Dukkha and Emotions in Soulmaking Practice

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Are you tired? Yes. Is there enough light then? No. When you're tired, it's important to do something about it. It's really, really important. It's not something to just put up with.

There's a whole interesting thing about why we feel energized sometimes, why we feel tired. It has to do with emotions, has to do with inspiration, has to do with eros, has to do with closing down, opening up. So it's actually a really interesting investigation. It's good to know how to galvanize the system, how to catalyze things, how to inject energy, find energy sometimes. It can change like that. If you don't know this, this is something we need to discover. Why does it suddenly change? It has oftentimes much more to do with the heart than we realize, or the mind—the mind in terms of certain ideas or reactivities. That's a whole other subject.

Having said all that, I'm extremely tired. I really didn't know whether I could do this right now, and I still don't. So we'll see how it goes. I apologize if I'm not firing on all cylinders and not so coherent.

We invited some questions on dukkha and soulmaking, and then it occurred to me that perhaps wasn't the wisest thing to do. From the way I feel about it currently, that particular nexus, that particular interaction of dukkha and soulmaking, is extremely complex. As if the whole thing wasn't complex already, this dukkha and soulmaking is really complex. As Catherine mentioned, there's already quite a bit out on the web. I think I gave a talk at some point that was thirteen or fourteen hours long on the subject of dukkha and soulmaking. So there's a lot, and we could say more, but it's complex.

More importantly, if I just speak for myself, when I'm working in an interview with someone and there's dukkha present, I don't feel like I have any kind of formula or preconception of how to approach it or what's going to happen or how it's going to unpack or unfold. To me, a lot of these kinds of practices, but particularly when it comes to working with dukkha, are very improvised and opportunistic. I don't know, either with myself or working with someone else.

It takes a while in an interview, if I'm in the teacher role, to let what needs to be heard be heard, to let what needs to be felt be felt, to see what the different aspects are—of body, mind, heart, situation, history, propensity, capability. And then what windows, what doors are open? To me, it's all quite opportunistic. And it takes time. Usually those kinds of interviews where we're working with dukkha in a way that's related to the imaginal, they're not quick interviews. They're an hour or something like that.

So some of the questions feel like I don't have nearly enough information on what's going on for a person or what's there or what's possible or the history. This makes doing this kind of thing right now a little bit

difficult.

It's also the case for me as a teacher, when I'm working with someone and there's dukkha present, I don't automatically assume this needs to become soulmaking. It's one option that may or may not present itself as a window of opportunity at some point. But it might be that actually what needs to happen is some other approach that just eases the dukkha in some way. So it's not always, where there's dukkha, "Okay, let's make this soulmaking." There may well be other needs.

A little while ago, I was talking with someone, and there was really a lot of dukkha for them. Asking them a little bit about what was happening, there was clearly some rage, some anger at a certain situation that they were not allowing themselves to feel. What happened instead, as is so often the case—not always, but so often—when anger is not allowed to be felt, it turns inward against the self and becomes a very nasty kind of depression, very self-destructive, very hateful, sometimes suicidal. So what's the need there? Not immediately to jump in and make this soulmaking. Maybe, maybe not.

But there's—let's talk about roots or foundations or bases or steps. There may be a gap, and I think I touched on this a little bit when we were talking about energy body—there may be a gap for some of us in relation to some emotions that we actually don't let ourselves feel. We do not have the permission to feel that emotion. In this case it was anger; in someone else's case it might be whatever. And sometimes it's even a positive emotion, sometimes even joy. It's not okay. It's not okay in our society somehow to actually feel deep joy. It's not okay to share it, whatever.

But the important point is that there's an intermediate piece there, and this often goes unrecognized. And of course, in certain contexts—for instance, a dharma context, where anger is basically... it goes in the box of "it's a kilesa, it's an affliction, it's a defilement." And so sometimes people talk about the Buddhist shadow or whatever—a person who actually doesn't really feel much anger. And it might look to their teachers like, "Oh, this is a good practitioner. Maybe they should be a teacher one day. Look how equanimous they are and how even," etc. They seem to have a good understanding, they're kind, they're mindful. It seems that way.

Something is not allowed, and the person doesn't even recognize that they're not giving themselves permission for this or that emotion. So when we talk again about these words—roots or foundations—sometimes there are basic kinds of emotional work, basic psychological gaps that need to be rehabilitated, drawn back into the fold and the field of psyche, drawn back into the hearth of psyche, and allowed and given a minimum degree of respect.

If I feel anger—it's partly why I said that thing about ranting in the popcorn thing today—something that looks like a defilement can actually be a signal of soul. It's the flame of soul. And it's coming up in a way that most people would be like, "Whoa, that's kind of not okay." I've come to recognize that if I can be a bit patient with this ranting mind, for instance, in terms of ecological crisis or other... I'll try not to go into that now, but there's actually a lot of soul there. And I feel like something comes through me. Of course, that

could be a grand delusion, and there's always that danger.

The point is that even just for psychological health, before we even talk about soulmaking and its possibilities, there may be gaps that need addressing. There may be basic building blocks that need filling in and given some solidity. It might be, I need to give myself permission. I need to allow myself to acknowledge, to feel, to maybe at some stage express in some way or another. And that's a whole journey if we're talking about anger. Something's dead in the being and it needs to be able to come alive.

Assuming this all makes sense... When we did on the last retreat—some of you were here—we did some of that movement stuff and there was some sort of ogre-ish kind of things. It wasn't so much... and I explained, it wasn't so much, "Oh now we're trying to cathart" (if that's a verb), "we're trying to release something." We're interested in opening up the pathways—neurologically, physically, energetically, emotionally, psychically, mentally, cognitively—that are closed, so that they can become roots. You think of a root of a tree as a living thing. Things flow through that root, those roots. And if they're blocked or if they're cut off or if they're starved or withered, you can't even have a healthy tree, let alone the blossoms of soul.

So it may be in some cases that certain basics, certain foundations need to happen first. What was interesting with this person was then talking actually over a couple of days. And so that was my immediate sense: "Oh, this needs to happen first. It doesn't need to become imaginable yet." And then they came back and reported already some images. And so the images were coming alive, and the images had to do with power and rage, and they liberated something.

So, you know, it's tempting to think: first this, then that, then that. Now you're ready for the image or the soulmaking. And oftentimes that will be the case. That will be so. I've talked a lot about this kind of thing. But I've been too struck by the kind of non-linearity of things sometimes. So what does that imply? I don't know.

To be open-minded. And again, opportunistic, improvised. Here's this knotted ball of string. What if I just pull on this one? No, wrong one. Okay, well, ah, that's a bit better. That starts loosening something. I don't know which one to pull on first necessarily.

But if we talk about basics, some of those foundations may, I think we said in the opening, take quite a while. If I think about my history working with anger, I was really some years in psychotherapy back in the late eighties and early nineties, really working with that and learning how to express it and getting it completely wrong and overdoing it or underdoing it or not being aware. So just that journey around anger—recognizing that I actually felt angry in some situations, learning how to tolerate it, learning how to understand it, learning what my needs were, learning how to express it—it takes a while, you know, just that. And we haven't even talked about soul-making possibilities there. So this is a long-term trajectory for all of us, really. And in that, there's open-mindedness and humility, and it may not always be linear.

So, on the theme of nonlinearity, some of you will know the teachings about the 28 elements or nodes of the lattice and all that business, and some of you may not. So we may get to it this week, but very briefly, there's a way of pointing to what's characteristic of what we're calling imaginal or soul-making or sensing the soul. But there's no order there. So it could be, if you go back to the knotted ball of wool analogy, that each one of those is an end of a thread of wool. And I may jiggle or pull or wiggle anyone and it starts unraveling the whole thing. Or if we use a different analogy, I ignite one and the rest ignite.

So again, what that means in terms of working with dukkha is there's this openness to which of those elements might be available and might be ones that actually can implement some leverage and start to move things and start to ignite and open things. And I do not know beforehand. I have no idea. I'm dealing with my own pain and situations and whatnot or with someone else.

So is that good news or bad news? While a part of us might like simple formulas, I think these kind of practices are too rich to be just formulaic. It's a bit like this thing that I said about you as a practitioner and your ideas. You can become a playful improviser, someone who has that confidence, someone who's just able to do that without a formula. In time, it will come.

So I don't always know in advance, but I do have the trust. At this point, I have total trust that—it might not be this person right now that this can be made soul-making—but I pretty much believe at this point and sense that anything can be made into soul. Soul can be made in relationship to anything, and that transforms and transfigures it. But that, in a way, there's thinking about those different elements and just kind of being with something and seeing which might suggest themselves or be possible.

And it might just be the energy body, just opening the energy when coming into a relationship with dukkha or whatever it is, already makes a difference, something as simple as that. But it could be something, one of the ones that we don't usually think about or something else. All kinds of things.

That word opportunistic—I think I said it once in a talk years ago—you know, the root is porta, which is a door in Latin. So to be opportunistic means to be on the lookout for what doors are not locked and one might just slip through, or what doors are open and just obviously beckoning us.

When some of these elements—which, by the way, I always forget what they are, so people say, "I'm not very good at number 18," and I think, "Number 18, what else?" Anyway. When some of them start to ignite, it's as if they already start to complexify what's happening in a good way. They give anchor points or vantage points or, you know, what's it called when you rock climb and you put one of those things in? Pitons, yes.

Well, you know what I mean. You know those climbing anchors that secure the rope - these things give footholds and vantage points. Another way of looking at it is they start throwing something out and connecting things. In that connection, it's as if a wire goes here and there, then another wire goes between here, then another wire goes. Soon you've got a kind of net and structure, and that structure can make a

crucible.

Everyone knows what a crucible is? It's a vessel, I think, from alchemy, where you put whatever material you were working with and it gets heated in this crucible. When we come to talking about dukkha and soul-making, Catherine writes that in a way, what we want is for this here to be a crucible. But we could also say that we want our emotions or our dukkha to be in a crucible. We need to have a certain kind of stance, a certain kind of relationship with them. And all these other elements start forming a kind of structure that holds something in a way that the flame can come alive.

So in relation to emotions, part of what we want is that there's a crucible of emotions. In that crucible, with the fire - sometimes the heat and the painful fire of the emotions - image is born or soul-making is born. If we're relating to our emotion in a way that's not crucible-like, then it doesn't happen. We might either spin into some kind of meltdown of dukkha, some kind of craziness, or we might relieve the dukkha through the many traditional dharma pathways that are available and there's a dissipation of dukkha and letting go. But without the crucible, there won't be the soul-making.

So the golden question is: what makes the crucible? As usual, it's not so simple and not so easy to articulate. But partly it's these different elements of the imaginal - for example, humility, or as Catherine mentioned this morning, the idea. So often when there's dukkha, in the back of my mind or in the forefront of my mind, this dukkha is caused by this. It's because of this in my past or my parents or that person or me being a loser or whatever. It's got a cause. Explicitly or implicitly the mind is reducing it to one cause - even if I say it's craving because the Buddha said it was craving. I've reduced it to one cause, and that element of the imaginal, that node, is dead. It's not alive. It's a damp wick, and the closing down of that idea will close down the possibility of soul-making. Catherine already said this this morning.

Let's linger on this a little bit. I've dwelt quite a lot over the years on working with emotions in different ways, long before the soul-making teachings. It's so easy to be imprecise when it comes to emotions. We just hear a sort of vague feeling - oh, kind of be with it and try to be with your body and just be open to it and watch it come and go or something like that and try not to identify. Oftentimes what happens is a person then takes that sort of vague instruction back to the cushion and it just kind of stews for a while until something else comes along that gets their attention. It doesn't necessarily really become fertile.

Even within traditional dharma, I feel there's a real place for precision about what I'm actually doing in relation to an emotion at any time, whether it's a beautiful emotion of joy or love, or a difficult emotion - despair, hatred, whatever it is, powerlessness. If I can be really specific and try different things, that tends to open a lot more doors.

One of the things Catherine mentioned this morning is that when there's an afflictive emotion, there's often a lot of energy wrapped up in it. Even if it's depression, depression has an enormous amount of energy, but it's in lockdown with certain kinds of depression. Anger certainly, rage, grief - there's a lot of energy. What tends to happen is then we hear, "Oh, kind of be with it or just open to it and just soften or

whatever." The mindfulness that goes with that actually doesn't have a lot of energy in it. It's not very specific, and the energy in the emotion is more than the energy in the mindfulness. You understand?

If I can find a way—and it's interesting we started with this energy thing—of really bringing an intensity of mindfulness and energized mindfulness to bear with this emotion, then something's shifted and the energy doesn't overpower the mindfulness and then things can start to move.

So in typical Dharma, or rather in mainstream Dharma practice, that would be one of my suggestions—a very sort of straight, normal approach among many others. In a way, we want the mindfulness, the awareness to be bigger, not just spatially (that's an option), but also in terms of energy levels, if that makes sense—bigger than the emotion.

Also in mainstream Dharma, what we tend towards is letting go of the story. And with that, letting go of the self, because self and story often go together. So you want a kind of brightness of mindfulness and a kind of diving under or letting go of the self and the story. Does that sound familiar? Really, really skillful, really helpful. So good to have that in your toolkit as something one can go into at any time.

Because dukkha is dependent on self-sense and identification, and in a way it's also dependent on an absence of mindfulness, or an absence of energy and mindfulness, when we bring the energy of the mindfulness up, and when we let go of some self-story and sense, well, the dukkha goes down. It's all swings and levers, dependent origination.

When it comes to soul-making, it's a little bit different. I gave the example yesterday of when Catherine suggested touching the body and I explained what was going on—look, there's self here, look, there's narrative here. So I'm not going "no self, no story." There's a certain allowing of some of that to some degree, because that might come into the constellation of what then can make soul. When there's an image and when there's soul-making, it tends to involve self-sense and some kind of narrative, and it's more complicated and more diffuse in the elements of its constellation.

So already there's a difference there. And some of us are thoroughly trained in Dharma practice—letting go of the self, just bringing the simple, bare attention, mindfulness, being with an emotion almost as bare sensation. We've kind of dived underneath the emotion and missed it. It's actually happening at this level and we've gone down here where it's just sensation. It's great. Maybe it just disappears. Helpful at times.

Again, there's this kind of modulation of the attention. Opportunistically, what actually feels soulful and soul-making here? But it may well involve—and again I've explained this before—when there's an image, the thing that is to become image or is in process of becoming image might be my dukkha, might be my body, it might be something else, it might be something in the world. There's an object there. The image is object. But as things become imaginal, the self in relationship to that thing starts to become image as well. And the world also. And my desire to—and in fact all the elements. So all these things start to become ensouled.

What that means practically is I don't always have to be fixated on the object at the expense of self and story and world sense. Any of these can be picked up first, opportunistically.

Whatever object we're working with—so it could be a dukkha or it could already be an image—in the process of something becoming imaginal, let's say this candle becomes imaginal for me. Well, if I stay with that and meditate with it as image and allow it to do its thing and allow the soul-making dynamic, at some point what will happen is the self that is looking at that candle becomes imaginal as well. Do you understand?

And then not only that—then it starts to spread and the blue velvet and the room and the light and the whole world becomes imaginal. And then elements of my being start to become imaginal. I recognize eros, and it's not just my eros—that eros starts becoming imaginal, in other words it has dimensions and divinity, etc.

That process of spreading out and making a more complex constellation is part of what happens with soul-making, part of what happens when something becomes imaginal in time. But what it means practically is that I don't always need to just focus on the object. I might start to include more of the self. Can that become more imaginal, for instance?

So sometimes, for example—we talked about the mindfulness in a sort of traditional Dharma—the mindfulness instruction, one of the instructions might be for the mindfulness to be, if you like, bigger in some way than the emotion. Sometimes, of course, we don't feel that at all.

We feel that this emotion is bigger than me. Now there's a way that can just be overwhelming and depressing. The mindfulness can't get around it—it's bigger than me. I'm sinking with the emotion.

But there's a way too in which the emotion can be bigger than me in a beautiful way, in a soul-making way. There's a humility that arises—and that's a loaded word for a lot of people. What does that mean? What's a fertile soul-making humility? It's one of the elements.

This grief, this pain—whose is it? And again, typical Dharma is it's nobody's. It's anatta. Soul-making Dharma might be it belongs to soul, belongs to the world soul. It's from the divine. This pain that I'm feeling, this sensitivity that I have to the pain is the divine sensitivity operating through me.

So already there's—you can see—well, that's an idea. Now it doesn't have to be a big thing where my mind is churning with all this intellectuality. It's just like a little grain of sand there of a poetic idea. And I just sprinkle it there and it does something. It's part of the alchemical process.

So in that case, the emotion is bigger than me. It's bigger than the self. I'm not even hoping to get bigger than it or handle it, but something has changed in my whole view of it and my whole relationship with it. Do you understand? So these little sprinkles of kind of alchemical tinctures or materials can make so much difference.

Sometimes one may be sitting, there's some dukkha or something, and there may be accessible just a fullness of intention, which means, sure, I don't like this dukkha and I want to get rid of it, but as Catherine was saying this morning, I want the fullness of soul here. I want what's right for soul. I want this to become soul-making in the service of soul-making, even if that has some cost to it, even if that has some bite to it, even if not all the dukkha goes. That's one of the elements as well, this fullness of intention.

And maybe with that, there's a kind of humility. And I might not even know in relation to what I feel this humility. It may be just some vague sense of divinity that if someone asked me, "Well, where exactly is it? Or what is it? Or certainly what's your theology?" I wouldn't be able to answer. But maybe that's enough. That stance of just the fullness of intention and a humility that I don't even understand and that isn't even that precise. And it fertilizes things. It softens and opens and fertilizes things.

How are we doing? Is it making sense? And are you still awake?

A lot of these words are—sometimes used sloppily by me and maybe not Catherine, but certainly by me. But sometimes deliberately ambiguously and sometimes to mean one or the other. So in that case, I meant both.

So, in other words, the concept of soul, like everything else, will itself become ensouled. All of these concepts—Eros, soul, image, you name it. So we start with some idea, or maybe like, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about, but it feels good sometimes, so I'm kind of hanging out." You know? And then maybe, let's say for someone, it starts with this idea, well, it's my soul, and then you have soul, and so on.

In time, because of the soul-making dynamic and the eros-psyche-logos, the concepts begin to get fertilized. They start to get worked and develop more windows, more shadows, more shadings, more complexity—more dimensions altogether. So for me, sometimes that word can encompass both those meanings and more, in a way that remains loose and elastic and open-ended and unfathomable.

The danger, of course, is that it becomes too sloppy and ultimately meaningless. So we're always treading this delicate line. Again, where do we stand? Where do we position ourselves at any given moment between precision and openness? Well, it depends what we want. If we want soul-making, then we need to sense in the moment: is precision what's called for right now, or is it the more open-ended approach?

In this kind of practice, the gauge is always what serves soul, and how do I know? It gives me those feelings—that sense of soulfulness. That becomes my navigation.

Sometimes when working with dukkha, a certain amount of letting go in relation to the suffering needs to happen before it can be made soul. And sometimes it's only through being made soul that certain dukkha is able to be freed up.

Recently, especially with some of the medications I'm taking and getting very confused and under-resourced, I've noticed something. Sometimes, after having many conversations and doing research

about different possible alternative medical approaches that might help—of course, once you're engaged in that research, it becomes goal-oriented, which is not to die. You're in a certain relationship and on a certain track with the whole situation and with the information. You understand? That track carries the assumption that it's not okay if I die, because we're trying to accomplish something else—somehow miraculously survive.

Sometimes just reminding myself, "It's okay if I die, it's really okay"—just that much letting go makes all the difference. If I've been too caught up in "should it be this dose or that dose?" or whatever it might be, sometimes that simple acceptance, that okayness, provides just enough letting go that the whole situation can become soul-making again. You understand? It's not that I then think, "Oh, it doesn't matter," or become indifferent. But just that certain amount of letting go can liberate things, loosen them enough that they can become soul-making.

Some of you in this room already know that nothing else has helped with certain dukkhas—intractable, long-standing suffering and deep pains—except when they become imaginal and when they're infused with soul. Nothing else. Not any of the other practices. Not years of psychotherapy. So again, there's this opportunism and flexibility that's needed.

A little less fabrication is one of the elements as well. When I say "it's okay if I die," there's a loosening of whatever clinging had built up there, and that loosening represents a little less fabrication. Then some soul can be made out of the situation.

As I said at the beginning, some of these questions would require far more information. I would need to be with the person for a while to get a sense of what might be possible or what else is present in the field. But let me see if I can offer something helpful.

Having given all that introduction as context, let me address a couple of questions about the ecological situation and the tremendous pain of that reality. Is it even possible for that kind and level of dukkha to be soul-making, to be ensouled? Here's where I would tie it back to what I've been saying—there was a reason I offered all that introduction.

I wasn't just getting lost. So here's a situation where there's an object—unprecedented species extinction and the heartbreak of that. Not just that actually, because part of the object there is not just species loss, but also the almost complete absence of commensurate response from humanity in relationship to it. So the object's already a complex one.

And then if we go back to what I said before, so there's this object, and then there's also self in relation to the object. Now, it may be too much to ask—someone wrote a note, can the rape of a child be ensouled—and someone might think it's not your business to tell that child, "oh, come on, you can ensoul this." That would be ridiculous.

But it might be then that the imaginal and the soul-making goes more to the self sense. Who am I and who

will I be and how do I sense myself with soul in relation to what's happening in the world? And that's—in this self-other-world constellation—where it starts.

And I might arise as the warrior. Or, like Joanna Macy talks about, the midwife of whatever might be new. Or the hospice worker. But these are imaginal roles. The self in relation. And then the question: can that fill out? And again, that's going to take a lot of emotional work and imaginal work. And then what does that mean in terms of my duty and how it manifests in the world?

Of this image—if my image is a warrior, what does that mean? How does that refract into my actions? Does it mean I then go become an eco-terrorist or something like that? Or does it refract in a more subtle way? But that image is driving me.

Another important point here is that images are eternal, they're timeless. And that's one of the elements of the imaginal as well, which means in relation to something like climate change or the ecological crises, it's natural to want to think about goals and time and ending. But in a way that warrior is always fighting, is always available, impassioned, dedicated—the imaginal warrior. Do you understand?

And that awareness of that eternality gives the whole thing another level of resource, less dependent on the temporal outcomes. You can still care. I probably said this in a talk before—I heard that when the Titanic was sinking and there weren't enough lifeboats, they really hadn't planned very well. A lot of people were left on board ship sinking into icy waters, all the lifeboats gone. They knew they were dying, and they started singing hymns.

This was not quite the complete eradication of any sense of religiosity in the culture. So they sang hymns. What the hell's the point? You're going to be dead in a minute. What good does it do to sing a hymn?

But it matters for soul. Were they singing hymns in the hope that maybe God will let them into heaven? It had nothing probably to do with that. It's like what matters—yes, of course it matters what happens with species loss. Of course it matters what happens with climate change. But there's something on another level that the soul needs. It will do, it wants to express, it wants to reflect, it wants something to come through.

Soul, if we go back to the bigger sense, is asking of the human being for something to come through that doesn't just have to do with outcomes and life and death. Do you understand? There are other levels to this, and sometimes, especially—I know there are a lot of activists in this room—it's hard to not get pared down to the concrete level only. To allow those other dimensions of soul can be immensely resourceful for that kind of thing.

But it might be more in the sense of self that the image arises, not in the sense of object, of the thing itself. Diesel pollution in the UK—is that a soulful thing?

I don't know. It stinks, you know, and it's really nasty. But in relationship to it, I can become something. It

may be easier.

Also in a way, you know, the sense of the earth, the species as sacred, the responsibility of the human being to other species—that's already a view. That's a potentially soulful view. This is a sacred world. Can I prove that to anyone? No. It's a view. It's an idea. But it's a soul view. Again, if we talk about self or the world, I start perhaps with the world and the sacred world. And now this sacred world is being desecrated. And that can galvanize something.

I'm going to read this question. I've been working with a particular manifestation of dukkha today with two images which feel to be on the opposite ends of some emotional spectrum. The first has qualities of compassion, tenderness, healing and vulnerability. The second personifies a kind of transcendent not giving a fuck in a joyful divine punk kind of way. Previously, you've talked about bringing images into relationship with each other. I feel called to explore that here. Any advice would be appreciated.

Yeah, so again, I would need to hear a lot more here. My initial thought was that some images are not really in relationship with each other. So this is an interesting thing. Jung talked very much or seemed to stress very much in his teaching a kind of integration of the different archetypes and the different images with the self and with each other, so that they come into balance and into dialogue and they kind of harmonize with each other.

James Hillman, massively indebted and respectful of Jung, but kind of in the context of reacting to that a little bit, stressed this idea that we have a polytheistic psyche, which means we're called in multiple directions that often are not congruent with each other. They pull us in impossibly multiple directions.

So I think I've shared this before. I have a monk in me. I have a teacher in me. I have a musician in me. I have someone who just wants to serve. They cannot all exist at the same time. So that there's some impossibility there in terms of the soul's calling and being pulled and stretched in different directions. And there's some grief there. There's some dukkha.

A lot of the questions are about how dukkha can be made into soul and sort of help that way. But there's also a certain amount of dukkha that we're assenting to by saying yes to soul making. And if we're not up for that, then we're limiting the soul-making. And it's possible that if we're not up for that, it's just because we haven't fallen in love with soul-making yet. It's possible it's just not our path. But there's a certain amount of dukkha that soul-making brings.

And if I allow the fullness of these pulls, so I have this—it's like this god of music won't ever let me go. I haven't been a musician for years and years. It won't ever really let me go. And so there's grief sometimes with that. And I realize I can't do that and this. I'm pulled in two directions. And I can work with it imaginably and it can refract into my life and my practice and my interactions in all kinds of ways. But there's a certain amount of pain for me in that impossibility.

I'm being pulled by soul and by the powers of soul, which, going back to what we said before, are bigger

than I am. This god of music is bigger than I am. The god of dharma is bigger than I am. The god of teaching is bigger than I am.

I'm being pulled by gods in different directions. I'm not even trying to harmonize them or balance them or live some kind of neat balance where I do a bit of this and a bit of that and it's all very nice.

So my initial thought was: I wonder if these two images that the person's alluding to need to come into contact with each other, or if there's simply a certain incongruence and tension there. And that's part of what Hillman would call the polytheistic psyche. It's part of the dukkha of soul-making.

There's an enormous amount of freedom that comes from soul-making, and as I've said, some freedoms that come from soul-making won't get opened up by any other way. But sometimes it comes with cost, it comes with pain, a price. Sometimes the price is in the duty. It might not be this pulling in different directions. It might be that this image is asking something of me. People were alluding to this with the meaningfulness we shared earlier. And that duty takes its toll in my life. It means a sacrifice. It means I can't do this or that or the other. It comes with a cost.

But you have to decide what you want.

We should probably stop there. So apologies for the questions I didn't get to. Apologies if I wasn't so clear or bright, but hopefully it's helpful.

Let's sit for a moment together, and then Catherine has an announcement.

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