Opening the Sense of the Energy Body

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:17:35

As I mentioned in the introductory talk, a significant portion of this series will be devoted to different aspects of the skill or art of sensing with soul in imaginal practice. My intention is to share quite a few things I haven't presented before, though there will inevitably be some repetition, which is beneficial. Hopefully there are insights here that prove helpful regarding different areas and strands of the weave of imaginal practice and sensing with soul.

There's no necessarily obvious order in which to present this material, and there will inevitably be some overlap between the different areas and strands, but I'll try to present each strand despite that inevitable interconnection.

Tonight I want to explore energy body awareness. There's no particular reason I've placed this first, but we do emphasize it considerably, though actually everything is important. We're talking about developing skill and artistry in energy body awareness—that kind of sensitivity, the possibilities that exist, and the capacity to work with it skillfully and artistically.

Let me begin with a review of what we mean by "energy body." We could say it's actually a kind of awareness more than a thing itself—a particular kind of experience or poise of awareness. We can break this down into three interwoven and overlapping aspects.

The first aspect is the felt sense. When we speak of energy, this is crucial—the felt sense of the space that my physical body inhabits, the space outlined by my physical body, perhaps even extending slightly beyond it. What does that feel like? What is the texture, the vibration, the experience there? The tightness, looseness, energization, harmonization, or whatever arises. This is one aspect of the energy body.

The second aspect is the image. We don't necessarily mean an imaginal image, though it may be one. There is usually some kind of image of the body present. I might close my eyes and have a vague image in the back of my mind of my body sitting here, wearing what it's wearing, with limbs in their relative locations—very conventional. Other times in meditation, perhaps in the first jhana, the image I might have of the body could be simply a diffuse cloud of white light corresponding with the felt sense.

The third aspect is the idea or concept of the body. In our Western society, we typically hold the idea that the body is composed of cells organized into organs and systems, with cells made up of smaller components extending down to molecules and atoms. Through the exchange and interplay of molecules and atoms at the cellular level, the body is structured, formed, and functions either healthily or unhealthily with various capacities.

This is essentially a reductionist model. There's nothing inherently wrong with it—it's simply one view, the dominant view of our modern Western worldview. This perspective holds that fundamental truth lies in basic building blocks that are purely material, existing as material entities functioning according to known physical and chemical laws. From this foundation, the body as a complex organism with its appearance and capacities arises.

A different idea, more popular in certain circles throughout history and present in some healing paradigms, New Age circles, or shamanistic traditions, takes more of a top-down approach. This view suggests the body has different levels of being, different strata to its existence. For instance, there might be an astral body or various sheaths—perhaps seven or nine in different systems. The astral body, as a level of higher energy, might function as a matrix that forms, shapes, and directs the material physical body. Rather than being reductionist and bottom-up, this approach suggests that higher energetic levels of the body inform, shape, direct, and in some sense care for the physical, material body that is obviously manifest to most people.

Of course, there are infinite possible ideas about the body, just as there are infinite possible felt senses or images we can have of the body. Some will be common, depending on culture, upbringing, and personal propensity, but the range remains open.

All of this together—these three aspects—defines what we mean by energy body. It's a poise of awareness, a poise of being. We might more accurately call it "energy body awareness"—the kind of awareness, attention, or way of looking that remains open to all possibilities within the range of these three aspects.

In some senses, the first aspect—the felt sense—is experientially primary. We want to be anchored, very conscious, and intimately in touch with the felt sense.

I've probably suggested this a few times in guided meditations or thrown it out as a possibility: imagining, as you're sitting in meditation, three lines of energy that course through the body. Two lines flow down each leg, meeting and centering in the very lower belly, while a third line rises vertically upward, perhaps even extending out through the top of the head. There's a kind of convergence—triangle isn't quite the right word—but three lines meeting at a point and radiating outward.

Recently, someone came for an interview while working on samadhi, though I can't recall their main focus at the time. They reported trying this practice, attempting to imagine these lines in close detail. Perhaps having heard elsewhere that energy tends to spiral into or out of the body—as in chakra teachings—they were trying to visualize each line as a detailed spiral. It wasn't particularly productive for them. "I'm trying that," they said, "but it doesn't really do anything."

To me, this missed the point of my intention in sharing this practice. Again, it's not so much about the visual details, which may or may not be important. Here there was a certain preconception about what was significant and how energy actually moves—that it spirals, for instance. This isn't to say that

sometimes seeing or imagining energy spiraling in the body can't be extremely helpful. The question is: Is it helpful at that particular time?

The main thrust of what I intended in sharing this practice was really about structuring the body or energy body awareness. Once you place those lines there in imagination, something happens to the sense of alignment, openness, and harmony in the body. It's about the geometry of those three lines in the space the body inhabits and what that does to the sense of well-being, the sense of the body, the sense of posture, and also the possibility of samadhi. It's more about the geometry and structuring of the body sense that emerges from this visualization.

Again, what I'm emphasizing is that the felt sense is primary—really, really important. We don't want to lose the felt sense because we're chasing some kind of idea about the energy body that isn't actually fruitful.

When we speak of image and idea as aspects of the energy body, all three elements—felt sense, image, and idea—are intimately connected. If I'm playing with a certain idea, like spiraling, I need to check the felt sense and notice what impact this has. If it's an idea that doesn't bear much fruit in terms of energy body awareness at that time, then it's not particularly helpful.

Another key principle to extract from this incident is the importance of experimenting, improvising, playing, and feeling and noticing. When I do this, when I imagine that, when I think this, when I conceive that, when I do this with awareness—whatever "this" or "that" might be—what happens? If you're cultivating samadhi and something feels good, feels right, then you go with that. This experiential approach—experimenting, improvising, playing, and feeling, noticing in the moment what results from each particular experiment—becomes crucial. How does it feel? What do I notice? Is it helpful?

Stepping back to a more general point: in practice as a whole—any kind of practice, any direction whether samadhi, emptiness, contemplating vedanā, mettā, imaginal practice, ethics—there's something developable here. Some people have more of a natural gift initially, but it's definitely cultivable. It's like developing what we might call a nose for what's important.

So often I hear long-term practitioners getting caught up in certain differentiations or ideas about this or that practice or teaching, when it's actually irrelevant. They could spend considerable time pursuing various approaches that don't actually make much difference. The importance, really broadly speaking about any practice, is developing a sense of what's crucial. What goes to the essence? What's to the point? What matters?

In this student's case, trying to imagine spiraling in detail almost missed the point entirely. I could offer countless examples across different areas of practice. This is a very general principle: Can I develop this intuition, this sense and sensitivity, this nose for what is significant? What actually is the nub of what's important in whatever practice I'm engaging? What am I trying to accomplish? How are the pieces

working together, and which ones matter? Which ones are secondary or irrelevant, or at least more irrelevant?

When we do imaginal practice—when we're sensing the soul—there's an instruction I often give that I consider almost universally beneficial. Whether you're practicing with an intra-psychic image, working in a dyad, or sensing the soul of some being in nature, I generally encourage bringing your whole body into contact with the sight, sound, or whatever you're encountering. Sense it with the whole energy body.

But what does this actually mean? Let me break this down into several aspects.

First, it means spreading or balancing the attention or awareness to include the object, the other, and the self, along with the sense of the energy body. As we do this, we begin to see that the energy body might start to include the other—as if there's a larger energy body, a larger sense of energy encompassing both. Certainly awareness spreads to one's whole energy body, but then that energy body is brought into connection, into contact with the sight or sound or whatever we're encountering. This opens the possibility of sensing energy as encompassing the two together.

The second aspect concerns the center of knowing or perceiving. Our default is usually the head—our sense organs are gathered there, so we tend to think of it as the center of knowing and perceiving. We're seeing with our eyes, hearing with our ears, and these are located in the head. But rather than this default center, we work with the whole energy body as center. For some, this may be felt at the heart center, the usual place for soul sensing to feel centered. For others, including myself, it's the whole body as a total field. This can vary. But the whole energy body becomes a center of knowing and perceiving. One feels it, senses it, imagines it, and in our language, creates and discovers it this way.

The default in our culture—really almost hardwired into our sense of things—is that the center is in the head. But what is it to actually feel, sense, imagine, create and discover the whole energy body as an organ of perception?

Sometimes this opens the possibility of synesthesia. With the whole energy body brought into contact and conceived as this organ or center of knowing and perceiving, the senses can begin to mix and blend. Sound and sight and touch become less separate. They weave into each other, imply each other, reflect each other, manifest across the boundaries between different senses. We hear with our body—not actually such an uncommon experience when listening deeply to music or birdsong, or even to a lawnmower's vibration. But there's rich possibility here for synesthesia, for the mixing of senses that can be very beautiful and fruitful.

A fourth aspect is that the energy body sense is open to the whole potential range of perceived substantiality, image, and idea. The whole range from very etheric and light to very dense, the whole range of imaginal possibilities and ideas. Bringing the whole body into contact means bringing the whole range of possibilities of the body—how I conceive it, feel it, imagine it, image it. The gates are open; the

range is open. It's possible for the energy body to manifest anywhere along that spectrum.

Lastly, and overlapping with the first aspect, a connection—sometimes even a flow—is sensed between the energy body and the object. When I bring this sensitivity, delicacy, and careful mindfulness to the presence of another in a dyad, an intra-psychic object, or an object in nature, there can be a gradually discernible or immediately apparent energetic connection between the energy body and the other. They form a kind of unit, a dyad of connection.

So as I said, I've already touched on that in the first of the five dimensions here. But a unit of dyads means yes, there are two—I can definitely feel two here—but I also sense a kind of unifying energy, or at least an energy that connects us, flows between us, ties us together.

If we linger with this and expand some of what I've just said, again, we're so conditioned by the dominant materialist, reductionist, scientific and scientistic worldview of modern culture that it's sometimes hard for us to actually have certain experiences. The logos becomes so entrenched, so limited within certain circumscribed parameters, that it simply doesn't allow other ideas—and so it might also inhibit certain experiences. Just as we talked about the eros-psyche-logos dynamic that can be inhibited or blocked from its natural tendency to expand, it can be inhibited and blocked at certain times. One of the ways this happens is through a limiting idea that we're clinging to, and sometimes we don't even realize what it is or that we're clinging to it.

In our culture, the language and ideas and models we have for sensing and sensation aren't quite adequate for sensing with soul. For example, as I've touched on, where is the sensing? We tend in our culture to think and feel only that touch happens on the skin. At the end of the hand, I touch another person, I touch my beloved, I touch this tree—only there, that's where the touch happens.

But when we touch, for example, when we touch a beloved who is for us an erotic, imaginal figure, or we touch the earth as erotic, imaginal other, when we sense it with soul, or when we listen to sound—to music, to birdsong, to anything—we don't only sense or think of touch as taking place at the skin or with the hand, or hearing happening with the ears. Rather, we sense with the whole energy body, which is larger than and more than the physical body. We touch and sense with the emotions and heart.

Again, in our culture we tend to separate these: body is one thing, sensory contact is one thing, emotions and heart something else entirely—which again in our culture might reduce to some kind of chemical process. But when we begin sensing with soul, these things come together. I touch it with my heart. I touch it with my emotions. It touches my emotions. We have that word already in the language: I'm touched by something. It's touching my heart. The heart also touches, and the soul resonates. All this is involved—receiving, resonating, shaping and touching the object.

So again, there's this much richer and more comprehensive and multi-dimensional sensing that happens when we sense with soul. The whole idea of this body and the instrument it is, its capacities and how it

works, its sensitivities and sensibilities—all of this gets expanded, enriched, complexified.

There's a sense, then, that we can talk about opening the energy body. What we really mean is opening the idea, opening up the range of possibilities, opening up what we imagine the body to be and what we actually experience. Opening up that whole range, as we said.

There's another sense in which opening the energy body is actually quite important—for all practice and actually for living well, but certainly for practices like samādhi and imaginal practice and sensing with soul.

I think I might have said this before, but it bears repeating because sometimes when a teaching is really relevant to oneself, one hears it but doesn't really take it in. It doesn't land. It's almost like I'm so caught in a certain pattern or idea about how things are or what I need to do that I don't recognize that this strand of teaching is actually significant for me—I'm so set on something else being more important.

I would say—and I want to tread carefully here in this portion of the talk—but sometimes a person may well need to develop the energy body awareness and the skill to really allow imaginal practice. We have placed it, and will continue to place it, as something quite fundamental and indispensable and integral to sensing with soul, to imaginal practice, and the whole soul-making dharma. But for some people—some of you might be interested in images, you like hearing about sacredness or whatever it is—but there really isn't that basis. We're back to foundations now, or foundations that can become roots, as we'll see. And there really isn't that developed basis of either awareness of the energy body or skill within. They might need to work and practice in different ways that really focus on that for a while.

Sometimes what's a factor here as well is that a person's not used to opening the energy body in the sense of having a lot of energy and openness in the energy body. We can feel the energy body at different times as being more or less energized, of course. For a lot of people, there's a whole range of holding and having energy course through the body, or the sense of the body being filled with much more energization than one is used to. For many people, that whole range of having more energy in the energy body, or the energy body being opened by having more energy, is just not an experience that they're used to. Many dharma practitioners as well.

So for some people, one piece of their developing the awareness and skill with the energy body is actually becoming used to having more energy.

One of the ways more energy flows through the energy body is through the long breath. In the Anapanasati Sutta, the Buddha begins with breathing in long breaths—the practitioner knows they're breathing in long, then breathing in short as the second instruction. Many times this simply gets ignored. It becomes just "okay, know whether your breath is long or short." But even that receives little attention, as people focus more on sensations at the abdomen or nostrils.

I'm not insisting on any particular interpretation. I don't really mind what the Buddha meant—it doesn't

matter. My point is that one could read this as an active encouragement rather than just passive noticing. Actually breathe long for a while. Fill the body, the space of the body with prana, with the chi of the breath, with that sense. What this does is open and energize the energy body if you stay with it for a while.

Sometimes this proves quite unusual, and in being unusual, quite uncomfortable for people. They resist for all kinds of different reasons. Sometimes it's simply unfamiliar. Sometimes it's frightening. Sometimes there are other aspects of being that become attached or consequential when there's abundant energy. When there's much energy and openness in the energy body, it's hard for the mind not to open. It's hard for the soul not to open. It's hard for the emotions not to open. It's hard perhaps for certain psychological structures not to open or be revealed or changed.

The person may, consciously or unconsciously, feel some resistance to all that. There are countless possibilities for what may be happening. Sometimes one needs to explore those reservations or concerns, going into the psychology and working with it gradually and caringly. Other times, one doesn't. One simply needs to practice the long breath, for instance.

I gave some retreats on samatha and the art of concentration in 2007 and 2008. There's guidance there if you want it, and you can find it other places as well. But opening and energizing the energy body with that stage of breath practice is one example. One becomes accustomed to feeling it, used to the body being open and energized, having more energy. The capacity of the energy body grows.

I've tried to explain why this is relevant, but often a person simply doesn't see it as relevant anymore. They think other things are important, that something else is the issue. I'll return to that.

I've been lingering on this point of opening the energy body for a while. This openness of the energy body—you know, the energy body opens and closes all the time. It's doing that all day long in different stages of openness and closure for many different reasons. Practicing the long breath tends to open the energy body. When there's craving, it tends to contract the energy body. When there's eros, it tends to open the energy body, and so forth. There are many factors that influence the state of the energy body at any time.

But the capacity or accessibility or even the habit of opening the energy body may prove quite significant in the long term—certainly in one's practice and the direction of practice, and in one's life as well. Opening, opening. The openness of the energy body is not divorced from many other factors, as I mentioned a few minutes ago.

For example, radical generous courage—radical, courageous generosity—is also an opening of the being. You can see that. It's like the fist is closed, clinging onto what I've got: my coins, my pension, whatever it is. And there's an opening of the being. I have to open the fist to give.

So generosity is an opening, radical generosity that is almost courageous in how much it's giving. It too will have an effect. Everything's connected. The dependent origination can't get away from it. That

opening of the being radically in radical generosity will open the heart, open the energy body, open the sense of self, opening all kinds of possibilities.

You can see, for example, sometimes a person's been practicing Dharma for thirty years, but they've never really practiced generosity, or the level at which they practice generosity is quite limited. I'm talking about all kinds of generosity here. There remains a sort of contractedness, a stinginess of being, just holding, holding oneself in, holding—almost like making this gesture, holding the energy body in. That's what happens when I'm not generous. And the opposite happens with generosity.

So you see some people, as I said, practice for thirty years, go all over the world, check this teacher out, check that, read this, read that, do this practice, do that practice, and something's still contracted. There's still this kind of almost perpetual tightness there. I mean, yes, some other things change, but still you get a sense of their being—there's something still kind of tight there.

Other people have been practicing much less time, but are willing to experiment with a kind of radical generosity of being and the courage that takes. And you see all kinds of consequences: an openness of being, openness of heart, ability to let go.

So there are a lot of factors—a lot of capabilities, readinesses, tendencies—that may be related to things like the ease of samādhi. I don't think we ask enough: How much is my openness and generosity connected with my capacity for samādhi? I would say a lot. Why? Because, again, they're both opennesses. Samādhi is a state of the energy body being open and a kind of surrendering to whatever—again, if we talk about the first jhāna, I'm surrendering. Part of it is, as much as I penetrate the pīti, the rapture, the bliss there, I'm also surrendering to it. I'm abandoning myself to it. I'm opening my energy body to that and letting it fill.

So this capacity, this readiness, this willingness and tendency to open in different ways is all connected. Again, a person might be practicing for twenty years and say, "I really need to work on my focus. My mind just wanders. I really need to just come back to the breath again and again and develop my concentration." And they're sort of interested in jhāna, but they've basically given up, and they keep trying to develop their concentration, convinced that if only they can just keep the mind in one place, nail it to whatever it is—the abdomen or the nostrils or whatever—that they will develop samādhi there. "My mind just keeps wandering. I just need to keep doing this."

And they don't see that actually their lack of opening to the loveliness of samādhi and the possibility of jhāna may actually be much more related to the openness of the energy body and the unfamiliarity or disinclination to open it, as we said before, with the generosity, with the long breath, whatever.

Sometimes one might hear this kind of thing and not even think it's significant, because they know what they need to do is just nail their mind, their attention, to the tip of the nose or whatever it is. And of course that is an aspect—that ability to stay focused, to concentrate in that narrow sense of the word, is a factor

in the development of samādhi. But it's often just way too overemphasized. A person doesn't grasp the broader set of often much more significant conditions and factors that come together to allow deepening, allow opening to jhānic experience and that kind of thing.

But this openness in the energy body, and for example, what I'm calling radical generosity—that whole exploration and lovely territory—may also be related not just to the ease of samādhi that a person experiences, but also to their ability to let go in general. In other words, to their freedom. Again, you can see it in the analogy of opening the fist in giving, in generosity.

It might also be related not just to the ease of samādhi and the ability to let go in general, but also to one's capacity or propensity for religious feeling, what we might call—for devotion, for opening, for surrender, for a sense of divinity and all that. I'll come back to that in a second.

I'm not saying this is the only factor. There are lots of factors involved in developing samādhi, involved in our ability to let go in life and be free, and also lots of factors that feed what we might call religious openings, religious sensibility, religious devotion and attunement. But these factors that I'm pinpointing right now, coming out of our discussion about opening the energy body, they may be much more significant than we realize.

I have a colleague, Suvadharo—some of you will know him—and I was sitting in on a talk that he gave at Gaia House some years ago, and if my memory serves me, he said something I thought was great. He was talking to a room full of people about meditation, and he said, "You know, some of you would be actually much better served by opening your house to a refugee family than by sitting on a retreat."

That's a bold thing to say, and it probably startled quite a few people, I imagine. But again, it comes back to this radical generosity idea and the opening that comes from that and then what that sets in motion, or what it opens in the being, and the ramifications for letting go, for freedom, for opening sensibility, for samādhi—all kinds of things.

So there's a lot to consider here. All these things, as I said, will be mutually dependently arising. It's not that one thing comes first and then another. Any of them can feed the other.

A devotional experience will tend to open the energy body. Generosity will tend to open the energy body and potentially serve as one of the supports for the capacity for religious experience, for sensing the soul, all kinds of things.

Sometimes in relationship to practice, a person has been practicing for a while and encounters all this talk about letting go and craving and freedom, and they say, "I should let go of craving and aversion and fear." But it might well be that practicing, for instance, more generosity, practicing surrendering and abandoning in relationship, opening in relationship to the energy body and the sense of energy there—that may be much more helpful in supporting the ability to really let go of craving, aversion and fear, rather than simply saying, "Oh, I should. I've been practicing so long and I should."

These factors feed each other. I want to draw out one strand and repeat it: the capacity to open the energy body and the being in surrender to something higher—some kind of sense of divinity in the loosest, broadest sense. This opening of the energy body is related to our capacity to surrender, and not just to a jhanic experience or a dissolution of the self and the space that opens up there, but also our ability to surrender in devotion or have a devotional sense. It's the same kind of movement—there's a lot of overlap between what is actually happening in the soul, in the energy body there.

All these factors are tied together in a kind of mutual dependent origination. I'm hoping to offer in these talks certainly tips and techniques, but also things to consider and reflect on or to question, whether or not they might be relevant to you at any time.

When we talk like this, we want to really steer clear of a tendency to view myself, to view oneself in a certain way. So back to non-identification, anatta. "I am like this. I'm just closed. My heart is closed. I'm a miserable, stingy person. My energy body is closed. I'll never feel devotion. I am like this." As opposed to understanding the mind, the heart, the body, the energy body, the attention—all of this we could see, and I think it's very skillful to understand all those aspects of our being as habits. As habits, they're trainable, they're malleable, they're shapeable. They're not fixed in stone.

Yes, we can talk about habits of energy patterns. You can see it or sense it in people's bodies—there's a certain habit this way or that way. But it's not who I am. This is really, really important if you're listening to some of this and there's some kind of contraction of identification and either praising yourself or more commonly beating yourself up or despairing. It's really, really important.

At the same time, we can also talk about styles of soul, soul personae, if you like. Souls are different. They're still trainable and shapeable, but we're also born with different souls, different soul styles and different soul personae. There are these two balancing considerations when we're really looking at the whole thing. Yes, we have individual soul styles and soul personae that we seem to be thrown into this world with, or as. And all of it is trainable and malleable.

Just another brief point to consider is that the kind of dharma that one might gravitate towards might also be determined by, amongst other factors—and it's not going to be just one consideration—but it might be determined amongst other factors by, for instance, this capacity: How do I have the capacity to really open the energy body? And then related with that is the possibility: Is it possible for me to feel devotion? Is it possible to have a sense of divinity and dimensionality without which devotion remains fairly flat?

All these factors will contribute to determining what kind of dharma one gravitates towards. If there isn't the capacity to open the energy body, there might not be the capacity to give oneself in devotion in a really deep way that feels deep in the sense of permeating the levels of the soul and the body and the heart. And so one is less drawn to a dharma, for instance, like soul-making dharma that tends to talk in religious terms and soul terms, and devotion, and divinity, and all that. One may avoid samadhi practice in the sense of jhana practice, etc.

But it might be that these factors, our capacities here—or our trainings here, maybe that's a better way of saying it—our training of our capacities here may well determine our direction, not just in practice, but in life. That's not to say that any one dharma direction is better or worse. That's just a completely irrelevant thing to try and measure—soul-making dharma better than this dharma or Mahasi. It's just not interested in such comparisons.

But there are different styles, and different souls will be called to different styles. The question again is: am I permitting my being, my life, my soul, my practice to be called where it is truly called? Or is it constrained by just habit—for instance, the energy body not being open, which then limits my sense of capacity to open to any sense of divinity, making me uninterested in certain paths?

It's great if it's intrinsic to my being that I choose this path over that path. It's less great if I'm propelled in one direction rather than another only because my choice of direction is limited and constrained by habit, indoctrination, fear, or whatever it might be.

I'm reminded of an aphorism that Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit." In a way, he's talking about the same thing. How we are with the body and our capacity or ability to open that body in surrender, in abandon, in connection—to tolerate a lot of charge, a lot of energy—all that's intimately related with how we are sexually.

This is obviously fraught territory, and there are all kinds of wounds people carry. But again, sometimes we can talk about different soul styles, different sexual styles that are more or less intrinsic. Sometimes we're talking about the result of wounding or indoctrination or intimidation. But there's a connection here between sexuality and what spiritual path and spiritual possibilities actually open up for us.

I know this is loaded and can be tender territory for people, but I hope you can understand the point I'm making without any temptation to judge yourself. Again, these are things to consider, things to reflect on. Is it relevant for me?

Let me say this again: it's not that one path is better or worse than another. What I want is this: am I free to choose? Am I free to choose according to what I love and what my soul feels drawn to and what makes sense to me?

First point. Second point to repeat: Yes, I think we can talk about different soul styles, different soul personae that we are born with, that we are given. I'm given my soul. How did it come to be that I'm like this? I'm given my soul, and it's a certain way, and it has certain tendencies and certain capacities, while other capacities are more limited, other tendencies are less developed.

So yes, there's that. We can talk about being given a certain soul intrinsically, and we can talk about the trainability and malleability of our capacities, tendencies, inclinations, and what's available and accessible to us.

There's another sense that we can talk about opening the energy body—meaning opening up in particular with regard to the image and the felt sense of the energy body. I've put this out recently, but I want to emphasize it to really make sure people get this development or furthering of the teachings and the possibilities in this teaching of the energy body.

We can, as I said, experience at any moment—whether we're with another or with an object in nature or just with ourselves in meditation or going about our day—we experience the energy a certain way. The energy of this body or the energy between bodies. There's a felt sense of that. There's also an image of it, as part of two of the three components of the energy body.

But it's another step to then see or sense that experience of energy at any time, to experience it as imaginal. So often when people talk about energy body or subtle body, there's either an explicit or implicit tendency—we're talking about something real here. Maybe not everyone can perceive it. Maybe scientists would quibble with it. But we're talking about something real. The energy is like this. My energy was like that.

That's all good and fine, but there's a kind of reification there. This is how it is. What happens when the felt sense of energy—well, when the image of the energy—is actually seen, sensed, conceived of, and felt as image? There are all kinds of possibilities here.

When this shift occurs, what needs to be present? The energy must become neither real nor not real, taking on that imaginal middle way quality with its theatre-like character. There's a recognition that this energy, this very sense of aliveness and connection, is itself a kind of sacred play, a divine imagination expressing itself through our embodied experience.

This transformation from ordinary experience to imaginal perception can be quite profound. What was perhaps initially felt as simple sexual attraction or energetic exchange suddenly opens into something more mysterious, more pregnant with meaning. The energy itself becomes a character in the sacred drama, neither merely physical nor purely conceptual, but occupying that fertile middle ground where the imaginal dwells.

Sometimes practitioners report that when they make this shift - when they consciously choose to see and feel the energy as imaginal rather than simply as experience - the whole quality of the encounter changes. There's often more space around it, less of the compulsive quality that can sometimes accompany strong energetic experiences. The energy becomes more workable, more fluid, more available for the deeper transformations that imaginal practice can offer.

This principle extends far beyond dyadic work, of course. In solo practice, one might experiment with seeing whatever energetic experiences arise - whether it's the simple aliveness in the hands during meditation, or more complex energy body experiences, or even difficult emotions that carry their own particular energetic signature - as imaginal rather than just as experiences happening to us.

The invitation is always the same: can this energy, whatever its flavor or intensity, be held and perceived and related to as imaginal? Can it participate in that sacred theatre where meaning and transformation become possible? This doesn't diminish the reality of the experience - quite the opposite. It opens the experience to depths of significance and possibility that purely literalistic perception cannot access.

What emerges from this way of working is often a much more fluid and creative relationship with the whole spectrum of our energetic life. The body becomes a space of sacred imagination, and our various energies become the very medium through which the imaginal expresses itself.

What factors need to ignite to make that shift? And again, with that transformation, the whole texture of the experience, its range and dimension, and what opens in the entirety of the experience might change.

For instance, where I was imaged but the other wasn't, and there was just this sexual energy that wasn't quite imaginal, both might become subsumed. Self and other might become imaginal. The eros itself, the sexual image, the images, the energy and desire—all of that might then ignite. The sense might arise of participating mystically in some kind of cosmic sacrament, again with that participation and cosmic dimensionality.

This attraction here, this sexual image, reveals other dimensions—cosmic dimensions. It becomes a holy sacrament that has its roots, its origins in the mundus imaginalis, in the world of images. Everything becomes imaginal there. So that's one example of the kind of opening that might occur.

I'll give one more example to end tonight, again speaking to the impact of that shift. I was practicing in a dyad, and the person I was practicing with was gazing at me and describing her experience. Almost all of what she described was energy body experience. I was very sensitive to her gestures, felt very sensitive to her words and her energy. The concertina opened for me.

As we've discussed, concertina as one of the elements, one of the nodes, refers to the spread of potential images, the incipient or inchoate images waiting in the wings around a central perception. They're not fully present or fully dominant there, but nothing really ignited to become fully imaginal.

As I was there and she was describing her energy body experience, and I was there with that sensitivity and the sense of the concertina, something felt slightly blocked in the process, despite my partner having strong energy openings which she was describing to me. There was a lot of energy, and she was being very careful and mindful in attending to it and opening to it and sharing it.

Then I asked her at a certain point, "Is that perception of energy, is it an imaginal perception?" She got it immediately and it shifted as a result of my just dropping that in, or rather she did something inside to shift it to an image of energy. The energy openings she was feeling and sensing were regarded as imaginal.

The point I want to make is partly about the effects of that, but partly about dyad practice. When she made

that shift, I felt my experience open up to image. What I'd felt a little blocked in my experience from my end—like the whole thing wasn't fully imaginal, was just sort of potential there in the wings, the concertina, but something felt like it wasn't quite igniting—that's really interesting. Her experience changed, and my experience changed.

This is fascinating to me, again about the effects of what we call a shift of level—of sensing energy as image, as imaginal image, and the capacity to do that, and what happens when we do that. The second point is how interesting this is regarding dependent arising of experience in a dyad. My experience depended on a subtle shift in how she viewed her experience.

Something happens in one person, in one component of the dyad, and something correspondingly is then allowed to open in the other and in the dyad as a whole. So yes, there's the significance and power of the option of sensing the energy body or the energy field between two people—of sensing it with soul, rather than just as plain experience or fact, which is the default and implicit way we tend to sense energy, if we sense it at all.

But secondly, there's this fascinating and mysterious sense of what happens between two people when one person has a certain shift, or makes a certain shift in their experience—in this case, viewing the energy as imaginal rather than just as energy—and how that then affects the dyad, affects the other person's experience, and affects the whole range of what then becomes possible.

I think I'll stop there for this evening.

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