting some of the ways we can get in the way, and some of what can possibly unfold.

I can't even remember now—was it yesterday morning we talked about the five ranges? That list, which I think is now up there, which I just ran through very briefly—five possible domains in which the range of our experience and our openness can extend further. We talked about each of the elements in the lattice and the constellation, the lattice itself. We talked about its spreading along the axes of self and world. We talked about the range of eros and the range of logos, the range of ideas which we can even entertain or play with or allow—ideas of what a human being is, what existence is, what kind of world or cosmos we live in or create or discover, the whole edifice of flexible metaphysics. We talked about the range of energy-body experience and sense, and we talked about the range of what we might call apparent

pathology to apparent non-pathology.

One thing about that process—and I didn't really say it, though I think some of you understood—is that those ranges will unfold naturally as well. That's just the natural movement of soul-making.

I hope you didn't come away yesterday with the idea that we need to force these, that we need to push. "Right, range. Let's push faster. If I'm a little bit scared of the dark end of things, or I'm really not sure about this apparently pathological aspect, now I have to really try and have some really dark, weird images." No—it's just to be aware of what my tendencies might be, ways I might be closing, just even my conception of what's possible or available or right. Not to force, not to push, just to be aware.

Sometimes in this process of natural growth, there are periods where things just break open—they explode open, the vessels are shattered, and a whole new range opens up of experience, of perception, of energy, of idea, of eros, all of it. And there are periods where we're just at a certain place, a certain range, and we need to be there for a while. Maybe really a while. Just safe, consolidated—not really a plateau, but just at that range. So really not to force it. There's something very natural here that needs to be respected.

At the same time as there's a naturalness to soul-making and the opening of that perception, have you had the sense this week—and just even in your life, but also the experience this week—of just how easy it is and how common it is for us to get in the way of that natural opening of soul-making? So easy. Either through limited ideas, through limiting energy, through limiting eros, through limiting the possibility of image in any of these ways—how easy it is and how common it is for us to be working either in meditation or even intentionally with another person around soul-making with that intention, and how easy it is for it to divert very easily into something that's close, maybe something that's familiar to us about a way of practicing, about a way of thinking of practicing, about certain psychological ideas or ways of relating to dukkha or whatever—all of which are absolutely lovely and really valuable.

So there's this balance between what's natural and what might be asked if you're interested and have fallen in love a little bit with all this. There's the ask of this kind of respect for natural unfolding, and the kind of care of discernment—oh, when are we now actually in a different paradigm? When am I, in my experience, in my way of looking, in a slightly different paradigm? Not to say one is better or worse, but different. And there's a kind of care of discrimination that's possible there.

Also, when we're together in different ways—in groups or two people or whatever—and there's the intention for soul-making, how much of the potential there depends on the care of the relational field, and that something in the relational field can also prevent, block, divert.

So if we use this idea—I said it earlier in the retreat—rather than a black and white between it is soul-making or isn't, have I got it, have I not got it, it is imaginal or it isn't, hopefully there can be this kind of idea of like it's a direction. We can open up more and more what we might call the fully imaginal or the

genuinely imaginal. So we avoid all this kind of judgment and we instead bring in a kind of care and discernment.

Soul-making, soulfulness includes heartfulness, definitely, but it's more than that. It includes love and metta, yes, but it's more than that. It includes certainly using the imagination, or being allowed to use the imagination, but it's more than that, it's more involved than that. And it includes being open to desire, but it's more than just that phrase.

And so there's a kind of invitation for those of you that are drawn or interested. There's the care of discrimination, not for the sake of better, worse, advanced—it doesn't matter. It's more this idea that something can seem a little narrow, but going through that narrowness just for a little while then opens up other reaches that wouldn't otherwise be available.

I guess this is true for this kind of dharma, what I'm about to say, but I'd say it's true for any kind of dharma that you love, whether it's emptiness or whatever it is. If people ask me, what advice can you give? What would be helpful? Two words: Be insatiable. Be ravenous.

Practically, you know, you guys have heard lots of advice about taking care of your practice outside and perhaps we'll talk a bit more about that. But in relation to soul-making, the importance of exposing yourself to beauty every day—in our culture, it takes the lowest rung in the pecking order above functionality, convenience, comfort, economics. Soul-making, you might also say going deeply into beauty is the same as going deeply into soul-making. It's the same thing. They can almost be interchangeable words—the fullness and the richness of what beauty really means to the soul.

There's something about taking care every day. What does that mean? Some exposure to beauty—art or nature or ideas or dharma or whatever.

And again, you might have sensed this already. I mentioned it just a minute ago. If it is soul-making that you're drawn to, and if some of your practice of soul-making is attempting to do that together—in groups, or two people, or whatever it is, in relationship—then how much that needs a kind of care and alertness and sensitivity and responsiveness, to care for the relational field, the temenos, in which soul-making can happen.

It needs a vessel, it needs a crucible. And this vessel, this crucible of soul-making—just even in ourselves, but even more so when we're with other people—is so easily shattered. It's a fragile thing. And it's asking a lot of us that care, relational skill, willingness to speak what's maybe difficult, speak one's honesty, work it through with another person.

So we have to be really interested. This question of—this was almost soul-making, or it was completely not soul-making, and what makes the difference? How? This is a question for discernment. We're really interested in, how do I care for, what are the conditions to care for that vessel? It's a living vessel, this temenos.

And so it can be really interesting, rather than judging myself—oh, I can't really—or judging another person—it's their fault, if they weren't here, it would be soul-making. Care. Care and discernment, and care in the discernment. It's a living, living thing, this vessel, this temenos.

Even this balance of attention thing that we just touched on so briefly—several people have told me we could have spent a whole week with that. How easy it sounds and how hard it is for human beings, especially in our culture. So actually, just even developing one's kind of sensitivity and skill with that is actually part of this vessel and how difficult that is, how challenging.

We'll talk more about that in a minute.

So if you're in love with this or some other kind of path of practice of Dharma, be ravenous. Be insatiable and be careful—the two together. And care means bringing all your intelligence, bringing all your sensitivity, bringing all your interest to discern what helps and what doesn't help and what are the conditions. And this is again, like all of this, it's an open-ended investigation. Bring your creativity, allow your humility.

So we can have both, and then the insatiability and this humility—which kind of contains the interest in learning to discern—they form two wings that balance each other. That balance each other. Something fierce almost in us, hungry, and something so exquisite and humble in its care. Hunger and humility, both.

And together, with these wings, the reach is open—where we can fly, where we can walk, where we can dig.

That's all I'm going to say. Thank you again for your practice, for your beauty.

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