Heat and the Material

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:58:13

This evening I'd like to speak about emotions and the relationship with emotions—the conception of emotions and skill with emotions in the context, mostly, of imaginal practice and soul-making.

One really general thing I'd like to say right from the start, and actually emphasize because I think it's quite important: when we talk about anything at all, but certainly when we talk about emotions, and we're being perhaps a little prescriptive in the sense of "try and do this with the emotions," or "this is what's good with the emotions," or "this is what's healthy," or "this is what a healthy psychology is"—certainly when we talk about our views about emotions and psychology, I think two things are really important to say.

I don't think human beings will ever come to the end, reach some final understanding of emotionality and emotional life and everything that's involved there. It's one of those rich, endlessly rich, endlessly fertile mysteries of human existence and of the soul. So that puts us in a relationship of necessary humility, inquiry, experimentation, open-endedness with regards to emotion and also psychologies. That's not to say that we then throw out any exploration or throw out any conceptions or ideas or conceptual frameworks or approaches—not that at all. But we hold them in an awareness of an ongoing exploration that I don't think we'll ever finally figure out. And hooray for that, I say.

The second thing, and it's related, is that when we talk about emotions and human psychology and someone puts forth certain kinds of ideals or divides what's a healthy kind of emotional life or approach to the emotions from an unhealthy one, we need to really be aware that those kinds of views are enormously culturally, historically situated and therefore conditioned.

It's easy for us to read a contemporary psychology book that says something about emotions and psychology—how it works and what they are and where they come from and what they need to be and what a healthy emotional life looks like—and kind of assume that, oh, that's right, and perhaps other periods in history or other cultures are engaged in repression or hysteria or whatever it is. I think there's an arrogance in that, and we, all of us, including myself, need to be careful about that kind of thing.

You only need to look around in contemporary cultures, cultures that exist in the world, and even subcultures—like this particular Dharma culture, or that particular Dharma culture, this religious culture, or that secular culture, this group, that group, let alone nationalities and ethnic heritages—to see what a huge range there is of what's regarded as healthy, appropriate, helpful, normal relationship with and conception of and attitude to emotions.

So I'm going to say some things—some things to reflect on, to consider, to work with perhaps with regard to our soul-making paradigm. But the whole thing has, if you like, a huge caveat that we can all remember about the cultural historical situatedness and therefore contingency of views and psychologies around areas like emotion.

Actually related to that, it's interesting that it might be, given perhaps certain contemporary views about healthy psychology and healthy emotional life, that some of the people who are attracted to the soul-making dharma and this kind of paradigm are people who, let's say, tend to be quite passionate, tend to love deeply. There was that psychology book from the eighties—what is it? *Women Who Love Too Much* or something? I never read it. I actually don't know what it said, but such people might be seen by others as having a style of loving that is hysterical. There's something unhealthy, out of balance there, just a bit off or too much or whatever.

Or it might be assumed that this person is that way—they tend to be overly passionate or love too much, whatever that means, or too deeply or whatever—because of some early lack rooted in their upbringing, in their childhood, probably their family, the mother, the father, whatever it is. And what's really driving this, quote, "loving too much" or being so passionate is some kind of neediness, some kind of clinging, a tendency to papañca, some kind of hysteria.

But to some of those people, the soul-making dharma will be very attractive and make sense. Yes, for some people, the way passion moves in them, the way emotion moves in them, the way love moves them, it may move them to certain manifestations of clinging, of papañca, or a kind of craving that becomes a neediness. But it may not always be because of some cause in their personal history. It may not just be a defilement that's driving them, a kilesa.

But it may be actually for that person that there is already a lot of eros and tendency to image in their soul. That's the soul that they are, the soul that they were given, that they were gifted with. And it's a lot to learn how to handle such a soul that has a lot of eros, that has a tendency to image. It's like being given a gift of a powerful horse, and you actually have to learn how to ride that horse, and that takes some time. It's very different if someone gives you a gift of a little pony.

So some people may have such souls—such rich, deep, fiery souls, lots of eros, lots of tendency towards image or inclination towards image, ease with image. But there's very little help or guidance in the culture in being able to ride that, relate skillfully to that soul so that this tremendous gift can actually flourish. Without such guidance, one gets thrown out of the saddle, trampled on, starts galloping away in this or that direction completely out of one's control.

There's very little help or guidance in the culture to allow that soul to make soul, to engage in soul-making, for the eros-psyche-logos dynamic to expand and enrich and deepen in the ways that we've talked about. So in the absence of that help and that guidance and that ability to learn, that support in learning that, it does go towards craving. The eros does become craving. What could have become imaginal does become

papañca, unfixated image.

So for some people, with that kind of style of persona, of soul, it may be that part of what's happening is they're attracted to the soul-making teachings because they recognize something there. It's not just a cheap kind of legitimization of their quirky foibles or pathologies. There's something deep there, but you need to learn how to relate to this—how to ride and befriend that horse. So it really can be a gift, a powerful gift.

Of course, not everyone attracted to the soul-making dharma has that kind of soul style or psychology. There's a big range, and some tend toward much more apparent equanimity, calmness, steadiness. Some have a range, so I don't want to restrict it to that style, but just in terms of cultural views around emotion and what's considered healthy psychology.

Following on from this, I said recently in the Roots into the Grand Soul retreat that for a large portion of imaginal practice and soul-making practice, especially when there's dukkha, we have to realize that our relationship to the emotions needs to fall within a certain range in order that they can ferment the soul-making process, fertilize, and give rise to images. I think I used the analogy earlier in this series of talks of a crucible, an alchemical vessel. And if that crucible doesn't do its job of containing the material and tolerating the heat, allowing the contents to ferment and undergo the soul-making dynamic, then images won't arise.

For some people—and again, there's so much that really needs to be individually tailored in these teachings—part of the reason they might say, "I don't get images, I don't get intra-psychic images. I can kind of sense a sacredness in the environment of a certain kind, but I don't tend to get any images, or very, very few"—for some of those people, it may be that there are certain habits in their ways of relating to their emotional life that mean the crucible is broken in a not very helpful way. The vessel doesn't conduct heat, however we want to stretch this alchemical analogy.

In alchemy, sometimes what the alchemical material needs is heat, and that's part of the process. You put something in a vessel, a crucible, and you heat it, and that allows something to happen. Sometimes the material itself is generating heat, like compost or fermenting material. But there's a way that if we talk about heat as the emotional life, there's a relationship there. Not always—I'll come back to that—but for some people, without them really realizing it, the crucible around the emotions is not built well. It's not serving the purpose for imaginal practice. It might serve all kinds of other purposes in their life.

Some people are habituated to not actually registering or not even allowing certain emotions and certain emotional intensity, and they don't even realize that pattern. Sometimes that kind of pattern is actually sanctioned by role models these people may come into contact with, or by the Dharma itself preaching this sort of even equanimity. So such a person—sometimes that's the reason, not always, but sometimes that's a reason or part of a set of conditions preventing the birth, the arising of certain intra-psychic images.

It might look from the outside like this person is a good practitioner, a good Buddhist. They're calm, reasonable, even-keeled, certainly warm and friendly. But the way they are with emotions, or certain emotions at least, doesn't allow the kind of heating up or galvanizing of the whole soul-making dynamic in terms of generating images.

There's another way where someone actually does have a lot of emotions, but for different reasons—either just a lack of training (that's why we call this skill with emotions and the art of being with emotions, working in different ways with emotions and having that range, different approaches in different situations and for different ends)—someone may not have had that training. It just wasn't really given. Or they may have a tendency toward a lot of emotions—they do tend to feel anger or jealousy or judgmentalism or huge passion, whatever it is (we're talking now about the more difficult emotions)—but they don't really have the training and skill, the art of working well with those emotions to create a kind of crucible.

Or again, they have a kind of unquestioned indoctrination from Dharma teaching where they know they're feeling something—jealousy, anger, whatever—but they also know from their Dharma teachings that it's really not good, not helpful, it's a defilement. So the way they relate to it leaves them caught between a rock and a hard place. It's going on, they're sort of entangled in it, it's got them a little bit, and at the same time they're trying to dismiss it and push it away, get beyond it or get over it. So it's not that the emotions aren't arising, but there's this arising accompanied by judging themselves for having it or trying to get rid of it or pre-deciding that it's unhelpful.

Now, of course, for some people and for any person at any time, images don't just arise out of the heat of emotions, and certainly don't just arise out of dukkha. They can come out of the deep cool of equanimity—the Buddha often talks about the coolness of equanimity, the depths of that equanimity. Because equanimity is very related to unfabricating, and in the coolness, in the equanimity, in the unfabricating, there's this liquefying that I talk about sometimes. The liquefying of things, and out of that coolness can come very beautiful sensing with soul and other images.

So if we talk about heat meaning emotion and the material, it's not always the case that we need a lot of heat, or even any apparent heat. Sometimes it will come from coolness. So again, you can hear how when I say something, there's a caveat—really this is... or there's an "in this case, in that case, on the other hand, it could be..."

So when you listen, please regard these as things to consider, and really to ask yourself, because oftentimes I see these kinds of things are going on for people, and they're just not aware that they're going on. They're just not aware that that's a pattern that they're in.

Now, of course, Eros is a form of fire and heat, and I think I used that analogy in one of the talks on another course. So we can include that. But when we talk about heat, we might mean the whole range—coolness, eros, the whole range of emotions. Seemingly pathological emotions, seemingly beautiful

emotions, joy, love, all that.

But this is important, this factor: it may be the case with some people that the way of—or a certain range of ways of relating to the emotions—are just not accessible to that person. And so a kind of opening up, a self-awareness, an opening up and a training, an extension of one's habits needs to happen. All this is complicated and very individual, I think. So I'm making general points, but it's very individual.

Some people—I remember talking with someone not too long ago, actually feels a lot of different emotions, but not anger, this person. Didn't feel anger, and I think she was on the retreat where we did a little bit of movement and sort of careful—some were quite extravagant and energized movements, almost violent movements and soundings, and some were much more subtle. But she was on that retreat, and when we did certain movements that involved stomping and roaring and stuff like that, she just said it just didn't resonate at all. There was just nothing in her that felt any need for that or any place for that. It was slightly puzzling. I think a few people had different kinds of reactions because it was quite intense.

I'm talking about this person now. So lots of emotions were there to feel, but not anger. But this person also has a history of depression. And what's becoming clear is that in certain situations, when something feels unjust or she feels something that's angering her—what a person's doing or what a group is doing or some dynamic or something—that actually the anger doesn't even register. It completely bypasses the anger and instead it goes into depression, in this case a very, very vicious depression, very self-destructive.

Which is one of the—I've seen that before in both some friends and other practitioners. And again, it might be—I don't think it was in this case, but it might be sometimes a shadow of Dharma teaching that automatically puts anger in the category of defilement, kilesa, and something to be shunned and not allowed.

But in this case, there was a beginning to notice that link: "Okay, I feel, or I go into this depression when I feel somehow silenced or shut up." Now, maybe partly the external situation was silencing her to a certain extent, but a lot of the silencing was just internal. There was some mechanism operating below the radar of consciousness that just didn't allow the anger to be registered or felt or validated. And it went straight—the anger was turned on the self in a very deep and destructive way. Very, very painful. Paralyzingly painful.

So this pattern began to become clear. And it might be then that a stage of practice for that person is actually to realize that and perhaps replay a scenario—now I feel shut down, now I feel depressed—let's go back to that situation where it seems linked somehow and actually replay the scenario in one's imagination and slow it down a little bit. There, how do I feel about being shut up? How do I feel the frustration, the pent-up energy in that? How do I feel about what these people are saying or what they're trying to do or how they're manipulating, or how it seems they're manipulating the situation?

And not worry so much. So it's a practice. It's in a safe space. It's internal or with a friend or with a teacher in an interview, whatever it is. And actually slow it down. Not worry about: is this right? Is it wrong? Was it really the perception that they were manipulating, or am I just projecting that? Don't worry about that. Don't worry: am I going to then bite this person's head off? Don't worry. You just practice actually slowing the thing down and just—there, what's that feeling right there? It might start as frustration. It might start as just a feeling in the energy body, but we want to feel that energy in the energy body and have it be okay.

If we recognize it's anger, and you want to fucking kill that person, it's like okay—feel that, and really have that be okay. This doesn't mean you're going to kill the person. It doesn't mean you may or may not even say anything to that person—that comes later. But to actually feel it, give it some degree of respect, feel it in the energy body, give it some degree of respect—that's a huge step and hugely important.

So if we talk about—again, with all the caveats I said right at the beginning about cultural conditioning and views and being historically situated and contingent in that way—but it might be, speaking now in this culture and from the point of view of our paradigm and what we're elaborating in terms of soul psychology, it might be that this ability and willingness to actually recognize anger, feel it, contain it in the energy body, and give it some degree of validation in the sense of not just immediately dismissing it—at least that—may be what we call a foundational element of soul-making practice and dharma. It may be one of the foundations.

It may well be, again given all the caveats I said about culture and history, also one of the foundations just of psychological health. And it may be one of the foundations of healthy relationship, human relationship. But more than that, it may be one of the building blocks, one of the foundations of imaginal practice and soul-making dharma. This person could have lots of images, but it may be that in certain directions or certain possibilities of images never could arise.

Such a foundation, if it is a foundation of soul-making practice, might be, in the longer term, an example of a foundation that becomes a root, that then becomes something that itself is living and growing and nourishing. So this ability to feel anger, to tolerate it, to feel it in the body, to recognize it, to not dismiss it—yes, good part of emotional awareness, skill, health, etc. Yes, a part of what can then allow images to come. But it might be at a certain point that that becomes a root in the sense that the anger itself, to follow this example, the anger itself becomes imaginal. The anger itself becomes an erotic object.

Does that mean now I'm going to become hysterical and go out and buy a gun? No, of course not. We've talked about all this, about reification and literalization and the non-danger of that if one is really listening and following the teachings.

So there's one thing to have just a crucible that can hold material that can then ferment to create images. It's another step, perhaps, that that material itself becomes imaginable, that anger itself becomes imaginable, erotic. It starts to have other dimensions. It starts to have divinity. It starts to have even

eternality. It starts to have theatros. It starts to have fullness of intentions wrapped in all that grace, even the grace of anger, participation in divine anger—all kinds of possibilities.

So there may seem to be an obvious progression here. First you develop the human psychological skill as a foundation that allows certain directions and openings of images that might not have been otherwise available. And then it may be in time that that kind of emotion or these kinds of emotions also become roots in the sense they become roots—like I said, alive, vital part, nourishing part of the actual structure of the soul-making, as opposed to just something on which soul-making is built.

And again, lots of caveats because there's so much individual variation. Sometimes things don't happen in the sort of obvious linear order of progression, of gradual progression—first this, the easy step, then the intermediate step, then the advanced step. Sometimes the advanced step, or what is apparently the advanced step, happens first, and everything happens in the reverse order. Sometimes divine anger opens up as an image, and that image itself then allows—in drawing on the image, being supported by the image, nourished by the image, bringing that image back in a kind of, as a tincture into human situations, either meditating on it beforehand or in this almost homeopathic background way while one's in relationship—that the image itself then allows healthy human relationships at the normal, at the conventional level, etc. And it may change the relationship with the energy body and allow other possibilities in terms of opening up the energy in the energy body, etc.

Yes, we can talk about, "Well, generally this is easier and that builds on this and that builds on the second bit," etc. But sometimes things happen in very different orders and an image is given and everything shakes down or is informed by that image top-down, so to speak, from the divine to the human, if we use such language.

So there's something in here—you know, notice I said not dismissing it, a certain amount of validation—there's something similar, maybe some of you can recognize already, with a step in what we call the OCD practice, or the opening to the current of desire, a step of which is just to suspend the value judgment, the negative value judgment about what we're desiring. And just entertain the idea, even just for a limited time in practice, entertain the idea that there might be treasure here. Possibly there's treasure in this thing that I've been taught is akusala, that looks like a defilement, that's certainly difficult, that I'm a little bit wary of because heaven knows what might come out of my mouth or what I might say and do.

But there's something similar in terms of, let's just suspend that judgment and can I just drop in a grain of trust, maybe for a limited amount of time. Maybe there's a treasure here in this difficult emotion.

So there's a lot here. There's a lot about just healthy internal psychology, about human relationships, and certainly about working with images and the receiving or generating of images. And there's so much more to say. There's a whole step in learning how—and this is an aside now—but how do I express that anger in a way that's helpful and skillful? And the Buddha talks about our skill in communicating the difficult, etc.

And that usually takes time. I have to say that usually really takes time to learn how to do that. But again, there are always exceptions.

As I said, some people may need to work more with their emotions. In some instances, there's apparent skill with certain emotions. A person might say, "I'm good with this kind of emotion, that kind of emotion." It looks like they're working with it, being present with it. But other emotions remain completely out of bounds. Again, there's tremendous individual variation here.

It might be that a person needs to allow or feel more, to get into or sit with particularly the difficult emotions. Sometimes positive emotions are equally hard to tolerate—a lot of joy or a lot of love. These aren't culturally normal, and we're not used to that intensity. But sometimes a person needs to actually be in that more and more inclusively, not refusing, not ignoring, not veering away from the emotions they habitually or dogmatically don't like, don't approve of, don't trust.

This allows the psychic energy in the emotion to form a kind of crucible and give birth to, ferment an image that is powerfully soul-making.

Having said that—again, a caveat—is this a universal truth? I don't think so. There are all kinds of other factors, as I mentioned earlier. This is just one factor, but it's really worth looking inside over a period of time, reflecting, asking questions. Maybe even ask a good friend what they think, because sometimes we can't see ourselves that clearly, or a teacher who knows you well.

So is it a universal truth? I don't think so. It may be that some people or some cultures—as we're talking now about what might inhibit the transubstantiation of psychic material into an image, the giving birth to images in the imaginal world—it may be that some people, some cultures actually need much less of the galvanizing that happens from emotions, much less of that kind of heat in order to give rise to images. And that may be for different reasons.

It may be that such a person is more accustomed to and more comfortable with a logos, a conceptual framework that supports the imaginal. So their default logos, or they can happily and fairly easily spend time entertaining a conceptual framework that's actually much more supportive to the imaginal. Someone else may be okay with their emotions, but there are certain concepts or conceptual frameworks that are just locked into place—again, maybe consciously, maybe unconsciously. And that's the reason.

Whereas the other person, as I said, is comfortable with a certain logos, and that logos is well-oiled. It's not like an unfamiliar, clunky, or rusty piece of machinery. It's quite smooth, quite ready, quite accessible. So that's a factor.

It may be, too, just what arises from meditation habit. One person might have much less of a habit of dismissing images in practice. They're so trained—as I was for many years—in dismissing any kind of image, just through the usual instructions of mindfulness. You might note something and put it aside, or you're concentrating on your breath, so images or whatever else are just irrelevant.

This might be trained over months, years, decades in some cases, like my own. And that actually means certain pathways have to get oiled, have to get smooth, have to be opened up, because there's such a habit of immediately dismissing any image that comes. "That's just a daydream. It's not what meditation's about." And that can become a deeply ingrained habit.

It may be as well, as I mentioned earlier, that there's just a different—and I think there is—just a different natural propensity in different souls to have more or less images, to have that more accessible.

And then, of course, there's cultural situatedness. There may be for some a kind of cultural affirmation and reinforcement of images—certainly deep images. So maybe in certain more religious cultures, or for a person who has had that background where deep images—by deep I mean not necessarily imaginal in our sense with all the imaginal Middle Way and all that, but deep in the sense that they touch the soul and they're designed to touch the soul. Not just an image of whatever—an advert for an SUV car or whatever—which interestingly try to touch something in us of our longing for freedom, mystery, beauty, autonomy, the image of the self. Well, the car ads are really about the image of the self.

Anyway, but in certain cultures where there's an affirmation, a reinforcement, a normality for deep images, and those deep images are public, shared, talked about, respected, venerated even—all that is also going to shape and support the arising of images for an individual person. Someone else is in a culture that dismisses or denigrates images that just don't have any place except at the most superficial level of adverts and consumer culture.

It might also be—again, we're talking now about what allows images to arise more or less easily—it may be for some people that emptiness practices and understandings have gone deep enough to liquefy and divinize all perception. So I outlined this in the book *Seeing That Frees*: emptiness goes deep, deep, deep into the unfabricated, and then, if you like, out the other end, where one realizes that sacredness is everywhere, not just in the unfabricated as opposed to the fabricated.

So maybe for some people, and for myself—I shared this before—I think that was my path to the imaginal. It opened up through pursuing emptiness deeply. But not for everyone. Yet for some people, that will be a very significant factor: there's often enough accessibility to that kind of liquefied and divinized perception of everything.

It may be, again, that the energy body awareness is just more readily and wholly available. So again, we're talking about what are the elements that need to be there? And we've talked so much in the past few years about how just opening up the energy body can help support the movement towards even the reception of images, and then the images becoming more imaginally alive.

So there are lots of factors here, but this business about emotions, as I said, is really worth considering and developing one's skill there, wherever one's at with it.

I've mentioned in the past when I talk about the breaking of the vessels and the Kabbalistic term *shevirat*

hakelim. We could say something more general: the soul-making dynamic, or soul-making over time—not necessarily from any individual image, but soul-making certainly over time—involves and catalyzes a stretching, a stretching of our being, of our soul, of our mind, of our heart, of our energy body range. There may be a shattering, this breaking of the vessels, a certain kind of tension.

With all that, often some territories of unsureness, complication. In the very dynamic itself, we talk about how the *eros-psyche-logos* dynamic complexifies itself so that the image becomes more complex. The ideas, the available ideas that are implicit as conceptions within perception, become more complicated, or as seeds for perception and reflection become more complicated. One's relationships may become more complicated.

Over time: stretch, shattering, tension, unsureness, complication, fertility, and ask—or several asks, challenge, duty. In other words, yes, tremendous beauty in the soul-making process, in the soul-making dynamic, but also difficulty as well, challenge and difficulty.

And so sometimes I feel when people only report loveliness from the whole imaginal and soul-making practices that it may be that they're missing something. Again, there's lots of individuality here, but it may be that a whole wing, if you like, is not being allowed, not explored so much.

I think I talked about that in the talk called "The Spreading of Five Wings"—that short talk is a reminder of what may need opening to and including and extending, what ranges may need extending as we grow in the soul-making. And again, given the caveat that souls are different, therefore the ranges are different—people have different ranges, maybe we could say almost intrinsically, and it can be trained.

But the point is that generally soul-making, not necessarily from any individual image, but generally over time, involves difficulty and challenge and stretch and the discomfort of that, as well as the beauty and the ease and the liberation.

Let's go back to that passage from Genesis that I mentioned the other day: Jacob wrestling the angel. The wound and the blessing came together in that case. And there's something, again, reading that story through the poetic lens of the soul-making dharma and the conception and the imaginal sensibilities—the blessing and the wound go together. No blessing, no wound. And so this is often the case with soul-making and the soul-making dynamics, certainly over time.

So this is interesting. Let me try and explain this. Having said what we just said, I want to talk about why it is sometimes, or why it may be, what might be the case for some people who feel like, "I don't get many images, certainly not intrapsychic images."

So it may be for some people that this is relevant: In imaginal images, if they're really allowed to galvanize the *eros-psyche-logos* dynamic, as we just said, there will be an opening, a stretching, potentially a breaking—either a gradual stretching or a breaking of vessels—as part of the soul-making dynamic sometimes.

Now, here's what I want to add to this. So many things in the domains of psychology, spirituality, soul work, dharma, where there's a dependency one way—in other words, this stretching, this sometimes uncomfortable breaking of vessels and stretching with all the potential difficulties that I just outlined, where that's dependent on the soul-making dynamic—the dependency often runs both ways.

So when you see a dependency one way, where as part of the gift there can also be the challenge, the stretching, the breaking, where there's dependency one way like that, we can usually expect—it's usually really worth looking for—the dependency runs the other way too. Dependency is usually mutual, mutual dependent origination. This depends on that, but that also depends on this.

In other words, when we are opened up—mind, heart, sometimes body—when we're stretched, when we're broken sometimes, or there's a breaking of vessels, whether that feels like internal mental vessels and containers and compartments and understandings, whether it's relational, whether it's philosophical or emotional—when there's that, in the reverse dependency, that very opening, stretching, breaking can give rise to images and to eros.

So when we're in love, something is really opening and being stretched in us. And our whole perception, not just of the beloved, but also of the self and the world—something's really being stretched there, with all the craziness of falling in love. So it's not necessarily always just a stroll in the park, being in love.

When we're in a moral crisis, that kind of stretch—and I'm going to come back, as I said in the introductory talk, I'm hoping that I will have time and capacity to come back and talk about morality and ethics. But one of the things is, in a way, it's hard to be a sensitive human being these days and not feel some degree of moral crisis with the complexity of the world and the difficulty of what's going on globally.

But certainly when we're in moral crisis, that's also an opening, a stretching, a tearing of the fabric of the view, of the heart, of the inclinations, of the desires, of the will. Or when there's a moral stretch where we feel called to take a stand, to speak, to act in a certain way that may require all kinds of courage, stepping out of our comfort zones—it stretches us in some way morally, or a heart stretch, or our ideas of this or that, our conceptual frameworks, maybe a map of the path, or an idea of who we are, or what the world is.

When we encounter teachings or teachers that profoundly touch our soul, this too creates a sacred stretch. Our existing frameworks—what we thought we knew about healthy psychology, our conceptual maps of the spiritual path, our fundamental understanding of who we are or what the world is—all these may be broken open or expanded.

When ideas shatter in this way, when our familiar containers can no longer hold what we're experiencing, these become examples of being opened, stretched, broken—vessels breaking or expanding beyond their previous limits. When we're stretched in these profound ways, then again, because of mutual dependent arising, these become particularly fertile times for images to arise.

And the images that emerge can be deep, deep guides for our soul. They have everything to do with the

angel out ahead. They have everything to do with what we feel called toward, what we want to move toward—with eros itself.

So by "stretched," listen carefully to the kinds of stretch I'm describing. I'm not simply talking about being busy. Most people nowadays are too busy—we're all too busy in that superficial way. Neither am I talking about mere ego concerns—worrying about giving a presentation and what others might think of me.

I'm talking about soul concerns. The soul being stretched by soul-making itself. This organ of soul that we've discussed—the one that senses in particular ways and yearns to sense in particular ways—actually grows. We make soul. We add to it. It becomes a bigger, more complex, more multifaceted organ. And when we're stretched, when the soul is stretched by deep soul concerns, then that becomes particularly fertile soil for images to arise.

One reason some people may not experience intrapsychic images—and I don't want to present this as a universal rule, but it's worth honest, deep reflection—is that they actually avoid moral stretches and crises. They may be busy doing good work in the world, but there's no genuine risk involved. There's very little breaking out of established molds, no truly courageous taking of stands, no extending beyond what has become routine, ordinary, or comfortable.

Because such a person is actually living in a constrained way—and they might not even realize it, thinking "I'm engaged in good work, I'm a Dharma teacher, or a psychologist, or whatever"—their soul isn't being stretched in certain essential ways. They're not placing themselves in situations that would create that sacred stretch, that would make things somewhat unstable, that would risk the kind of extension and perhaps even breaking that constitutes crisis.

I remember when I first began giving talks on soul-making and the imaginal—for a year or two, I think. As I shared in the last retreat, there was a real stretch for me. Even though some people had been quite hostile to emptiness teachings for various reasons, the level of hostility and anger from some people regarding soul-making and imaginal teachings was quite remarkable.

Going places to give talks, or even at Gaia House in some situations, I would feel: "Wow, this is a stretch." Not just the material itself—which by its very nature was stretching, even breaking, the Dharma paradigm, depending on your perspective—but also putting myself in situations where I could sense the hostility, where people would write notes or speak to me with considerable antagonism.

That stretch itself, knowing I was entering those situations while wanting to offer this material that felt deeply important to my soul, to soul in general, to the Dharma, to our culture—that required courage. I was taking a stand for something essential. And that was enormously fertile in terms of giving rise to images that echoed and mirrored that very situation, that very difficulty. Really helpful images, profoundly fertile ones.

Having cancer and probably dying soon—that's also a stretch. That whole strand of my life in recent years

involves a kind of breaking: breaking of the body, breaking of life, breaking of one's continuities and relationships. This too constitutes a stretch of the soul and being, encompassing deep soul concerns.

The unfolding tragedies of climate change and ecological degradation, mass species extinction—these tragedies can be felt as something truly breaking in the heart, in our being, in the fabric of our civilizations. It's breaking the fabric of the only home we know in the universe, the fabric of nature in which we're so deeply embedded.

Anger, especially the righteous indignation we can feel in response to moral issues or regarding climate change and species extinction and humanity's insufficient response—that anger arising from deep soul concerns can also be ripping at fabrics and stretching things.

It might simply be being touched in our soul by a teaching, a teacher, or a tradition.

It might not even be our main tradition, but all these are examples of things that stretch the soul and open things up and maybe break things in us, break vessels in us, and that can give rise to images.

There's this mutual dependent origination between soul stretch and soul-making as part of what's going on in the soul-making process. We stretch the soul by what we're opening to, or opening ourselves to, or the situations we're putting ourselves in life. Stretch the soul in life, and there's soul-making that happens through that, very probably with lots of imaginal images being part of that process of soul-making. And where there's soul-making over time, there will be a stretch. So the dependency is mutual—it runs both ways.

In the opening talk of this course, I made a categorization into three modes. There's what we might call fixated images and papañca as one mode of the imagination. There is mindful awareness or deconstruction of images as a second form. And the third is allowing the images or supporting the images to become imaginal and soul-making.

Wrapped up in those three, we can also trace a corollary tripartite division of the relationship with emotions. In the case of papañca and fixated image, the emotions are usually unskillful. They're not helpful—they've got us in their grip, and we're being sent through the spinner. They've got us, and they're unskillful emotions. Even if there's love, there's a lot of grasping or clinging in it.

When we're mindful of what's going on—like there's some tendency to papañca, there's a certain image—and when we're just mindful of that, it tends to quiet, to pacify the emotions. That movement is actually part of a larger movement of lessening fabrication. So also the emotion itself is fabricated less, and we go towards a coolness, a calming, a kind of emotional neutrality. Mindfulness, as I've pointed out several times, is just a certain degree of less fabrication. So we're fabricating less story, less self, less image, less emotion.

In contrast, when we're on the imaginal track, then the emotions—we form a kind of crucible for the

emotions so that the emotions can be integral and part of, and nourish the whole, giving birth to the imaginal. Then they tend to—they might still be intense, so they're not necessarily pacified, they might be intense—but they're transformed, or given other dimensions, or other roots, and they tend to be liberated in the best sense.

Just to linger on this tripartite division for a moment: there are ways of being with emotions. For example, in typical mindfulness instructions, we let go of the story, let go of the self. What that does is there is a little less fabrication that pacifies the emotions. And in so doing, it doesn't become soul-making. That's just a pacification. It doesn't become imaginal—there's just a pacification.

Those set of instructions I gave called "Working with the Emotional Body" from 2011—where I made the point about emotions being something we'll never get to the bottom of as a species, our understanding of them—there I gave seven guided meditations, instructions. They also will tend to pacify. They're skillful ways of working with emotions. So we're not throwing these out for good reason. We're not throwing them out once and for all. We want to keep that kind of way of relating to emotions—just a simple mindfulness, a simple lessening of the fabrication. And within that, there's a range of ways. There were these seven modes of paying attention and working with emotions. All of them are kinds of mindfulness, kinds of stances of mindfulness that would pacify the emotion and with that self, and the fabrication.

But if we want the imaginal to come from the emotion, then we need a kind of crucible. We need to let the emotions heat up in certain ways in that alchemical vessel. So in this tripartite division, we could make distinctions: What goes in each division? What kind of image? What kind of desire?

What kind of emotion? And what kind of fabrication?

With what we're calling papañca, or fixated image, well, that's the kind of image. It's fixated, it's reified, it's papañca. What kind of desire? Craving—the contraction of craving, and the dukkha of craving. What kind of emotion? Unskillful emotion. It's got us, it's tangled us, it's taking us for a ride, we're caught up in it. What kind of fabrication? Unskillful fabrication. The self, other, and the situation, the world, are all fabricated in ways that are bringing dukkha, that are not helpful, that are reified.

I see myself this way, clinging to that view. That's how I am. I see that person that way because they looked at me this way, or they didn't speak to me, or they did speak to me. I'm fabricating the perception of them in a very literalized, very reified way, and usually in a way that brings suffering. And the situation, the world—maybe it spreads to everything. I see everything a certain way. So: fixated image, craving, unskillful emotion, unskillful fabrication of self and the world.

When we practice one of the skillful kinds of mindful attention that are more standardly taught—the kind that I and many other teachers probably put out—then again, we can go through: what's the kind of image, what's the kind of desire, what's the kind of emotion, what's the kind of fabrication?

There's a quieting, a pacification of the images and actually of perception in general. There's a pacification

of desire, eros and craving through the simple, standard mindfulness and the deconstruction that brings. Pacification of images, pacification of perception, pacification of desire, to some degree or other, depending on exactly what practice one is engaging. There's a pacification of emotion, as I said earlier. That's the kind of emotion—this torrent of probably unskillful emotion is pacified. And pacification of fabrication. So we're somewhere there on the spectrum of unfabricating of self, other, world.

There's not no-self. In standard mindfulness, there's less story. There's less personality. But there's not no-self. There's just less self. Less self is being fabricated.

When we consider these categories in the imaginal domain, then we have an imaginal kind of image. The kind of desire becomes eros with everything that that means and the pregnancy of that and the impregnating faculty of eros. The relationship with the emotions is one of a crucible that allows the generation and the reception, but also allows the transformation of everything, including the emotion, sometimes.

Sometimes the emotion becomes another emotion, transformed through the alchemical process. Sometimes the emotion stays difficult. We've talked about this when we talk about dukkha and soul-making. It stays grief, or it stays whatever it is—anger. But it has other dimensions to it that make it much more liberating, much more liberating. Much more space is opened up in the emotion because, if you like, the territory of the dimensions of the beyond is opened up. There's more vertical space, so to speak, in the emotions.

And also it being sensed as rooted in the divine, if it does, gives it—we have then a healthy respect, reverence even, humility in relationship to the emotions, trust. That's all part of what is allowed because the crucible is there.

So imaginal image. Desire becomes eros rather than craving. An emotional crucible is formed and forged and allows all kinds of possibilities with regard to the emotion and the image. And there's skillful fabrication and there's soulful fabrication, soul-making fabrication of self, other, and world. The self can become imaginal. It's not just me in the flat view way of regarding me and my psychology and my history. But included in that is the self can become imaginal.

So what might be involved, or what are some of the elements that might be involved in a more potentially soul-making relationship with emotions in this range of skills that we're talking about for being with the emotions? There are a few things we could point to, actually. There are many, but I'll just throw out just a few right now.

You know, as I wrapped up what I just said, a result of skillful imaginal involvement with emotions—or of imaginal images arising from right relationship with emotions—is that the emotion then feels as if it's not just mine in the flatly conceived sense. Rather, it has its own quality; in a way it's bigger than me, rooted in divinity.

So again, with mutual dependent origination, if the imaginal can open up that sense of the emotion, then if I can view the emotion that way, it might open up the image. We're playing with conception, with logos, with perception. I may be able to simply see an emotion a certain way, and that seeing it differently changes my relationship with it. In that shift, something in the jammedness of things shifts—like tectonic plates shifting—and something can move, and an image can arise.

Often in psychotherapeutic settings, and certainly in Dharma settings, we're taught either that the self, in a psychological context, is larger than this emotion—"You're bigger than this feeling"—and to cultivate that view over time as a helpful way of relating to emotion, so that we're not overwhelmed or driven by it. In the Dharma, we don't say so much that the self is bigger; we might say something like awareness is bigger than the emotion, or mindfulness can be bigger than the emotion. I've certainly taught that way, and it's very important as a view. Can we make the mindfulness bigger than the emotion? Can we have a sense of awareness being bigger than the emotion?

In imaginal practice, in soul-making dharma, these ways of looking where we or mindfulness or awareness are regarded as bigger than the emotion always remain available as modes we can move into at any time. But in addition to that, the emotion may be sensed and conceived as more than me. Actually, this thing that I'm feeling is bigger than I am—bigger than certainly my history or whatever. Why? Because it has a divine root. It's conceived, felt, sensed as having a divine root. It belongs to or originates in the angel, something more than me.

That view doesn't lead to an out-of-controlness where the emotion is bigger in the sense that it's completely tossing us about, putting us through the wringer, leaving us out of control and driven by something in a really unhelpful way. It doesn't lead to that kind of chaos. It doesn't lead to unethical or inconsiderate behavior. But there's a flip in the view there. And again, with mutual dependent arising, this may arise as a result of the image bringing a different view of the emotion. Sometimes I can simply try to gently encourage a different view of the emotion that allows image to arise.

There are other factors we could point to. I'll amplify something I mentioned already. In some ways of skillfully and mindfully paying attention to emotion, what's really happening is we're atomizing the emotions—breaking them down into sensations, for instance. Whatever the emotion is, it's looked at with a kind of high-resolution lens in mindfulness. Instead of getting caught up in the story, we're going underneath the story. The story is a gross level of resolution. We're going beneath that: Where's the sensation? How closely, how finely can I look at the sensation? Oh, it's just pulsing or it's just heat. This anger, I experience it as heat, for example, or pressure, or whatever it is.

In that sense, there's a kind of atomizing of what was a complex, rich phenomenon—the emotion itself, and the emotion in the way that it tied into myself, my narrative and stories. We're atomizing that through the intensity and high-definition resolution of our attention. This will prevent images from arising. It's really skillful at times, really skillful. This is part of the whole art of navigation—when this approach,

when another approach. But certainly if we atomize our emotional experience through the kinds of ways we're paying attention, that won't give rise to image.

So there are other ways of being with emotion that we need. We need to include some self-sense. Maybe I need to include a narrative. I might need to hold it a bit more lightly, a bit more spaciously, that self-sense and narrative. But it needs to be included in the kind of aura or nebula around what we consider the emotion, rather than diving in and atomizing it. And again, we talk about involving the whole energy body rather than zeroing in on sensations in one location at a very atomistic level.

I need to make sure that I'm not reducing this emotion to one cause. "I'm feeling this emotion because of this"—because that person said that, or because this can't happen, or because that happened when I was young, or I was treated this way, or whatever it is. That may be part of the reason. But for the soul-making dynamic to include the emotions, that reason—because my mother said this, or because my father didn't give me that, or because that person said this, or because whatever it is—may be regarded as one cause, but there are more causes, even if we don't know what they are.

We're just opening up the conception of causes. This is one of the elements—that we're not reduced to one meaning or cause or causal explanation. It's one of the twenty-eight elements. Not reducing to one causal explanation or meaning.

But again, it might be that in the mix of qualities that need to be there, I need to let myself be moved. That's the other one which we've touched on, actually. Being moved, being touched—that is an element of soul-making, as we said before. It's an element of the breaking of vessels, of the soul-making dynamic: that things are shifting, that we're touched, that we're moved, that it's meaningful. So we need to let that be the case. If we shut that down in relation to the emotion, or we limit what it can mean in relation to the emotion, then it's not so fertile for the images.

And the eros as well—maybe we're not allowing eros. If we talk about eros as more than emotion, it can be included in that territory. And again, trust, which I've alluded to earlier—just a grain of trust here.

Not narrowing down the values. And again, values are one of the elements of the imaginable. So if I've, in a predetermined, preconceived way, narrowed down my range of what are acceptable values or what is valuable, then that too can limit the trust and limit the possibility with regard to emotions, as touched on earlier.

Sometimes an emotion is going on and actually we don't see—perhaps at the edges or underneath or around it—there is love there. We're somehow feeling loved, or there's love for something, or love for ourselves in allowing ourselves to feel this, or love for our sensitivity, or whatever it is. And maybe beauty. Sometimes we don't see those elements. And in seeing them in relationship to what I'm feeling right now, difficult as what I'm feeling right now might be, that also can allow more possibility, more fermenting of the material in the alchemical vessel.

Of course, seeing, sensing the beauty and the love may be easier if the emotion becomes the emotion of an imaginal other. Okay, so I'll touch on that in a moment. Yeah, let's come back to that.

So there are different—we could probably name some more, but these are some of the threads to consider in terms of what kind of—as I said, range. It's not really exactly this one relationship with emotions that's going to give rise to image, but it's a certain range. And in that range, there are lots of possibilities. There are lots of strands to follow. If it's a ball of tangled wool, there's lots of threads that we can pick up and just start following and see if it untangles or creates something more helpful, more beautiful, more soul-making there with regard to the emotion and also in regard to generating images.

So one of the strands there was this not reducing—not reducing, again, either consciously or unconsciously. So much happens unconsciously that we're not aware of that can actually limit the soul-making process. This is really good to shine the light on. Actually, am I doing this? How am I regarding X or Y?

So we just touched on not reducing the explanation of this emotion to one, to just one cause. Because if I do, that will tend to block the image, especially if that cause is a kind of flatly conceived cause without the dimensionality.

So let's just say something about that as well. You know, of course, just again to highlight this thing about unconsciousness—sometimes we don't think, "Well, I'm not thinking about causal explanation here," but actually at some level of our mind we are, where the mind has already kind of locked down on a certain explanation, a certain view of why I'm feeling this. Because this happened, or because I'm this way, or because I'm just no good at whatever it is. So it's really worth, as I said, shining the light to unearth, to uncover, to discover how we're viewing things in ways that sometimes we're not aware of.

But if we linger on this one about not reducing to one causal explanation: if we always or too often see interactions, relationships, certain effects of the past, of family—you know, my mother or father or whatever—if we're too often or always seeing certain effects or certain interactions or certain relationships or difficulties or emotions through the lens of this past cause—my family, my history, this or that event—it may many times miss, or such a way of viewing may many times miss or obliterate what we could say are more primary reasons and motivations for some affect, some emotion being there, for some response arising in us, for some relational choice or movement. I've decided it's because of this. And there may be something from a certain paradigm that's actually more primary, more fundamental.

So, for example, someone not wanting commitment in a certain relationship, or not even wanting intimacy in a certain relationship, or at a certain time, or more widely, just seeming to avoid that. And so easily a certain explanation comes: "Oh, you're afraid of intimacy," or whatever it is, and there's a kind of whole psychological paradigm that gets dragged in there. But it may be because of an attractive pull, a calling to the angel of purity, for example. Someone's called to a kind of purity that may involve, for instance, more celibacy for a period. Or it may be the pull of the angel towards certain kind of creativity

or manifesting certain creative work. It could be many things.

In other words, it's not coming from an inhibition or a fear that's based on my past. There's a telistic, a telos operating here. We're actually called to something else. Yes, it has a cost. In this case, whatever—I'm not open to intimacy.

I'm not open to pursuing this relationship or making this commitment to this person, or whatever situation or project at work. You're not pulling your weight, you're a slacker. But I may not be a slacker. I may not be lazy. I might be pulled to something else. I might be called to something else. I might not be afraid of intimacy. I might not be afraid of commitment. I just have a commitment to something else. I feel called by some other angel.

Some duty or calling other than intimacy in the usual, commonly conceived, psychotherapeutically correct sense. A duty other than, a calling other than to family or to relationship or commitment, whatever beckons. It's not from the past - it's from, so to speak, the future, the angel out ahead calling us to something.

But again, if we're not open at least to the range of these possibilities and ideas and sensing and asking, "What's actually going on with me and my soul and my life and my choices and my inclinations?" - sometimes we lock things down. Everything gets jammed up and inhibited in the sense that certain possibilities that may be really rich and really soul-making are not possible.

So again, if we just linger with this question of what might be among the strands - the helpful strands of ways of relating to emotion that allow images to arise that are fertile, that are potentially imaginal. Sometimes, to add to our strands there, sometimes a slight regard of the emotion as anattā, as not-self. It's not me and not mine, this emotion.

If I lean too much on that regard for the emotion, that's a very, very powerful unfabricating practice. And if I really linger with it, then the emotion will fade. It will go into deep equanimity. And if I just keep going, even with the anattā, the equanimity, even that will fade and it will go beyond, towards the unfabricated.

Certainly with skill in development, with emptiness practices, but even before that, it might be just possible. Don't underestimate what's possible, even without certain trainings sometimes. It might be possible just to sort of slightly loosen the self's appropriation - or normal appropriation - of the emotion, normal regard for the emotion as being me or mine.

Of course it's my emotion, we assume, or we feel. Naturally we feel. Of course it's who I am, or certainly mine. It's just the default, normal way - even, again, not even conscious of, often not even conscious of viewing emotions.

Sometimes it's possible to just - can I just see it as not me, not mine? And that loosening, that slight loosening, again, it's like loosening the jammed elements, the jammed hardware, loosening the tectonic

plates, so the waters of soul can start to flow, the waters of soul-making can start to flow, and images can be born from those waters.

Sometimes - I think I alluded to this a few minutes ago as well - sometimes we can say I'm feeling an emotion and it's a difficult emotion. Grief or anger or heartbreak or sadness or frustration. And sometimes it's possible, rather than just that slight loosening with the anattā, not me, not mine, actually going a step further and just creating, generating or inviting an image of another. In other words, an imaginal object who is feeling that emotion.

So who is it who's feeling that emotion? Tentatively, it's me. But what if we just allow it to constellate, to form, as if we were witnessing some imaginal other who feels that emotion? And then there's a witness, the self who's meditating, practicing and watching. Of course, the self will still feel some of that emotion. But allowing it to become other actually opens something up.

And then we might be able to have a slightly different regard for that other than we do for ourself. Maybe there's, for instance - I don't immediately get locked down into judgment. And I say, "Oh, there's a kind of nobility in them experiencing that emotion or bearing that emotion. There's a kind of deep sensitivity." And I sort of see - wow, how beautiful is that, the sensitivity of the soul of this imaginal other, that they feel in that way and that they're impacted in that way. Back to the vulnerability as being maybe a necessary element - they're able to be impacted. They're open to being sensitive and perhaps to being wounded.

But making it other just creates a bit more space sometimes, and that can allow a different relationship with the emotion. And it's already become image to a certain extent, and then it can become - that image can start becoming more imaginal, more complex, more rich, more deep, and reveal what it reveals to us, teach us in the way that it teaches, draw us on in the way that it draws us on.

Related to that, again, it's so worth repeating the sort of non-linearity, a non-formulaic nature necessarily of soul-making work, sensing the soul, imaginal practice. So especially when we were talking about the dukkha and soul-making, and Catherine and I talked about that, and we really stressed, and I'm stressing today as well, the importance of really feeling the emotions. And not just feeling them, but feeling them within a certain range or with these different strands and feeling them in a way that's supportive, but actually feeling them, being with them, allowing them, recognizing them.

And then out of that, as one supportive ingredient or factor or condition in the alchemical process, then an image arises. But again, the absence of formula or my suspicion with regard to sort of formulaic solutions - it's always like this, there's always an order you do it in like this, first the emotion and then the image.

Sometimes, as I've just alluded to a couple of times, sometimes an image comes or we generate an image and it leads to an emotion or it liberates an emotion - an emotion that was stuck or felt like it's definitely there, it's an emotion, but it's all a bit compacted or I'm just looping with it in a certain way. The image

itself, of course, again, because of the dependent arising, because of the multi-aspected, multi-elemented nature of the imaginal, the image can give rise to emotion, can liberate an emotion, or can transform an emotion.

Something that can almost move to the opposite emotion, or move to the same emotion as I said before, but it's got dimensions now, and it's got space, and there's something beautiful and liberating about it, and we wouldn't want to trade it for anything, despite the dukkha that might still be in it. There's something sacred and precious, and feels really right, and feels really necessary for the soul.

So yes, very often emotion first. Make sure - am I allowing it? Am I recognizing it? Am I feeling it?

Am I relating to it in ways that are not blocking the soul-making process and the birth of images? Emotion first, then the possibility of image arises. Sometimes the other way around. The presence of an image, or the deliberate instigation of an image, or the recall of an image that's been helpful before, actually either gives rise to a certain emotion, or liberates an emotion, or ensouls an emotion, or transforms it. All of that.

Sometimes what happens is we don't actually realize an emotion is present and things are a bit jammed up, but again the way of being with the emotion can liberate an image that's helpful in the whole process, or an image comes and helps the emotion.

I'll give you one example. A person came for an interview and they were quite stuck—or I'd say more unsure than stuck. They were really unsure about their invitation to join a collaborative creative writing project. They also presented this image: the image was of a mule resisting with all its strength and determination, resisting the pull of a rope. You couldn't see in the image what the rope was attached to, who was pulling it, or why. It was just this mule with a rope pulling it one way, but doing what mules and horses sometimes do—standing in this way that they're actually unbudgeable. All its strength and determination were resisting the pull of this rope.

She was baffled by the image, but it felt important. Actually my initial response was, "Well, I've no idea," which is often the case. Sometimes people describe images or dreams and I'm initially just baffled and sort of daunted by them. But we were talking about it. She felt there was some connection between the invitation to collaborate on this writing project and the image.

But as I've said before, we have to be careful with literalizing and also with the scope of our intention. The fullness of intention means I don't just want to rush in to working with this image asking, "What does it mean? What does it imply? What does it tell me to do? Give me guidance." We can recognize such an intention because guidance may well be part of what's going on in an image—specific guidance in relation to a specific choice may be part of what's there in the imaginal. But if I reduce it to "that's what the image means" and relate to this image solely for the sake of personal guidance in my life, then that tends to shrink things and not allow the full blossoming of the imaginal and the soul-making.

So here's this image, and I guided her gently: "Is it possible to enter into the bodily experience of the mule?

Here's this mule standing there, its feet planted and resisting with all its strength and determination. Can you meditate on the image and in this moment, with your energy body, with your bodily sensibility, can you feel the mule's bodily experience?"

In doing that, she began to feel the kind of strength and determination and alignment there, by almost putting herself or feeling into, sensing into the mule's body. So what happened was strength, determination, a sense of alignment came into her. I also sensed at that point something of the heart was involved here—it wasn't immediately obvious yet, but something of the heart.

So very gently: "Can you include the energy body experience and the emotional experience, the heart there? What's the heart feeling?"

And she said, "Oh, power. Power." And I could feel it. This is why it helped me guide the questions here. There's tremendous power here. Don't rush. Don't rush. Linger there. Let it fill. Let that feeling of power fill you, fill the energy body, fill the heart and the being.

Very often—and we're back to where I started—very often feelings of power are not common for people to actually feel. I don't mean power over another or bad power, just power in the being, power in the energy body, power in the soul. Power as the ability to do, power as a sort of gathering and harmonizing of one's energies. It's actually quite rare, and maybe sometimes even more rare in some Dharma cultures where power is too close to the possibility of abusive power or anger. So very often people are not accustomed to allowing it, to letting it come into the being, to recognizing it, certainly not to lingering with it and feeling it and letting it coalesce and letting it shape the whole experience of body and self.

Because that was actually what I asked her next. Does the self become involved or become image?

So from the energy body sense or via the energy body sense, ignited by this unfamiliar energy body sense of power, an image of self comes up or is allowed. Instead of the usual range of how one feels and senses and conceives of oneself, because there's a different experience here—the experience that originally was not seen as mind because it was in the mule, and it seems like other—and then feeling into that, feeling it first in the energy body, lingering, slowing down, including the heart, including the body, letting it fill, letting it fill the energy body, the feet planted on the ground and the fullness of that, the beauty of that power, really. And then it's allowed, it's allowed then to ferment, to spawn an imaginal sense of self as, in this case, powerful, strong, and the words with so much integrity.

Integrity has a lot to do with power as well. When we're split, when we're not honest to ourselves, not aligned with ourselves, we lose our power. Power and alignment, harmonization, integrity—all these things go together. So much integrity. So again, this was, in some respects, in some domains, new experience of self.

To me, it looked very beautiful. There was a beauty in this. Again, in a way I pointed that out at that point, and that's not to praise myself—it's more to make the point of how so often we're so unaccustomed to all

this that we don't see the beauty and specifically the beauty of ourselves, our own beauty, the beauty of this imaginal sense of self, the beauty of this new experience of self, and love there—love of this self.

And again, for so many, it's such a struggle to really love the self deeply and know deeply one's deep beauty, for the self to become a beloved erotic object for oneself. How rare, how very rare in our culture. So just gently pointing out: can you actually see, feel how beautiful this sense of self is, this imaginal self, yourself, and the love of this self?

So there's multi-dimensionality there, there's mystery, all that's wrapped up in it. And again, we're back to pacing, the necessity with these kinds of openings to really linger and go slowly, and particularly in this case with the elements that are new, especially the love and the self-love and the beauty of sensing the beauty of self.

Even in the process one can fall out of that—oh, the energy body awareness shrunk—oh, feet planted on the floor, and that connection. But there's a kind of mist or a constellation of all these beauties and all these qualities that coalesces there, condenses there, and one's sort of in that mist, that holy cloud, mystical cloud of all these elements of the imaginal, one's sitting in it, one is it, they're part of the fabric of one's being at that point.

And then maybe, and again, taking care with the pacing. What happens then if we introduce the notion of reflection and mirroring, the infinite echoing, infinite mirroring, and we introduce, put together this self-image, this imaginal self, with the narrative of your life, past and future? Because at that point, it was just me right now with this different sense of self. And it's not really connecting to the story and the narrative of years and decades, perhaps years and decades of difficulty and choices or feeling strange because of this or that or alienated or whatever it is.

What happens is, just very gently, we put—I don't know how to say it. It's like we put in neighborhood of each other, in the vicinity of each other, just gently this self-image, this imaginal self-sense, and the whole narrative of one's life, past and future. And of course the future is unknown, but just the sense of a narrative moving into the future. So that's a real possibility. Again, the importance of including the narrative sense in a lot of imaginal work. Not as a rarefied, fixated thing, but as something, again, that can be opened up, stretched, dimensionalized, divinized even, through the alchemical process of sensing the soul.

Then, you know, maybe we might introduce the idea or the possibility of this particular creative project into relationship with this imaginal constellation, energetic constellation, state of the soul, perspective on the soul. Introduce into the vicinity of that with the energy body sense, with the self image. And from that came a different relationship and a kind of freedom in relationship to this invitation to collaborate. Freedom not to participate, but also recognizing the beauty of it, the importance of it, the love of it, the duty perhaps. But it's coming from a very different place now with a different self-sense and the power and the integrity, this freedom not to do it, to be involved in that project, not to be pulled in an unhealthy,

unconscious way, in a limited way, not to need to prove myself or to seem important because I'm part of such a project.

So there's an important navigational principle in that. The image allowing a certain emotion or opening up the possibility for a certain emotional sense, a certain self-sense and all that. There's another one which I'd like to point out regarding the art of navigating with an image or in the territory of the imaginal or sensing the soul. And it's the importance of going via the energy body, which we always emphasize, but here in particular.

Here's this puzzling image, and it's really a very, it looks like a very limited image. Where's the dynamic element in the image? Where's the power in the image? So at first—well, nothing's happening in the image, it's just static, it's stuck, it doesn't even seem to have a context. But how does the mule's body feel? In all its strength and all its determination, the dynamism was locked there. The power was locked there.

I think what's more important here is the dynamic element. Something that looks very static and very stuck, this mule just resisting a pull from an anonymous rope puller, actually had a lot of potential dynamism. And dynamism means that which can move things on. It's going in that way, sensing. And again, it's not formulaic. It was just an intuition in the moment. But we might raise it as something to consider.

Where's the dynamic? We say, where's the soul-making element? Where's the immediately soulful element? That may not always be obvious, but it might be that there's something that holds a kind of dynamism. And it may be locked. It may not be obvious or apparent at first.

There's a potentially dynamic element, and in going into it and feeling it, entering into it and lingering and allowing it, allowing the alchemical process to do its work with the appropriate sort of sensitive, responsive pacing, then actually that locked dynamism became dynamic and put into dynamic motion the whole soul-making imaginal process. Then things could move and the whole self-world could transform, as I've described.

This is different than asking, "What does this mule mean? What does this image mean? How can it guide me?" I'm actually going by something rather than... I'm going by what's alive in the image. And again, in this case, it had a lot of dynamism but it wasn't apparent.

It's different than asking, "What is this image telling me to do in this situation? What's the guidance here? What does this mule mean?"

These are things to consider, maybe to practice with, maybe to reflect on, to inquire into. Different pieces will be relevant for different people at different times, as always.

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