Daimon, Refracted

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 2:08:24

If one's practice and understanding of emptiness, shunyata, goes deep enough and wide enough, radical and thorough enough, then we see, amongst other things, that any view or sense of self is empty. Any self concept is empty of inherent existence. It is not an ultimate or basic truth.

In that fuller and more radical understanding of emptiness, it is not the case, for example, that the personality is somehow illusory, but what really constitutes the self is just the process in time of the five aggregates of consciousness, physical materiality, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, intentions, and so forth. Nor is it the case, if one goes that deeply into emptiness, that self is an illusion but some kind of oneness is a basic reality. All these views, all views of self, are seen to be empty.

Where that leaves a practitioner who has seen this, who has understood this, is not with a sort of impossibility of using the language of self or using the views of self and a nowhere-to-go situation in their life regarding self and anything else. Because everything is empty and there is no hidden, basic, building block reality or fundament that is not empty, where it leaves a person seeing that is: it opens up any and all views of self as legitimate views and concepts to play with, to entertain, to put on the way an actor would put on different costumes.

So there's the legitimizing through deep insight. There's the legitimization to see and conceive and perceive self in different ways at different times in the whole range of views of self. Yes, I can practice at times seeing or conceiving of personality being empty, ego being empty, but all there is is this process of the aggregates in time, for instance. This is a legitimate view, very helpful, quite freeing, quite simplifying at times to a certain level. Or a view of just cosmic oneness of one kind or another, where the ego or the separate self is an illusion. Yes, beautiful, lovely, liberating to a certain extent at times.

But it also legitimizes seeing, sensing oneself as angel-like, or the self of another as angel, as theophany, as having a duty to one's daimons, which we can actually use interchangeably with angel, for now at least. The deep emptiness seeing, the radicality, the thoroughness, the totality of that legitimizes and opens up all kinds of possibilities, in a way an infinite range of possibilities, rather than closing down all these possibilities. We're free to conceive and perceive and talk and entertain any sense of self. We're free to move in that whole range, knowing all the time that whichever costume one puts on, whichever way of conceiving, sensing, viewing the self is empty, as empty as any other.

When we talk about the imaginal middle way—not just the middle way of emptiness in the Dharma, what Nagarjuna calls the middle way—we're not talking about simply a dissolution, a melting of the self, a dissolving, a disappearing, a fading of self or other objects of the imagination. To be an object of the

imagination, it must be formed in some way. It must retain some degree of form, this form or that form. And again, there's the infinite range there.

The imaginal is formed, but it's theater. If you've been to good theater, it's powerful. You know this is not real, what's happening in front of you, but it affects you. And it can effect a transformation in your being, a transformation in your life, heart, in your soul, in your view of things, in your aspirations, in your desires. Theater needs forms. But knowing that it's theater doesn't take anything away from the power that these different forms of self, the different senses of self, can wield.

There's this kind of dance across the range of the imaginal middle way. The imaginal middle way might seem neither real nor not real. It can seem, just like the emptiness, like a very narrow path that requires a kind of razor's edge of precision in terms of reification and non-reification. But actually, it's helpful to conceive of this middle way as more of a broad boulevard. We have this possibility to reify less at times or more at times across that range that still constitutes basically a sense of theater with regard to an image or a sensing.

In the last retreat we did, *Gaius, The Roots into the Ground of Soul*, I tried to give an analogy for the necessity, if you like, for soul, of the imaginal sense beginning to involve and enliven and dimensionalize the sense of self. Oftentimes we talk about image as other, as the image feels like it's other—though not always. The image is other. It's an object. But in time, it might become important that the self becomes an image as well. This might not happen immediately with a certain image, and with some images or some experiences of sensing the soul, it's not always important that the self becomes an image.

Of course, we've touched on that. The image is other. It's an object. But it's important in time. It might not happen immediately with a certain image. And again, back to questions of pacing, etc. But to look... And with some images or some experiences, sensing the soul, etc., it doesn't always need... It's not always important that the self becomes an image. It might be just fine for this other to be image and the sense of the imaginal doesn't spread to involve the self sometimes.

But if one looks over time at one's sort of tendencies or patterns with regard to imaginal practice and sensing the soul, and one notices that, for instance, oh, I'm always—it's the other that's always divine. And I don't tend to sense my own divinity because the sense of self has not become imaginal. If one senses, if one recognizes looking back over a stretch of time with many images and says, oh, that's really quite rare, then one might be recognizing there an imbalance.

So I gave this analogy, as I was saying, on the last retreat of a fountain. So you can imagine like a fountain, a stone fountain in one of those squares, you know, in a city or a village, in a piazza or wherever it is. So if you imagine this fountain, and the water shoots up out of the central nozzle, and we could say, in this analogy, that's kind of Psyche's creations and discoveries rising up from the central nozzle, this sort of infinite and endless outpouring of the inclination to make soul, the desire to make soul and the raw material of soul.

And so the water comes up out of the central nozzle and then, as it does with fountains, it falls back down. And that central nozzle is central in a stone tray, maybe a circular stone tray. And in falling back down, if the water just falls back down on one side of the fountain, and not around the whole area, around all the different sides of that circle, then if the stone is not too heavy and there's a lot of water—again, analogies get stretched—then if it just falls on one side, that basin and the whole fountain is going to tip over. It's going to be made lopsided and eventually kind of lose its balance, fall, maybe shatter if it's lopsided.

If the water is falling down equally or relatively equally over the different areas of the circumference of this circular basin, then there's more balance there. So when we talk—I've put this out there a few times now, but I'm stressing its importance—so self, other and world want, soul wants self, other and world to become image.

So where there's, let's say, an image that's an other, like an erotic object that maybe I'm sensing as divine, etc., there's a natural tendency, and again it might have its own, let's say, natural pace, if we can even use such terms, for the sense of the self also, and then the world in cosmopoiesis, to also become image. So the initial image might have been an image of another, and working with that, and if we don't get in the way, if we allow soul to do what it wants to do, which is to make more soul, then self and world as well as this other will become soul.

So I hope that makes sense. Without that, as I said, there will be a tipping over. So there will be, for instance, very little equanimity if just this other is divine but I'm not. Especially if that other is a human other whose divinity I am sensing because I am sensing them with soul and I am not. I remain flat or lacking in divinity, etc.

So, this, when we talk about self, other, world becoming image, or soul wanting self, other and world to become image, then we also have to point out it doesn't have to happen in any order. I have been sometimes sitting, for instance, teaching a retreat, and the yogis, the sangha, become image for me first. And then it might spread to the world and to me, include the imaginal sense, the self gets subsumed, involved, needed in to the imaginal soul-making and the creativity and discovery of that. So it can happen in any order.

It might start with a cosmic vision. It might start from some lovely sense of nature opening up, some imaginal sense, some sensing of soul, either of one object or of the totality of one's environment. And then move to the self. So any order is possible. But over the long term, we want to get a sense that the waters of soul are allowed to flow always, all those three ways, self, other, world. The order is not important. So that's something to check.

And what I really want to talk about tonight is the self becoming image. So that's a general point in terms of contextualizing it. We could go further with that and actually delineate other aspects of being, of experience, that also will tend to become in-souled if we let the soul-making dynamic and process do its thing, if we don't get in the way or block it or inhibit it in some way.

So we could say also that eros will become dynamic. Our own eros will become an erotic, imaginal object for us. And in fact, any aspect of our being that sort of comes into the orbit of our attention will—if, when the soul-making is happening, at a certain point it will become, it will get drawn in to the soul-making dynamic and hence become imaginal. So, self, other, world, other aspects too, but it's important that self also becomes imaginal at some point. Or sometimes, at least. And that can happen in any order.

So, in a way, like I said, we could say this is just what soul will naturally do, left to its own devices, if it isn't blocked. But still, we can investigate that whole movement a little bit more, and at times we can encourage or help it, and that's quite interesting to explore that.

So I think I already mentioned, I didn't really fill it out, you know, sometimes what happens is we're dealing with something that's touching the heart, maybe touching the heart in a difficult way, whatever this issue is, or a very lovely way. But we see that we desire something. And maybe that desire is already eros, maybe it's a painful kind of desire, or it's stuck in a painful place. One possibility sometimes, again, quite deft in the touch here, and delicate in the sort of maneuvering rather than formulaic and sort of yanking things around. But one possibility then is to...

almost like externalize the self who loves this or that, the self who has desire for this or that, or has eros for this or that.

So once feeling it in oneself, and even getting to that point, it might be that that was a journey, even to recognize, oh, I have desire for this, or wrapped up in this complicated dukkha that I feel afflicted by right now, or lost in, actually is part of the whole constellation of dukkha, there is desire. There will always be desire when there's dukkha, and that goes back to the teaching of the OCD practice, the opening to the current of desire. But often there's love too. I love this or that. It's wrapped up with desire, of course. I love this or that. I have eros for this or that. I have desire for this or that.

But externalizing the self. So we say, here's all this complex dukkha. I recognize that one strand of it is my love for this or that, or my desire, or eros for this or that. And externalizing it means let that, let the one who loves this or that, the one who desires this or that, let that become image. She, he, they who love this or that. So almost putting it in the third person and letting it constellate as an image, which then obviously has echoing and mirroring and kind of maybe feels a bit like myself, but is also other.

Sometimes that's a really skillful move. Again, if it's deftly and delicately done and handled without too much pressure or clunkiness or demand or formulaic sort of going through the motions. She, he, they who love this or that. She, he, they who love, who desire or have eros for this or that. And then being with that image, it might be that one actually recognizes, oh, one has eros, or there's an erotic relationship with that self that we've just externalized.

So let it be other. But it becomes imaginal. It might start as just a sort of more flat image, but as one recognises the eros, as one recognises the beauty there, it might become image. And sometimes it's easier

to have that sense of eros and beauty when it's externalised like that. For all kinds of reasons and social taboos and cultural conditionings and whatnot and contractions of being and psychology, it's harder to have that, to recognize the beauty and the dimensionality and to have an erotic relationship with oneself. So one kind of externalizes it by just making an image. Don't worry if it's not imaginal at first. It can very soon become imaginal, more fully imaginal, with the eros there.

So, the one who desires and loves opening, the one who desires and loves to be touched, one recognizes that becomes an image, and one sees, as I said, the beauty, the dimensionality, the eternality. There's eros there, there's reverence, and one recognises the echoing, the mirroring. It's me and it's not me. But that might have come, this imaginal sense of she who, the one who desires and loves opening, one who desires and loves to be touched, or someone else said the one who is faithful and devoted to beauty. All these, these are actual examples from interviews, but they came out of a condition of being that wasn't at all clear to start with. It was just a contracted sort of tangle of lots of different painful elements, history and psychology and situation and self-view, etc.

But as this image was sort of supported to come to birth and to emerge there, then it reflects back on the self in the infinite echoing and mirroring. One recognizes something. One recognizes something about oneself. And oneself has become image. Although there's this kind of other, it doesn't matter. Some magic, some alchemy has happened in the sense of self. So it might take a little while to get there, because one has to deal with the tangle of dukkha sometimes. It might not be that tangled, it might not even be dukkha to start with. But then if you like, I don't want to make it too formulaic, then the beauty is revealed, the eros is revealed, the whole self-sense can open up.

So this is important. And there's so many possibilities, you know, working with image of the way the self gets pulled in, dynamic pulled into the imaginal sense, how the imaginal sense spreads to include the self.

So someone on retreat at Gaia House was sharing with me, this is a while ago, they were in the garden and a blackbird flew into a window of Gaia House and was wounded, fell to the ground and was wounded. And she heard the sound, saw it, found the blackbird in the sort of undergrowth and in the flower bed or something. And it was clearly wounded. And so she just sat with it and she stayed with it in its wounded condition, in its suffering and stayed there with compassion, with care, with concern, but also with, you know, a troubled heart. And there was quite a lot of papañca at first with that situation, despite the compassion, etc. There was, you know, what should I do, and quite a lot of, the being was stirred up, partly in a not very helpful way.

But then, as she sat with it, or later actually, the whole thing became imaginal. Like the whole scene, and the blackbird, and the wounding there, became imaginal, and in our framework, when something becomes more imaginal, actually a lot of the unhelpful complication and proliferation that we call papañca diminishes. So as the imaginal grows, the papañca diminishes. As the papañca grows, the imaginal diminishes.

So somehow in being with it and being with it later in her life, back in her room, the papañca declined, peace came and a healing sense came, something that was healing in the soul. She went back in the morning to check on the blackbird, but it was gone, so either it was presumed dead or a fox got it or something.

The next day, the image returned. And she was reporting this in an interview. I asked her, in the image, is the bird alone or are you in the image sitting with it? And she said actually the image was of her sitting with the bird, rather than the bird alone. Actually, both would have been fine. It was more I just wanted to get a sense of what the actual image was, what it included and what the possibilities were. But there was something, I think, a particular possibility or direction gets included if she was in the image. It's not better or worse, it's just a particular possibility or direction gets included when the image is the wounded bird and the self there.

Sometimes in a kind of simple way, this works. It's almost like I'm then implicit in that image. I didn't actually linger on it. I kind of said very little because I wanted to let the process work by itself without me leading it or suggesting too much a direction or what needed to happen.

But one of the sort of basic possibilities of working with image in this way is that sometimes we don't see things about ourselves. And sometimes some aspect or quality of our being comes more clearly to be recognized. But it's not just that. There's more to it than that. In this case, her natural goodness, deep, natural, innocent, almost childlike care for beings. Something that, in my sense, was very natural to her soul, part of her soul.

So we recognize something—recognize our own positive qualities—but there's more to it than that because the whole thing can then become dimensionalized and divinized, which is different than just recognizing "oh I'm good at this and I have that quality" and that sort of flatly conceived psychology of self-esteem or whatever. That's maybe one level. But then there's the possibility when things become imaginal, with the dimensionality, with the theater, with the eternality, with the divinity and theophany, that it can become more of that.

Still, that basic level of recognizing certain qualities of oneself through an image is important. As I said, sometimes it's easier when it's externalized like that.

I'll give you a couple more examples. Someone a while ago came into an interview and reported two images and was actually interested how to connect the images with the self and with the particularities of herself. So one image was a kind of dramatic image of a queen with a long robe, and the robe was trailing blood. So she's leaving this trail of blood in her long robe, from her long robe.

So that was the main part of the image. Who is this queen? What's her story? So I can't remember if I asked that. I think I did. Or she might have wondered, or she might have just offered the background story. And she was concerned in offering this background story that, oh, but I thought images were not

supposed to be narrative.

We touched on this, I think, in a Q&A in the Roots of the Groundless Soul retreat. Sometimes you get an image which it's not so much a narrative image as much as it has a kind of backstory. It has a kind of imaginal background, so one understands almost actually implicitly—not like watching a series of events, but one understands implicitly the story or the narrative, in this case, of this queen or whatever the imaginal character is. So in a way it's part of the image, it's just more in the background and intuited implicitly, but it has a narrative structure and still the whole retains a sense of eternality, of always already happening, of timelessness.

So that's actually not a problem with images, even if they're narrative, sometimes it's not a problem. And getting a sense of this queen trailing blood and her poise and strength. So I think, again, it's almost like I might have had to ask questions to tease out the character and the quality and maybe a bit of the backstory of this queen trailing...

And so again, I asked, "Do you notice—" as she was sharing this image, the image became alive for me. We were entering into it together. I felt like I was perceiving the image just as much as she was. It became, in a way, a common object between us, which is a very lovely thing to happen, as many of you will know.

When I asked, "Do you notice her wisdom?" This queen has a particular kind of wisdom, a shrewdness, but without any of the negative implications of that word shrewd. There's a kind of practical wisdom, a diplomatic wisdom. "Do you notice her kind of attuned, appropriate, measured responses to her subjects and to the people in her court?" "Do you notice her dignity, her nobility?"

All this was, to me, pregnant in the image and needed a little bit of teasing out to become more palpable, to become more recognizable, and to be recognized, to be witnessed, to be made clear. And then it's possible, again as a stage of practice, to resonate with her qualities. So poise, strength—each one of these: dignity, nobility, wisdom, attunement, appropriate response, measured response—all these individual and connected qualities can be... Take your time in the meditation and just be with them and witness them and put the energy body and the soul and the heart and the sensibility in touch with them.

Just by virtue of opening to them and witnessing them and appreciating them, one opens one's being to those particular qualities, and the being, the soul, the energy body, the emotions, start resonating with those qualities. In so doing, we absorb those qualities. We absorb, if you like, into our life in ways that can actually then become manifest, practically manifest, really manifest in our relationships over time. We absorb those qualities.

Now sometimes people practice with images and that's the total scope of the intention. Sometimes people even practice Vajrayana practices to do that. It's great, and it's a very powerful way of practice. Sometimes people practice metta just by imagining Kuan Yin, Avalokiteshvara, or Jesus, or whatever, and their love, and just beholding that, opening the being to that. Through that there's this resonance and this absorption,

and it begins to ignite and empower those qualities and those capacities in our heart, in our life, in our relationships. That's wonderful.

In our paradigm, we're saying: yes, great intention and wonderful that that happened, but remember the fullness of intention. The image is not here just to serve me. I am serving the image. The fullness of intention means the fullness of soul-making here, rather than just becoming this or that quality, becoming empowered in this or that quality. Becoming empowered in my life and in my relationships, in my expression, in my speech, in my action—this may be part of serving the image, may be part of what the image wants from me, may be part of doing my duty to the daemon. But it's really helpful in our paradigm to remember the fuller scope, the fullness of intention—actually the fullness of soul-making. Included in that can be this absorption of qualities, this empowerment of different aspects and capabilities of our being.

We talked too about a situation back home with some voluntary work that she was doing and the relationship with that community and finding her voice there and being able to speak up with strength. She saw all that was relevant. There was this echoing, mirroring—again, part of the infinite echoing, mirroring—in its relevance and the echoing and mirroring to these particular situations with regard to community and how she manifested and spoke up there.

A second image that was shared was a naked goddess who lives in a tree, resides in a tree. One particularly salient feature of this goddess was that she has her legs open—her legs are spread. The yogi shared, "It's actually not sexual, but she's opening my legs too." So there's already a relationship of the self as meditator in relationship with this image. This image, this naked goddess living in the tree, is very gently opening my legs. It doesn't seem sexual. Something very delicate happening.

There was a little concern from this yogi. She said, "I'm trying not to become ethereal in the image, and I'm trying to retain my particular self." Again, her initial question with these two images was: what's the relationship between these somewhat puzzling images and the self? She couldn't seem to connect them or ground them. In this image, she said, "I'm really trying not to become ethereal and to retain my particular self."

You don't have to always do that. Even if you become ethereal, it's not a problem. To become ethereal—we've talked about this—how does the energy body feel? That range from insubstantiality, ethereality, to dense and substantial and everything in between is one of the ranges of the energy body perception. It's all open.

To become ethereal is not a problem. It's simply what's happening with this particular image at that time. It might be very appropriate for this particular image. I think in this case it was. And also, to become ethereal—if my energy body becomes ethereal—this is not the same as melting in union and losing the twoness, losing the differentiation between self and image, and with that the eros, and so forth. There will be the reflecting and the echoing in the life from the tunas. I don't have to become the image. Even when

there's a sense of self and other, there will still be this infinite reflecting and echoing just because it's what the imaginal does. It's part of it.

Again, there was a sense here of the image being expressed and then shared as if I could sense it as well. I was living that image at the same time. We were living it together. But I was careful. I didn't want to—I always question my inclinations and responses and intuitions. So to me, it was checking it out. Is this right? Is that right? And to me, there was a real sense of exquisiteness. So this naked goddess had a real exquisite, refined, very sensitive, very delicate quality. And so I asked her if that was the case and she said yes.

Again, it's like sometimes: is it not part of your soul, this exquisiteness that you see in her, in this goddess? Is it not part of your soul? And your particular kinds of gifts in this life, your particular kinds of exquisiteness are being mirrored and echoed in this goddess. Or we could say, more powerfully I think, your life itself—your being, your personality, the way you are with your body, your sensibility—echoes and mirrors the exquisiteness, the particular kinds of exquisiteness of this goddess. There's a refraction there. They won't be exactly the same, but there's this emanation that then gets interpreted or reflected in our particular ways.

And might not this sense of exquisiteness also be part of what, so to speak, the gods, the daimons, the angels ask of you? So again, not to identify with it and not to make a rigid, tight ego belief, an ego view around it. So this is the delicacy of the middle way. There's a way where that can have all the power—witnessing that exquisiteness, conceiving of it and sensing, more than conceiving, sensing of it, having the heart and soul sense of our being and our persona and our narrative in this life being a very particular refraction or emanation of that particular exquisiteness of that image. And not to identify with it, but to feel the power of that.

And with that: is this not part of what the gods, the daimons, the image, the goddess, the angels are asking of you? So the image is brought into a very powerful relationship with the self. But it's got all the lightness, partly helped by the ethereality, but it's got all the lightness of touch, of non-identification—or not over-identifying, put it that way—and making a rigid ego identity around it.

So there's the duty wrapped up in it and the sense of self and the way this image then informs and flows into the self. The self is—again, there are different levels of the way we can sense and conceive this. So there might be, with a lot of these images—again, whether they're images that are sensed as other or the self becomes image—there's this sense of gift but also duty, ask. And that's part of the deal. It's part of the deal of the self, part of the deal of imaginal work as we conceive it, and part of the deal of the self getting embroiled, involved, worked on in the soul-making dynamic in the imaginal process.

So you can already hear beginnings of a different range of views of self and conceptions of self and psychologies about self than are perhaps more common or dominant in contemporary psychology.

Someone asked me a while ago—I feel like, so they're talking about themselves now—I feel like I want to leave an impression. I want to make an imprint or leave an imprint, I think she was saying on me, but she was also thinking on others, on the world. And she was very skeptical about this desire. So why do I have this? This person had done a lot of practice, a lot of mainstream Dharma practice and Advaita and different things, non-dual practice and that kind of thing. And so she was very wary of this desire, impulse and intention and desire that she noticed within herself, wanting to leave or make an imprint on others, or on a particular other or particular others. So why? And she was judging it.

And it's easy to assume under the rubric of many psychological, spiritual, conceptual frameworks that this is ego. Why do I have to impress people? Why do I have to try and make this imprint? Why do I have to be important that way? Et cetera. But we were talking about this and you can actually ask: who wants this?

Her tendency was to be very suspicious of it. Because she had practiced so long in paradigms that put aside the self, moved towards dissolving the self and dissolving it in some kind of ultimate oneness, there was this suspicion. So it can only be an ego thing. It was troubling her, really, like some kind of itch that she wanted to get rid of.

But we can ask, and I said, we can ask, who wants this? Who wants to make an imprint? Maybe it's what the soul wants. Maybe it's the way it communicates with other souls, if you like, or we could say amongst its parts, if we're part of a world soul, if we're conceiving of the soul that way. The way it communicates amongst its parts is by making impressions on the other parts. One soul communicates with another by making an impression, and that's what the soul wants to do.

You know, if I think about John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, Beethoven, Peter Maxwell Davies, James Hillman, Etty Hillesum, friends who I love deeply—these are all, for me, in my life, deep, beautiful, precious imprints on and in my soul. They are my soul, or they're part of it. My soul is informed, has the impression, has the stamp of these deep soul images. Coltrane, Hendrix, this friend or that friend, et cetera. And I treasure that. I treasure that. I want to be impressed upon in that way. I want to be impressed upon. Don't we as souls want to be impressed upon by soul and by what is soulful?

In that desire to imprint on others, I think, is actually the nascent sense of an imaginal self. So it's not necessarily the ego. Again, it's the soul. And soul expresses itself in images to a great extent. It's not just the ego self that wants to make an imprint. It's the soul self and the image, the imaginal self or the imaginal selves, the budding sense of that that wants to make an imprint on others—a deep soul imprint on others.

And that imaginal self, again, it's me and not me. It's neither real nor not real. But somehow it's very profoundly me. Somehow it's very profoundly me, maybe more profoundly me than anything else. The self needs to become image; it wants to become image. Soul wants to make things imaginal, to discover their imaginal dimensions. And it needs to imprint. It wants to express itself. It wants to connect with other souls. This is how soul grows. Soul making is being impressed upon. Sense of soulfulness is to be impressed upon.

If we don't allow the imaginal dimensions of self, et cetera, then that impulse to imprint stays as ego—in other words, flatly conceived self. And not eros, but craving. And the only recourse then is to try to live that out, trying to impress people from this flat level, trying to make an imprint, an impression on people, but it's all flatly conceived. And that's going to be misery for everyone, probably.

Or the only other recourse, if we're inhibiting or disallowing or dismissing the possibility of this whole soul dimension of self, is to dwell in no-self, whatever that means, and try and live one's life with this kind of ideal of no-self—whether that's I'm just this process of aggregates or I'm just love or whatever it is, I'm just awareness or I'm just cosmic consciousness or whatever. Again, in the way I would understand, that's great. Those particular views of no-self are wonderful to move in and out of, but to try and live a whole life with all the complexities and demands and particularities of our ways of loving and our creativity and our duties, et cetera, doesn't really work.

So without the imaginalizing, the dimensionalizing, the divinizing, the theophanizing of self, our possibilities are very limited and they don't really work. So in a way this person was bumping into repeatedly the failure of a paradigm of no-self to comprehensively address the totality of our being and her needs—spiritual, soulful, et cetera.

We're just so used to a certain idea of this is right, this is spiritual, this is psychologically healthy or whatever. And just something else wants to happen. And partly what allows it to happen is to conceive it in a way that gives it some respect and believes there's a treasure there, believes there's a necessity of soul there.

So self, other, world—maybe also one's desire, one's eros. There might be eros to imprint on others, this desire to imprint on others, on the soul of others.

My soul desires deeply to make this impression, and there's not craving, not even just desire, but eros there. But self, other, world, eros need to become erotic, imaginal objects for us. Then there is unfathomability, sacredness, beauty in these—in the self, in other, in world, in desire, not only beyond self. The unfathomability, the divinity, the beauty—it's in them. They are expressions of it, broadening expressions of it.

I think I touched on this very briefly in an earlier talk in this series, but if we allow this and begin to sense it or allow ourselves to sense it and conceive of it as a soul desire—it's not ego, it's soul—then, if it's allowed to do its thing, it can be soul as opposed to ego. If we can conceive of it the right way, it can be soul rather than ego.

But of course there's dukkha there if it seems like we're not making an imprint. The angels want to make an imprint. They need to—it's what, one kind of conception is, that it's what we're here for. It's what human beings are here for: to express the divinities, the divinity, the angels and their particular faces, the faces of the gods. We are here to express the faces of the gods, and the angels want that, and they want

that from us.

So the dukkha of feeling like I'm not imprinting, there is no connection there in what I'm trying to put out or communicate of my being—the dukkha might not even be an ego dukkha, primarily. It might be the dukkha of that whole sense of "this is what the angels want, and this is what I'm here for," and it's frustrated, it's blocked. There isn't the reception.

We could say, if we just play with this idea, that the ego's desire to impress is a kind of contraction of, or a dim echo of, the soul's desire to impress. So again, we could make a whole psychology of this idea, kind of premise or maxim: the soul wants soul-making, the soul loves soul-making. And that's the urge, that's the fundamental movement in life. And everything else can kind of shape down from that.

And what happens sometimes, if we play with this conception, is that that soul's desire to impress gets shrunken or flattened or tightened or contracted. And so it becomes a contraction or a dim echo of the soul's desire to impress. And it just manifests as ego. And it feels like ego. Something's got shrunk.

So that kind of conception is quite a different conception of self and reading or interpretation or hermeneutic of what we're doing in us, what we're trying to do. Or what, if you like, the angels are trying to do through us. My daimons, your daimons are trying to do through you, with you, as you.

There was, you know, some of you will have heard this story from Oscar Wilde, where he was travelling between countries and the customs officer asked him, "Do you have anything to declare?" And he sort of said, "Only my genius."

And it's funny—sometimes I've shared a few quotes of Oscar Wilde before, and sometimes it seems to me, I don't know if it's the case, but it's almost like you can hear these little witty quips that he has and these little retorts that he has to certain situations on two levels. So at one level it's just a funny sort of self-aggrandizement kind of thing, declaring that he's a genius in the way that we usually understand that word.

But that word genius actually originally referred to something like a daimon. So it wasn't that a person was a genius; a person had a genius—so a particular genius, like their, if you like, angel or their spirit or their daimon.

So: "Do you have anything to declare? Are you bringing anything with you through into this country, through customs?" "Am I bringing anything with me? Only my genius." So you can see I have nothing here, very few bags or whatever it is, but I'm bringing this invisible daimon that you can't see—like illegal goods might be hidden. So he's declaring that.

So I don't know if that's what he meant, but as I said, a lot of times I get these kind of double-leveled interpretive possibilities, possibilities of interpretation of things he says. And then the relationship with that could be very different than the first interpretation of just a kind of ego thing, "I'm a genius, I'm

declaring my genius, I'm a really smart guy," or whatever it is. Not ego—it could be the conception of that daimon, of that genius in the original sense. It's him, not me. And so there's a relationship of humility with that.

But this has really gone out of fashion. If it was ever mainstream in any culture, I don't know, but it's certainly gone out of fashion.

I remember in a music history class studying about Stravinsky, the famous, brilliant twentieth-century composer. He wrote The Rite of Spring, as some of you will know. And he was being interviewed by his assistant, Robert Craft, and they recorded it at one point. And they were talking about the composition of The Rite of Spring back in the early twentieth century, and this was much later.

And Robert Kraft got him talking, and at some point Stravinsky said something like, "I was the vessel through which the Rite of Spring was born, through which that music was born." And then a little while later, Robert Kraft quoted him back as saying that. And Stravinsky said, "I never said that." And Kraft said, "You did, it's on the tape recorder."

It's a kind of slightly taboo topic because I think, like so many other things—sexuality and all kinds of things—we have such a confused notion of what we're allowed to think and say and how we're allowed to view self and what's taboo and what's regarded as ego. So in the flow of the conversation, he was expressing perhaps a certain natural perception of being in service to something. In this case, the service of the angel was a piece of music. Étienne Souriau, the French philosopher, sometimes talked about "the angel of the work." So this composition, this 20th century composition The Rite of Spring, it was or had an angel, and that angel wanted something out of Stravinsky. But then he said, "I never said that." "Yes, you did."

So we're constrained and confused by the mixed messages we get about self. In so many ways we live in a very egotistical culture, but we also view that badly and we judge ourselves or others when it looks like they or we are being egotistical. There's nowhere else. There are no other conceptual levels. The conception is so thin and so limited, and we're just shunting back and forth between a rock and a hard place there. Either ego—because we have no other level to think of—and so we pursue things out of a sense of ego aggrandizement, or the judgment and denigration of that in ourselves and others. There's nothing else, because the wider conceptual frameworks in the culture offer nothing else. All the dimensions have gone, all the possibilities have gone, and there's a real impoverishment there.

So Corbin, of course, talked a lot about—I shared before—talked about the angel out ahead. He's almost like a counterpart of ourselves, a second half of our soul, if you like, and our relationship with that through the imaginal and the importance of that to the sense of who we are and the direction we have in life and our duties to that angel.

Just paraphrasing a passage from one of his books, Temple and Contemplation, I think the book's

called—you know, so in this case he's calling it the "person archetype." He said that's not a symbol of something in me. Rather, it is the earthly human person—it's me—who by gravitating towards this spiritual person, this angelhood, I represent and typify something. A hypostasis means an existence, a being of the angelic world. You understand? So the usual way of seeing it is, "Oh, this image is representing some aspect of me." We've talked about this before. It's representing some aspect of me. The image is a representation.

Turning it around. No, I represent and typify this angel of the angelic world. And he continues: the human being is called upon to answer for it on earth. So again, there's his way of saying this sense of duty. Everything's reversed here.

He's actually talking about ritual in this passage, so it's how the ritual relates to these kinds of ideas. He says human gestures, human representations and imaginings are so many methods whereby a human being can be led to typify and exemplify in themselves a celestial existence. By celestial existence, in our language, it's other dimensions of being. So there's that dimensionality node here.

And again, he's talking about ritual, but he says if a celestial person, if an angel is represented by a particular gesture or word or phase of the ritual, then to observe these is already to exist in the manner of that transcendent person. It's a very different, back-to-front, upside-down view of reality, of self and reality.

And so, as I said, that brings dimensionality into our being, and not just the dimensionality of, let's say, Freud's unconscious—a sort of deep, dark well of shameful secrets and inclinations or whatever. This dimensionality, all kinds of dimensions there. And yes, divinity, sacredness, theophany. Self is dimensionalized, divinized, recognized as sacred, or allowed to flower in a sense of sacredness. Self as theophany, or as potential theophany.

So this angel out ahead, or what he's calling in this case the celestial person, is eternal. Our selves—our human selves—don't seem to be. Sometimes when Corbin—I'm not an expert on Corbin, his writings are sometimes very dense and he was very prolific—but sometimes it sounds like he's talking, when he talks about the angel out ahead, as if there's just one angel out ahead, or one genius, or whatever.

In the soul-making Dharma, there's not necessarily just one. So going back to the beginning, we're free. There are many images, what Hillman calls more polytheistic psyche—images that sometimes, imaginal beings, angels, that sometimes are kind of in conflict with each other, or at least move, pull us, draw us, beckon us in different directions, ask of us impossibly divergent things.

I mean, it may be that they all refer to some kind of more fundamental, higher dimensional archetype, if you like—I don't know—but in some of these paradigms. An archetype, if you remember when I talked about that word, I think it was in Path of the Imaginal—in the original meaning, it meant something without a form. It was rather the principle of forming. Forming like this or forming like that. So that which

is not an image but forms images.

So it might be, if you think about it that way, that it generates many images.

Now, of course, sometimes what we encounter in or with the sense of self doesn't feel divine at all. It doesn't feel sacred. If it feels eternal, it's more just a sense of seeming to go on forever with its afflictive gestalt or constellation.

Sometimes, for example, we struggle—especially in our culture—with the inner critic. This is very, very common, partly as a result of our culture and its limited ways of understanding and conceiving the self, but also as a result of social fragmentation, individualization, individualism—all kinds of things historically.

I've talked about working with the inner critic in the past. Many years ago, I gave some talks on it and offered a whole set of approaches or things one could do in meditation, both when the inner critic is active and present, and also when it's not active. Some of those approaches involved working with the imagination with regard to the inner critic and relationship with the inner critic. But that wasn't imaginal—it was working with imagination, not imaginal in our sense. However, it might be that we can actually allow things to become imaginal with respect to the inner critic.

Some of that might start with just a more deliberate imagination. Let me give just a couple of possibilities to start our exploration.

Sometimes perhaps the inner critic could be seen as part of the self, part of the psyche, which among other things has become the sole locus of power. When the inner critic is badgering us and taking over and hounding us, all the power, or most of the power, has gone there. There is this psyche with its complexity, this self with its complexity, this soul with its complexity, and all the power of that soul seems to be gathered under the purview and domain of that inner critic. The rest of the being feels weak, collapsed, lacking in power. But actually, my psyche, my self, my soul is part of that.

So, a couple of possibilities. Sometimes, maybe, feeling one's frustration and anger at the inner critic. We're back to this crucible thing and the emotions and where the emotion is, and where the point of entry is that can allow things to start to become dynamic and galvanize a little bit in terms of liberating process, but maybe even soul-making process.

Feeling one's frustration, one's anger—one can be so fed up with this inner critic. Instead of getting dragged into listening to the inner critic, what else is there? I'm feeling really fed up. I'm feeling actually really angry at the inner critic. The heat of that emotion—I have to sit with it in the energy body, have to kind of tease it out of the afflictive mix that's happening at the time. But in being with it, in holding it, in being with it in the energy body and recognizing it, actually letting it heat up, letting that frustration and anger—recognizing there may be a treasure here in the frustration and anger, which I usually would see as a defilement, as a kilesa, as something that's not helpful.

Letting it build up in the energy body, in the alchemical vessel, in the crucible, and out of that, an image might arise out of the heat of the frustration and anger at the inner critic. An image might arise and that may well have power in it because frustration and anger have a lot of potential power wrapped up in them. And so another part of the psyche is empowered and it changes the relationship with the inner critic.

Another possibility is to go ahead and deliberately imagine—it might not be imaginal at first, don't worry. It might never stay imaginal; it might still be liberating. Go ahead and deliberately imagine, for example, destroying the inner critic violently. Whatever it is—smashing it to bits, clunking it on the head, whatever. That deliberate imagination may not be imaginal, and it may be liberating without this ever becoming imaginal, or it may become imaginal. Then that actually going ahead and deliberately imagining destroying the inner critic violently may actually liberate the feeling of anger.

In the first approach, it was: can I feel the anger first? Can I feel the frustration first and let that constellate an image? Or it might be that I'm actually playing with the imagination and that liberates the possibility of feeling that emotion. And in that anger is power. The third step there would be to actually—can I almost filter out the sense of power in the energy body from the feeling of anger?

Those are some possibilities. Again, in that last illustrated thing, putting those two together—there's non-linearity here. It's a tangled ball of wool. I pull on this and it might be that this loosens as well, this other thread.

There's also a slightly different possibility. The inner critic tends to arise in relation to something we are deeply longing for or that we actually have eros for. Someone was talking to me about the inner critic, and I asked her when it comes up—is it there all the time or in certain situations? It was coming up in relation to or in the context of certain kinds of public speaking situations where she really cared about what she was communicating or teaching. For a lot of people, it comes up in relation to practice and wanting to practice well.

So this is interesting, you know, I'm not saying it's always the case—sometimes there's a more pervasive, low-grade sense of inner critic, of course—but oftentimes it's actually coming up in relation to things that we really care deeply about, or that we really long for, or that we have eros for.

So rather than getting caught up with the inner critic and what it's saying and what it's doing, et cetera, again, it may be possible to let it do its thing, but can I kind of contact the eros or desire that's there? Because I want—I'm judging myself for being a bad meditator or whatever—but actually, can I contact the eros and the desire to meditate well and deeply and discover and play in that way?

The inner critic is still doing its thing, but I'm kind of just honing the attention, directing it to other elements, other aspects of the tangle of what's going on. And with that desire, again, as I touched on earlier, might be wrapped up the dukkha of the frustrated desire. You know, I really want this thing and

I'm just frustrated. I'm not making any headway, or I really want to be able to communicate well in a teaching situation or whatever, but I feel like I'm not doing well enough.

So there's the dukkha of the frustrated desire might be part of what I come into contact with when I'm looking for the eros or desire underneath, underpinning or associated with this inner critic. And that's okay, you know, because frustration also has this heat element and it's very close to the desire, the eros. But again, out of that crucible, out of that—I'm directing the attention to some elements of the being, the eros, the desire, or even the dukkha, the frustrated desire—there's heat there, and there's potential dynamism there.

And out of that crucible, if I can relate to them and hold them the right way, an image might arise in relation to the self, or the self might become image. And one might have a very different sense of it all, even a different sense of the inner critic, different sense of self that's healing there, etc.

What was interesting when this person raised this with me was she was taking a public speaking course to try and develop her skills as a public speaker. When they were given certain exercises and things like that, but in this case I don't think—or it may not be that—the underlying desire, the deep longing comes up in the context of those public speaking exercises. There might still be self-judgment, but the desire won't be there. But when it came to teaching or speaking in public about what she really loved or what felt really important to her, then there will be the desire.

The other things were kind of just giving exercises or techniques that you can do to improve as a public speaker. All really important. But it wasn't just that she wanted to be a good public speaker just for the sake of it. There were things that she wanted to communicate, that she deeply wanted to communicate and communicate well. So you have to look for the desire in the right place if this is the case.

And we'll hopefully come back to this, but there's a way—and I know some, probably at this point, maybe most of you know this—there's a way that we, as one of the knows, loving and being loved, we can feel loved by an image or images in ways that heal so deeply. And so sometimes connecting with an image and recognizing, feeling, opening to its love for us—it's so tailored and so tailored to our being and our particularities and so attuned to us and empowered by the dimensionality and the divinity and the beauty, et cetera—that in a way that kind of love, the love that images have for us, profound and almost mysterious, mysteriously attuned love, it can heal the inner critic and that whole painful constellation almost more powerfully, I think, than anything else.

So if we just lay out some possibilities with regard to the self-becoming image, the self-becoming imaginal, soulful sense of self, soul-making sense of self. There is, as I said at the beginning this evening, there is the possibility of externalizing, so to speak, the self that loves this or desires that or feels this way or whatever, and letting that become image, letting it become other, and then that becomes imaginable. And that starts to then echo back and change our sense of self and dimensionalize it, et cetera, and allow it to become more imaginable soul-making.

Then there is also the possibility of an image that is already other, but we sense it's me and it's not me. It's not me, it's other, but somehow it echoes me. And in Corbin's language, we recognize the angel out ahead. It has something profoundly to do with me and my soul. Somehow it's profoundly me and it's not me. And so that becomes, if you like, part of our sense of self, part of our soul sense of self, part of our sense of soul.

There's another possibility that I haven't really touched on, where an image can arise and it's sort of apparently impersonal. It seems like it's not to do with self, it's not an image of self, but actually it's doing something that's allowing the self to gain dimensionality and become image. So there's images that are apparently impersonal that don't retain particularities.

So, for example, I've been reading in the last few years at different times a little bit about what's called the Ten Sephirot. So it's a Kabbalistic teaching. There are ten—you'd call them aspects of the Godhead or aspects of God or aspects of the way God emanates from the sort of unfabricated, dark mystery of the innermost being of God emanating in these ten qualities. And so love and strength and wisdom and etc. And there's all kinds of literature on this and ways it's interpreted, et cetera.

And so I was meditating one day with this, having read about this, and then with the idea that my being contains or expresses these ten sephirot, these ten aspects of God. Our beings do. Everyone's being does. So they themselves are part of and rooted in the divine being. And our emanations are set at different levels of the divine or the Buddha nature, if you prefer that word.

And again, in Dharma language, Dharmakaya actually means the body of qualities of a Buddha. That was one of the original meanings of it. And it came to have other dimensions of meaning. So there's a similarity there between the teaching of Dharmakaya and Sephirot. But then was added to in my meditation with this idea that my being contains and expresses those ten aspects of the divine, of the Buddha nature.

And meditating in that way, they remain impersonal, but the self begins to be given a kind of dimensionality and divinity, and it's complexified in that way. Because of that, the self begins to become imaginal. And then, as I said right from the beginning with the fountain basin analogy and also then the world in cosmopoiesis, the world starts to become imaginal as the self becomes imaginal, or it might be that the perception of the world is conceived of and sensed as self—that kind of way of looking.

But in that meditation, you can hear that it all sounds quite universal and impersonal in a way. Although the self is involved, it seems to be being seen as just a universal kind of manifestation of God, of the Buddha nature, with these ten qualities that everyone has. But there was a way of doing it where my particularities were retained—they weren't dissolved. I wasn't dissolving the sense of self or omitting the sense of self. My narrative, my struggles, my joys, all that was included in this meditation on the nature of God and the nature of the human psyche—a human being—and the continuity of that in terms of the Sephirot, the human being as emanation of the Sephirot, but without dissolving the particularities, without omitting me and my narrative and struggles and all that.

So there's the particular, unique way these ten Sephirot manifest and express through me. Something that can start as an apparently impersonal image, or even sound like it, actually can be—by including the narrative and the particulars and the uniqueness—rendered more unique, retaining its particularities, retaining its personal personhood and uniqueness to self. There are all kinds of possibilities. I'm just throwing out a few here.

But if we linger for a moment with this particular area of senses of self that are apparently impersonal, then it's worth mentioning—some of you may know this—in some of the Buddhist tantras, the tantric texts, the elements, for example earth, air, fire, water, sometimes space, sometimes consciousness—either four or five or six elements—are, you could say, personified or associated with certain divinities, certain bodhisattvas or Buddhas or goddesses. You could say more than that. You could say that the elements are the refractions of those goddesses.

For instance, in the Guhyasamāja Tantra, the four goddesses: Māmakī, who is or is behind or emanates or symbolizes liquidity, the water element; Locanā, who symbolizes, who represents, who emanates, who is the element of earth, of solidity; Pāṇḍarā, who is or symbolizes or emanates fire, warmth element; and Tārā, who manifests or emanates or is the goddess of air, the air element.

And so for some tantric practitioners who base themselves, for example, on the Guhyasamāja Tantra, practicing that way, that would form part of their mandala and part of their meditation. And there are different ways you can do this. Some of it will be very prescribed, but there's no reason why one can't improvise with it a little bit. So sometimes one may be meditating outside with a sense of the elements in relationship to one's body, and there's a sensing with soul of, for example, the four elements. And one plays with that, one encourages it, or it just opens by itself, and one senses them as divine, maybe as goddesses, personal divinities in this case, or one's following this prescribed image.

So that's all lovely, and we could include that in soul-making dharma and that kind of thing in imaginal practice. There was once—maybe it was on the Foundations, I can't remember, I think it was in a Q&A—someone asked me, and I responded to, categorizing the different kinds of image that can arise that aren't... You know, there are the imaginal images and the way that we talk about them for the most part, but then there are other variations where you can kind of get this formless space that retains the essence of the particularity of the character of whatever imaginal figure one was meditating on, but the actual sensible apprehension of that imaginal figure has gone. It just retains their character. An empty space with their character can be very beautiful, very profound. That's a possibility.

There's also a whole possibility of what often tends to happen with more prescribed images or archetypes—Guānyīn or these four goddesses from the Guhyasamāja, for instance, or Tārā—where it's almost like one's working with an imaginal figure, but that imaginal figure is kind of, in a way, semi-universal. And that's fine, that's a very popular form of practice of using the imagination and visualization, especially for Vajrayāna practitioners. And it can stay there, like this goddess Tārā, whoever

it is, doesn't really become a fully particularized character the way imaginal images, in the sense that we mostly are talking about them, tend to. But it's still really valid and can be really fruitful.

And of course, an image may start that way in a sort of more universal archetypal sense of this image, Tārā, or this goddess, or whatever it is, and then become more particularized with practice. Not that it should or shouldn't, it's just a slightly different realm that one's in, a slightly different direction.

Or again, it could be, for instance, in practicing with sensing the elements with soul, the four elements—earth, air, fire, water—and letting them become divinity as goddesses, like that. Again, then, as one meditates, it may be, and one might be able to steer it this way, or it might just happen this way—it's not better or worse—that they become particularized, these goddesses, or their relationship with this body, this self, and the elements in relation to these more universal archetypes. That relationship relates to this particular self.

And again, as we said in the introduction, for example with the practicing of the ten Sephirot, the particulars of this self and this body and the way the elements have manifested in this body and in this life and in this narrative and do manifest right now and will in the future—that's where the particularity is kind of not just retained, but also then involved and highlighted and amplified even in the practice.

So they remain kind of somewhat universal, the elements and the goddesses behind them in this example, but it starts to become more personal through the relationship. How do those elements, how have they been incorporated into my life, this life, this narrative, this being, this self, this body? So that's a possibility.

There are a couple of possibilities there: letting it be more universal archetypal, and it becoming less so through the particularization, the uniqueness of the self; or, through the particularization and gradual particularization and uniqueness of these divine figures, they become more particular, more like proper characters.

So you can see there are all kinds of tributaries of possibilities here. But even if something starts apparently impersonal, it can stay impersonal and still be very soul-making, very beautiful, very fruitful kinds of practice.

Or there are ways that it can be apparently impersonal and then gain more personal relevance and particularity, either in oneself or in the image.

So just throwing out some different possibilities here. I mentioned we're talking about what can support the sense of self becoming imaginal and the sense of then dimensionalizing the self and sensing the self as having divine roots, as being theophany, as having its origins in other dimensions.

And I mentioned several times now ways of practicing where one has a kind of panoramic view or bird's eye view of the whole of one's life, as if from the other side of death, beyond death, after death, seeing it

all at once as a tableau—the birth, the life, the narrative, and the death—from the perspective of eternity.

One can just play with that. It may take a little practice, but it's just using the imagination a certain way. But in gaining that perspective on life, then it can be that the eternality element, the node of eternality is triggered, is ignited, and that can allow the sensing of one's life, of one's birth, narrative, and death from this perspective, from the eternal perspective. And the whole thing can be sensed with soul. It starts to flesh out and come alive in the soul. One sees it, one senses one's self, one's life, one's journey, all of it with soul.

So I've mentioned that a couple of times, but actually there's all kinds of possibility when we get into the domain of time and timelessness and perceptions of time and eternality.

I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but sometimes in your love for someone—a human, other, a beloved other, of course maybe an animal even, or a tree or something—where there's love, sometimes it's possible, because of the love and because of the eros, that the perception becomes soul-making. You actually sense them with soul at times, this beloved other.

And sometimes it's possible, I find very lovely perception, to perceive this other, this beloved other, or oneself even, as the sort of contemporaneous totality of the temporal slices of their life. In other words, one can see plainly there—I'm with them and it's now and they are X years old, whatever that is—but somehow I'm seeing not just that, but I'm seeing them when they were a little girl. I'm seeing them when they were a baby. I'm seeing them when they were a teenager. I'm seeing them in the full bloom of adulthood. I'm seeing them when they're an old person. I'm seeing them when they're very old. All those kind of temporal slices exist at once. All those ages exist. And one loves them all, and one perceives them all at once in the being.

Again, in the sensing with soul, there's the, through the eros, inseminating psyche and logos, inseminating the imaginal object, the beloved other, and it complexifies, it diversifies, it presents other faces, more and more faces, more and more dimensions. And so that's one very lovely way of perceiving either oneself at times or someone you love.

All kinds of possibilities when we get into the realm of time and the perception of time.

Another possibility, and last one for now, is meditating on an aspect of your being. So it could be the body or anything. It could be the voice. And meditating on it in a way, sensing it in a way that allows it to become ensouled, allows it to gain dimensions and significance for soul and the elements to come alive with respect to that aspect or area or domain of our being. And then, maybe from there, it spreads to the whole sense of self.

I could give an example of this, but you might even try it as a guided meditation if you feel like right now, just very briefly to give you a sense of what the kind of possibilities are.

So if you're listening and you want to engage and put your body into a posture that's comfortable and appropriate for meditation or helpful for meditation, whether it's standing or sitting upright or whatever it is, take some moments to actually sense the body, just in the simple way of sensation. And the energy body, and expand that awareness of the energy body.

But include in your awareness, as we've touched on—this always has to be the case—but for right now, let the sense of self, which includes your narratives, let that be there too. It doesn't mean getting lost in it. It doesn't mean going off on a distracted tangent or fretting about this or that. It just means having a sense of the body, how the body feels, how the energy body feels, its presence right now, its material presence, its energetic presence and feel. But also of yourself. There's a self sitting here, so to speak. That self has a narrative and that can be included in the larger scope or background of the awareness.

And just gently, very gently, suffuse your body, yourself, your narrative with metta, with loving-kindness, with unconditional love. Every part and aspect of your body, as the Buddha would say, leaving no spot untouched, totally permeating and saturating your body with the healing balm of friendliness, of kindness, of love and well-wishing. Let that metta include yourself and your narrative and narratives. Very gentle, very light touch here. Aware of the body, aware of the energy of the body, aware of the energy of the metta, touching the body, permeating the body, surrounding and suffusing the body.

And you can let the metta be somewhat there as a sort of implicit background or basis of this short guided meditation. So let that go into the background, but still be there, underpinning everything.

Aware of the body again. Aware of certainly the energetic field, the energy body, but also aware of the materiality of the body, the physicality of it—sinews, muscles, nerves, fibers, skin. Your body. Yes, it's not yours, but let's say it's yours right now. It's you. It's not you, and it's you.

Just checking that the metta is still there, sort of implicitly in the background—warmth, kindness, well-wishing. If that needs a little boosting, just give it a gentle shot.

Seeing if you can dwell with this sense of body, the mystery of embodiment. The mystery of you having this particular appearance, this kind of form, this kind of body. The miracle of that. The gift of that. And yes, all its particular quirks and all its particular ways it doesn't work so well, maybe failing in this way or that. It's still an amazing thing. It's a beautiful body, totally a miracle. And there's no other body like it. And it's tied in to your being, your soul.

Then within the scope of the body and the bodily functions, let's just focus in on the voice. As far as the body is concerned, we can identify maybe three or four regions or centers of voice production in the body that are involved in vocalizing and making sound.

There's the chest—the air in the lungs and the whole resonant cavity of the chest. Just be aware of that as part of the instrument, part of the miracle, part of what allows you to sing forth, sound forth, communicate, reach out, touch other people through your voice, to express your uniqueness, your point of

view. Let yourself be aware of your chest in the context of the gift of voice, the mystery of voice.

There's the throat and the voice box or the larynx, also obviously integral to the production of sound, our voicing in the world—part of the gift. And the mouth, the malleable cavity of the mouth that can shape itself as a resonant chamber in all kinds of ways, all kinds of amazingly precise ways to really shape sound very precisely, very uniquely. And then there's the tongue and the teeth, which are also included in the instrument, part of what shapes and supports, forms the voice, the sounding.

So this miracle, this gift of embodiment—and part of that miracle, that gift of embodiment is this particular set of areas, regions, centers of the body that are involved in vocalization and voice.

As you are with your sense of the body and with the sense of these four areas or regions or centers of voice production in the body, begin to include in the awareness, in your meditative awareness, what comes through the voice, what can come through, what comes through of soul—through the voice, through your voice, through our voices. What comes through as soul through these regions, these centers of the body.

Kindness can come through. Love can come through. Humor—mystery of humor. Flashes of intelligence and brilliance come through, articulated. All these aspects of soul, your soul, coming through, being given life, manifestation, embodiment through the voice, through this physical entity, through this miracle of body. Your perspective, the way you see things, the way you sense things.

Fire can come through—fire in the voice, fire in the perspective, fire in what's articulated. Struggle, story—we can convey our story, our struggles, our difficulties, our pains, the sensitivity of our heart. All that manifests from and through these regions of body: the chest, the throat, the voice box, the mouth, the tongue and teeth.

Poetry can come through, either literal poetry or just poetic speech. You don't divide them. You can say body is the instrument of soul, the gift of body in the service of the gift of soul to you and from you into the world and to other souls.

In the voice there's obviously the possibility of carrying verbal communication. We communicate ideas and feelings and requests and all kinds of things as I've elucidated. There's also the sound itself, the music of speech. So often when we listen to someone speak or we speak ourselves, we're concentrating on the words and their meaning. But there's also the parallel, intertwined, ongoing music—the sounds, the syllables, the mystery of that. And somehow this too is part of the communication of soul.

Of course it's there when we sing, but it's there when we speak—this music. Right now as I'm speaking, you can listen to the words, the meaning, what's he talking about, I'm trying to follow these instructions. But there's also a music in the sounds of the spoken voice. And it doesn't necessarily mean anything. It's music. And it has dimensionality and it has mystery, if we can hear it in a certain way. It has beauty. All this comes through you, comes through the gift of body, is embodied through body.

What happens right now if you just experiment in this meditative state, in this soul sensitivity, as much as you can encourage it gently right now, with the full awareness and the sensitivity of the resonances and the ripples in the heart, in the soul, in the energy body, perhaps even in image...

You just let yourself make certain sounds that are not words. Maybe certain syllables. Puh. Puh. And listen. Listen to the mystery of it. You are part of that mystery. Listen to the music of it. It doesn't mean anything. It's full of meaningfulness.

The mystery of this ability to vocalize. Doesn't matter what sound right now, what syllable. If you want to, you can press pause and for a few minutes just play with that. Let yourself vocalize meaningless or apparently meaningless sounds and hear it as music. Sense the mystery there. It can be in the vocalization, in the sound, in the rhythm if you string syllables together. There's music there.

What happens now if you say "I"? I. This time with the implication of the meaning of I, the self, the mystery of that I. What happens when you vocalize that I? What happens when you vocalize "you"? So really as delicately sensitive and open and alive to anything that you notice, anything in the nuance of reverberation, of resonance, of mystery, of beauty.

When you're ready, coming out of that particular meditation, whenever you're ready.

Maybe that gives you an idea—you could take any area or aspect of being, as we did with voice, or it could be body or whatever, and meditate on it in a way that supports or opens the possibility of sensing that domain of your being with soul. And from there it can spread to the whole, the self, and perhaps even into cosmic consciousness.

So like I said, these are just some possibilities. The possibilities are infinite, really, for the ways that the self can become imaginal and gain that dimensionality and divinity in our sense of it.

Really, we might turn it around and ask: what actually gets in the way of that happening? What prevents us from sensing the self with soul?

One is, of course, as usual, a logos—an idea, a conception that disallows it. For example, the example I gave earlier: this wanting to make an imprint or this wanting to make an impression, I just assume that it's ego and it's not okay, and I judge it. There's a logos there that's actually limiting my sense of things and my understanding of myself and my impulses and the movements of my being. So very often, a certain logos gets in where we don't even realize it.

Or, as I said at the beginning of the talk, not noticing the possibility that in working with an imaginal other or an imaginal object, the self too can become infected, caught up, involved in the soul-making dynamic. The self-sense can become imaginal—either not noticing it or not allowing it for whatever reasons. Maybe I don't even know the reason; it just feels blocked. So that's going to get in the way, obviously.

Of course, the opposite can be true, as I touched on. It's always myself that's imaginal, and I fail to allow

the world or others to become imaginal, to sense them with soul. That's also a possibility, and it would be a problem.

What else gets in the way? Over-identification, over-reification of the sense of self—any sense of self, even if it's a beautiful one. It feels like, "Oh, this is what I am now." If it's too reified, problem. If I'm too identified with it, problem. It will squeeze the soul out of it, like squeezing the juice out.

Or, on the other hand, I just dismiss it: "Oh, that's crazy, that's stupid, that's not real." Over-reification or under-reification, in a way. Like I've said a couple of times, we're dancing on the breadth of this boulevard—the imaginal middle way with respect to reification, how much, how little, at different times.

Sometimes, or with some people at some times, it's important that they view or that they are encouraged to view: "Do you realize you're more really that? You're more really or more primarily angel than you are what you appear to be in the conventional sense, in the conventional view." Sometimes, of course, a person's gone the other way and they've identified too much with that angelic dimension or the imaginal self and need a bit less reification.

But our culture doesn't really support that view of the dimensionality of the human being, of the imaginal self, of the angelic refraction. So because the culture doesn't, we might need to lean on it a bit more to re-legitimize it and reinstate it and open up that possibility. But it's also very individual and it can vary at different times and different situations.

But there is the possibility of sensing the self with soul, sensing the self as a temporal emanation of what is timeless, the angel, a theophany. We hold it lightly, and in that light holding of it, as I said, can have enormous power, bear enormous fruit. Something very, very beautiful.

Thank you for listening.

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