Logoi and Leanings

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:45:17

This evening, I'd like to offer a few pointers, reflections, and things to consider regarding both navigation within imaginal practice or sensing the soul, and navigation between practices. So some thoughts about steering within practice, and secondly, some reflections on concepts and ideas and their place in practice and sensing the soul.

With regard to what we might call steering or navigating in practice—someone who's doing soul-making practice must understand that we're not just talking about imaginal practice or sensing the soul alone. Those practices, which are themselves very rich, are nestled within or part of a much larger practice framework of related practices. They need those other practices at times to support, nourish, consolidate, and balance what's going on in the imaginal practice—to give relief, take the pressure off.

As I've pointed out on retreats, it's probably not wise, probably not even possible, to try and do imaginal practice all day long. It needs the balance of samadhi, of emptiness, of metta, of emotional work, working with the energy body. A person engaged in soul-making dharma is actually moving between different practices at different times. And as always, there's an art to that, a playfulness, but also a kind of wise and attuned and sensitive responsiveness that's necessary.

Then there is, of course, the navigation and steering within practices. A lot of this steering or navigation—sometimes it's quite clunky, a move from one thing to another, but often it's much more subtle, the way we can shift between practices.

I've given the image many times of an eagle or a hawk soaring on the thermals, the warm air currents. If it wants to glide to the right, it's just a very subtle leaning, an inclination of the tilt of the wings—the left wing upwards, the right wing downwards, and vice versa. The art is in the subtlety, oftentimes. Or if you're riding a bike, sometimes the steering happens more by the leaning, or a motorbike or bicycle. If you've seen people sailing in relatively small boats, they lean over one side, pulling the sail.

Sometimes that's quite dramatic and vigorous, but a lot of this navigation is really quite subtle. As things develop, as our artfulness in practice develops, we can find that the whole movement between emphases, between directions in practice or between practices gets correspondingly subtle and more subtly attuned.

The general point, which really bears repeating: sometimes we wonder, when should I do this and when should I do that? When should I just be with an emotion and when should I try and drop it or see the emptiness of it? I don't think there's necessarily a mistake in each instance, or that one should fear making a mistake.

Let's say we're talking about emotions and something's coming up emotionally that's difficult, and one decides in that moment to steer away from it: "I'll just come back to the breath. I'll just regard it as a bit of papañca, or I'll just see the emptiness of it and let it go." Now, of course, that may not be the most helpful decision, either at the time or in the long run. But I don't have to fear so much about it. If that's the case, it will tend to come back and keep knocking at the door, or something will feel like it's dried up or not working. We'll get the cues and clues and indications in our practice and in our life that we need to go back to that and explore it.

Conversely, a person might decide to go with emotion and be with it and explore it. But after a while, again, the cues, the clues, the indications tell me, "Actually, I think I'm just creating a lot of mud here. There's nothing really deeply authentic or real in this particular emotion. It's just the mind spinning and making a mess," as it has that tendency and habit.

So in each instance, don't get paralyzed thinking, "Should I do this, should I do that? More samadhi, less samadhi. More imaginal practice, or should I do an emptiness practice?" We can go with something, but if we stay sensitive and receptive to the cues that we're getting back from our experience in relation to whatever choice of direction or leaning we've taken, then we can read that feedback and always change something.

I don't think fearing making mistakes in the moment is really justified or helpful. What may be a mistake—or what I sometimes tend to think is perhaps the only mistake in navigating between different practices—would be to always do the same thing. Only one thing, only one of two choices. So always be with an emotion, or always drop it and return to the breath. Either one of those "always" approaches is going to be problematic. I'm not going to learn nearly as much in terms of the total territory of what we can learn and discover and open up in practice if I just do one or the other.

Some practices, some traditions in Buddha-Dharma teach to always work with microscopic attention—always boring the attention into something, atomizing experience. In that system, this is held to be the way you're going to get insight. So the attention is always trying to work in this atomizing, microscopic way.

Other traditions, either within insight meditation or borrowing from Mahāmudrā, Dzogchen traditions, sometimes Advaita traditions, always work with a wide awareness. Again, one will almost certainly be missing quite a lot of insight by just doing one or just doing the other. All kinds of things won't become apparent, won't get absorbed.

We'll have partial insight. And there are also other reasons—energetic consequences from doing just one or the other in terms of how the mind feels, how the energy moves in the body, and so forth.

So sometimes I like to say to people: don't fear so much the mistakes in the moment. Look at this kind of overview of your practice, or look at it over time. If you're always just doing one thing—always just one

kind of approach or one kind of response to some particular area of experience that comes up—that always doing one thing, I think, would be a mistake.

So less fear, more openness to the possibilities and the diversity and the range and the flexibility of approach, of direction, of way of looking, of practice. But that then invites the question of discernment, brings that question in, and so we have to address that.

One of the possibilities that can arise both in metta practice, in emptiness practices, and in imaginal practices is that in the opening that happens in any of those practices—in the letting go, in the beauty that we're touched with—it's possible that lovely feelings arise, lovely experiences in the energy body arise. And it's as if the path then forks, potentially it forks.

So one option is to lean into those lovely feelings and pay attention to them with the intention of enjoying them, of spreading them, of absorbing into them. And if we lean that way at any time, then we are moving down the samadhi route—the pervasion, the permeating of body and mind with whatever quality of well-being is present or has arisen as a result of our practice, or just spontaneously, or whatever.

When we're doing imaginal practice, that's a common occurrence. When we're doing emptiness practice, that would be a very regular occurrence. Or when we're doing metta practice... well, with each of those three practices—metta, emptiness, and imaginal—the instructions would be slightly different. I don't want to particularly go into those differentiations right now.

But the samadhi qualities, if you like, or ingredients that come from working with an image—an erotic imaginal image—will arise quite regularly. People have found this is related to the way the image opens up our energy body and aligns and harmonizes our energy body. Openness, alignment, harmonization of the energy body are all absolutely characteristic of certainly the first four jhanas, but in a way we could say of all jhanas and all samadhi. It's central to what I would take samadhi to mean.

So when we do that, or if we always do that—whenever the kind of loveliness in the energy body and the emotional qualities of joy and peace, ecstasy, rapture arise—if we always lean into them and go into samadhi, we'll, in a way, only gain a portion of the imaginal's immense treasures.

I'm saying this partly because someone was reporting this to me indirectly. She didn't kind of realize she was listening to talks on soul making and playing a little bit, and discovering that often these samadhi qualities came up and they were quite new for her. So she was leaning repeatedly into the samadhi, almost like using the imaginal to then get these lovely qualities in the energy body and the heart, and then kind of honing in on them, opening to them, absorbing them, leaning it towards the samadhi and towards jhana.

But if we always do that, as I said, you're going to miss a huge portion of the unfathomable and diverse treasures that are there in the imaginal. It would be a bit like someone making a profound and beautiful work of art—maybe it's made out of a precious substance, bronze or gold or whatever—and you melt it

down and extract the bronze or gold because that's worth something, it's valuable. The work of art, though, will be worth more. If it's a great work of art, it's going to be worth more than just the value of the material it's made from.

So financially it's worth more, but existentially even more so. It will keep on giving if it's a profound work of art. It has that unfathomability, which profound works of art have—closely related, or if not the same thing, as imaginal images. They keep on going. They have that unfathomability, that inexhaustibility. They can touch your soul endlessly.

So to always go towards the samadhi, take the samadhi fork, is going to limit actually how much we open to recognize and receive the gifts—the diverse and profound gifts—of the imaginal.

But sometimes it's a really helpful thing to do. Here's this image, and there's loveliness coming up because of the eros or whatever, and the beauty there, and the opening in the energy body. To decide to let the image be secondary, and those lovely qualities in the energy body, in the mind and heart, be primary—joy, peace, whatever they are, ecstasy, rapture, even if that's quite mellow—to hone in on them, to open to them, to absorb into them, to really get intimate with them, developing the samadhi... that's really, really helpful.

As I said, partly as a balance to the imaginal practice, because it would be too intense and too probably unhelpfully entangling to do imaginal practice all day long. Partly because we rest well there, we get nourished and resourced, which influences our view on all kinds of things. There are all kinds of other things to learn in samadhi practice.

And part of the kind of—I almost want to say the witchcraft of samadhi practice, the wizardry of it—is we learn a lot there that bears fruit in all kinds of areas, including imaginal practice. So sometimes doing that is really valuable. Always doing it is we're really going to miss this treasure—just like if we melted down this amazing sculpture that was made from bronze or whatever, just because we want the bronze. We've missed the art. We've missed the profundity of the art that would feed our soul.

But this is one of the kind of common and classic possibilities of forks when we're doing imaginal practice—forks in the path where we can lean one way or another. And it will arise quite regularly, I think.

What makes the difference is... because sometimes what we get is the image is there and the lovely feeling is there.

And so I kind of have to decide where am I leaning exactly? Am I leaning primarily to the lovely feeling in the energy body and the mind and the heart? Then I'm going towards the samadhi. Am I leaning primarily towards the soul-making aspects of the image and resonating with them and opening with them and the eros and so forth? Then I'm doing imaginal practice—then the image is primary. Am I balancing the two?

You know, what's the relative degree of balance between these? So all this can be played with. And it could be that one lets the image completely fade, or it just goes to the background, while the samadhi qualities are most prominent, or vice versa. The samadhi qualities, I kind of let them really go to the background while the image comes forward, or I hold the two in relative balance. But I should be familiar with moving and working along that whole range again.

We're talking about ranges, flexibility, making sure that when we talk about these different ranges—as we did in that talk on the "Spreading of Five Wings"—that the whole range is available to us and we're not kind of always hanging out or preferencing one area of that range.

So in moving between samadhi and image, or actually in moving along the spectrum between pure samadhi and pure imaginal practice, the key factor is intention. For example, when I'm leaning in the samadhi direction, my intention at that moment is to support, to stabilize, and to enjoy the factors of samadhi—pīti, sukha, or whatever. That's my intention. It's the intention that makes the difference, because the intention directs and primes the attention. And when I'm trying to enjoy something, it shapes—it not just directs the attention, but it shapes it or flavors it or conditions it in a certain way.

An intention that's trying to enjoy has a certain kind of morphology to it in the sense that it's open, it's tasting, it's penetrating, it's relishing. All that is wrapped up in the attention, but it's driven by, it's programmed by the intention. This is what makes a difference.

When my primary intention is to go down the imaginal practice path, and I'm leaning that way, then my intention is for soul-making. That's why it's important. What nodes need lighting up? Where's the soul-making factor in all this complex image or imaginal constellation where the self and other and the world are involved? Where's the sense of soulfulness right now? Can I tune into that? So again, the intention is for soul-making and that directs and shapes, informs the attention.

So there might be working with an image and there are all kinds of lovely feelings going on. The body is in complete rapture and it's dissolved into whiteness, etc. But it still might be possible, despite the intensity of that lovely feeling—which could easily go into jhana—my intention at that moment may be towards soul-making. The image is still there. I'm aware of what's going on in the body and mind and the loveliness there. But my intention is towards the soul-making.

So the intention is the primary thing that kind of determines which of these forks we're going down at any time. And that's an important thing to bear in mind.

Again, I'm offering these as reflections, things for you to try out in practice and get a feel for them yourselves, make them personal. I know what that feels like, I see, I get the feel of that kind of leaning, of that kind of steering. I get the feel of how this or that emphasis or intention or whatever we're talking about makes a difference. So everything we're talking about is there to be incorporated, discovered in your own practice, or deliberately incorporated, tried out, experimented with until you get taste for it

yourself and you make it your own. You understand it, you've absorbed it.

So there's this, as I said, this possibility of emphasis or leaning between imaginal soul-making emphasis, imaginal practice, and samadhi. And within imaginal practice, I've already made this point, but again, it's worth repeating: with the elements or the nodes, we must remember that there's not a kind of formula for the order in which they go. There's not a predictable unfolding. First this element lights up, first I do this and then that. It's not so linear like that.

Again, what that means for practice is it throws us back into a kind of openness of possibility. We don't exactly know what will light up first. It means my antennae have to be primed. I have to be receptive. I have to be delicate and sensitive in my attention so that I can notice: where is the soul-making? What's igniting right now?

What would be helpful? What's possible right now out of all the different elements that we can give attention to, begin to notice, or begin to deliberately ignite, tweak, play with?

As I've already mentioned, there are different starting points. I gave examples where sometimes the sense of being loved came first, then an emotion, then the imaginal sense of the trees. We often begin with instructions about the energy body, but it doesn't have to come first.

You will find—and I've pointed this out many times—that when an image is imaginable or potentially imaginable, has meaning for the soul, meaningfulness for the soul, is potentially soul-making, it opens up the energy body. It harmonizes it, aligns it. The other way around also works, and we've emphasized this many times. Sometimes you're working with something that's not really imaginal, there's not really the sense of sensing with soul there. Open up the energy body, inhabit the energy body, let the body lead. Bring that whole sensitivity of awareness to the entire space of the energy body, and that allows something to become more imaginal.

So the imaginal opens up the energy body. Opening up the energy body, inhabiting the energy body, can open up the imaginal. There's not necessarily a formulaic linear order.

Again, from some examples I've given in this series of talks, one might choose deliberately to focus on the sense of timelessness or eternality and gently open that out or shift it—perhaps in a more sudden quantum leap in different ways. In doing that, it allows one's self or some aspect of one's existence or what one is sensing right now, internally or externally, to be sensed with soul. It allows the whole thing to become more imaginal.

Correspondingly, of course, because timelessness and eternality are elements of the imaginal, when we are sensing with soul, when something does become more fully imaginal, we will notice—or at some point—the eternality element will switch on, will ignite.

Just remember this and what it means in terms of our poise, our stance, our openness, our need for

sensitivity, receptivity, opportunism. This is very much part of navigating within imaginal practice.

When we talk about navigating or steering, we're also including this aspect of pacing, which I've touched on over recent years. But I want to say one more thing about it with regard to eros and the eros-psyche-logos dynamic.

When we defined eros, we included the *pothos* element in the definition. Eros wants more contact, more connection, more touching, more opening, more intimacy with its beloved erotic other. That "more" was a key aspect that drove the whole movement of eros and its stimulation of the soul-making dynamic.

But if you pay attention to your experience, you will notice that eros doesn't always want more right now in this moment. Often it does, and there's that sense of more pushing into creating, discovering more of the beloved other, the beloved imaginal object—creating more faces, more aspects, more dimensions, more images within the image.

But sometimes the "more" that eros wants may simply be to linger. Right now, with the loveliness and delight of whatever perception is there—the loveliness and delight that are part of the subjective experience of eros—rather than wanting to reach, penetrate into, open to beyond, wanting to see more, or wanting the image to complexify or to create and discover new faces, new aspects of the beloved. Sometimes eros wants to linger longer. The "more" is in the more time. It wants to linger for more time with the loveliness it has, with the delight it has, with the sense of the beloved that it already has right there.

Again, we have to be respectful, sensitive to and respectful of what does the eros want right now? What kind of more? Often it is that more that will naturally create and discover more faces, more dimensions, more beyonds, that wants to penetrate and open those beyonds and that unfathomability. But sometimes it's not. It pauses for a while and lingers.

This has to do with pacing—the pacing of the whole movement of the soul-making dynamic, the whole movement of what's happening, what's opening, what's moving, and how and when and in what kind of rhythms it moves when we're working with an image, with sensing with soul.

Eros and the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, the soul-making dynamic, have rhythms. They're not necessarily gradual or smooth. If you perhaps got that impression from descriptions we've given in the past of the way eros works and the way the soul-making dynamic works, just bear in mind that the rhythms there may not be gradual or smooth. They may be more step-like rather than a smoothly linear graph.

That step-like rhythm might be more obvious with the logos in general, which tends to move the ideas of things, selves, objects, world, reality. Logos—our ideation, our concepts and conceptual frameworks—tend to move and open at a slower pace than eros or psyche or image.

I'm saying this partly because I don't think I've spelled that out clearly in talks before, and perhaps I've

given the impression that it's always in motion with the soul-making dynamic, that eros is always wanting that kind of more. It does generally, and for the most part, but as I said, there may be rhythms. The river is flowing, and then it comes to a place where it's relatively still and pools for a while, enjoying that stillness and pooling, and then it moves on.

Again, the need for withholding a kind of imposing of formulae, the need to listen, to be sensitive, to be open and receptive to what's happening and to respect that—or at least be open to respecting it. Because sometimes we need to respond to what's happening and make it different.

Help it to become something else.

And sometimes we need to kind of impose a sort of slowing down or a kind of stasis in what's happening, in what's unfolding. Sometimes this is for the sake of stability and equanimity in the being.

It can happen—I'm not sure how common it is, but some people might be, for different reasons, more predisposed to it than others—that something opens up in the sensing with soul. And there's a lot of excitement. And that excitement is, of course, part of the eros. But sometimes the excitement can fizz in the being, in the energy, and in the mind, and in the heart in certain ways that just actually mean that what could be absorbed and learned and opened to is not so well absorbed, learned, and opened to. Maybe the being just gets agitated in a way that's not that helpful. Maybe something in the whole stance and structure of the being gets thrown off balance in a way, again, that's not that helpful.

Of course, at times, being thrown off balance is extremely helpful, despite the fact that it might feel difficult. We've talked about that—the stretching, the breaking of the vessels. But sometimes it can be wise to introduce something or lean in a certain way or navigate within the imaginal constellation that's happening, within the sensing with soul that's happening, so that we kind of balance things out, balance the being out, which allows more absorption of the illumination of whatever we're sensing with soul and allows more illumination of the soul and more digestion for the soul of that illumination over time.

So going back to this teaching about the fountain and the basin of the fountain and that needing—the waters of soul needing to kind of balance out, the waters of what becomes imaginal needing to balance out and at least include self and world. Not with every image, of course not, but again over time.

And sometimes within one image, again, we might find something's out of balance here, something doesn't feel quite right, or I can't quite tolerate this. For instance, the eros is so much leaning towards the other in its gaze, in its belovedness, in its erotic charge and directionality. And that's tipping the being over in some ways. So we can counterbalance that—not diminish the eros, but actually in a way add to it by allowing ourselves or helping ourselves to become an erotic object for ourselves. The self becomes imaginal. So that the eros can flow both ways. There can actually be more eros, but it's balanced. The eros flowing towards the self balances the eros towards the other, and the world.

Included in the world also, we might say, what's the sense of the world right now? What kind of world?

What kind of cosmos? What's the cosmopoiesis here? What's the perception of things? And included in that is the perception of time. So again, one might balance things out by just paying attention to what kind of perception of time is happening right now. Maybe the perception of time—time begins to get sensed with soul. And again, there's all kinds of possibilities there in timelessness or the kinds of perception with time. And that allows the eros and the soul-making to flow in that direction, fill out in time. And that also balances out the flows of water here so that there can be enough equanimity, enough stability in the moment and over time in practice that things are digested, absorbed. They don't just get bowled over by some amazing experience that was—I can't decide whether it was more amazing or just more agitating.

Sometimes what happens for some people is that the whole sensing with soul brings one into sensing something in nature or some kind of universal process—the arising of appearances or something about the cosmos, something about consciousness. And the whole sensing with soul, it's hard to say what's sensing with soul and what's insight. Maybe there isn't a boundary there. And again, with the insight, there can be a lot of excitement and a lot of turbulence sometimes.

So going back to different teachings we've given, perhaps there might be certain of the elements at that point. If that's what's happening, I don't want to throw the whole experience out. There's a lot of insight here. There's a lot of opening. There's a lot of beauty and amazement in this sensing with soul. But perhaps if I just noticed, for instance, the sense of grace, and I give that a little bit more attention, or the sense of being loved—there can be soothingness in both those qualities. We're pervaded by this grace, we're held by it, we're given something. Or being loved—usually there's something soothing about being pervaded by that sense of being loved.

So just some attention—doesn't have to be all the attention, but some attention to those kind of qualities, or as I said, maybe that eternality can kind of soothe things and allow things to be more stable, more sustaining, more digestible, and in that way, more fruitful, more soulful, more fruitful for the soul.

And also the balance of attention, as we said, with self, other, world—where can I play with this balance of attention and actually feel more the sustainability and stability come into the experience right now?

Of course, one has to remember sometimes—I don't know how common this is, but sometimes if there's really a lot of excitement that's happening with a certain experience, the excitement means we can't remember so well. But I do think this kind of thing is very possible.

I've seen it to be so, and in interviews, just guiding people gently, it's very possible. It's part of the art of steering.

When we're still talking about steering now, and steering for the sake of soul-making, of course, or if I'm steering in emptiness practice, it's steering for the sake of those insights making a difference. So something to bear in mind is these two factors of energy body and also ideas or conceptual frameworks and how significant they are.

They're the primary factors that allow soul-making practice and also we could say emptiness practice as well, to realize their full potential.

Energy body, we've talked about—it's involved in the steering. It tells me when something is potentially soul-making, even if my mind is objecting or horrified by something or thinking, "Oh, this is not very interesting or boring or it's probably rubbish, it's probably irrelevant." The energy body can tell me. I can read the energy body and with this harmonization, alignment, opening, it's telling me I'm on the right track here, no matter what my mind is saying. And I can go with it and trust it.

So it's part of the steering. But it's also part of what allows the digestion, the chewing, the absorption of the soul-making experience. It allows us to open to it more. It allows the sensing the soul, whatever we're sensing, the imaginal object of the eros, to penetrate the being, to touch the being. It's working, it's kneading the dough of our body and our being, and not just our body, but through our body, our consciousness and our soul.

That's part of, as I said, also with emptiness practices, because we feel in the body the release that a certain emptiness way of looking or insight way of looking brings. And that allows us to really absorb that insight and to feel the freedom of it and to feel the liberation of it right then and to absorb it more long-term.

So energy body is involved both in steering and supporting the soul-making and emptiness practices to realize their full potential.

But also the ideation—the conceptual framework or the ideas supporting soul-making and imaginal practice, or if we're talking about emptiness practices, the ideas that are underpinning them, supporting them, those are absolutely key.

We can have an experience in either one of those practices, either imaginal practice or emptiness practice, and the experience itself, if we can even talk about an experience itself as if it's separable from other conditions and the surrounding factors. But we might have some experience, and that experience itself may be therapeutic to a certain extent. It may feel therapeutic. It may feel healing. It may be interesting. It may be amazing in either of those two practices, soul-making or emptiness.

But it might not be either fully imaginal or soul-making or delivering of liberating insight into emptiness. Because the ideas that are supporting it are not—ideas are excluded, or they're narrowed down, or they're not conscious enough.

As you can tell over the years in the talks, there's a lot of ideas that support the whole soul-making logos. And if they're not operating in a way that—in the time of practice, it doesn't necessarily mean they're at the forefront of my mind, but if they're not operating in ways that support the practice, then yes, I might have something that feels, to a certain extent, healing. I might have something that's, wow, if I tell my friends about it, it might be something that's really interesting. But there won't be the fully imaginal, fully

soul-making potential there. I won't receive that.

And similarly with the emptiness. Something might fade through some practice, but if I haven't got some portion of my mind understanding the idea of why that fading is significant—it fades when I do this, or when I drop that, or when I don't do this, and that's teaching me about dependent arising. So yeah, sure, if there's some painful papañca, painful story, painful history, body pain, and it fades, we feel great, that was really helpful, amazing that it faded. But if I'm not linking it up, if it's not undergirded by certain, again, lightly held concepts and ideas that are appropriate, that are the ones that are helpful, well, it won't be helpful, that experience. Or rather, the help of it will be limited. And I doubt I will have any kind of long-term benefit from it.

So, energy body, but also very much ideas, concepts, logoi, conceptual frameworks—that I want to go into, offer a few things, reflections and considerations about tonight.

The importance, certainly, of conceptual frameworks, but also of individual concepts. We use this word logos for either one concept or one idea or a much larger frame of ideas, framework of ideas. Like, for example, the Soul-making Dharma is a whole conceptual framework, or the way a certain tradition practices Theravādan insight meditation is also a whole conceptual framework—a whole network of related ideas that together form a kind of hopefully coherent framework and helpful framework.

So by logos, I can mean either of those, either one idea or a whole framework. We've stressed the importance of this and how a kind of limited logos or inappropriate logoi, or narrowing down or rigidification or holding on to some logoi can block and inhibit the whole soul-making process.

But let's consider the possibility of even more flexibility around causality. What if we could hold, at times, multiple perspectives simultaneously? What if this dukkha arises from the past AND is conditioned by my present way of looking AND is pulled into being by some future angel, some calling from ahead?

This multiplicity of causal understanding - rather than limiting us to just one explanation - actually opens up the dimensionality that allows for sensing the soul. When we can hold these different causal frameworks lightly, when we don't rigidify around any single explanation, then something much more alive becomes possible.

The image can breathe. The dukkha can reveal its deeper nature. Instead of being flattened into one causal story, it becomes multidimensional, richly textured, imaginal.

So we might say that a skillful relationship with causality involves this kind of conceptual flexibility - not abandoning the notion of cause and effect, but expanding our repertoire of how we understand it. Sometimes the most healing perspective might be historical. Sometimes the most insightful approach is to see the dependent arising in the present moment. Sometimes what's needed is to sense the teleological pull, the way this experience is actually serving something larger, something that wants to emerge.

Each of these causal frameworks can be valid and useful. Each can serve the soul-making process in different ways. But when we get stuck in only one, when we insist that this is THE way to understand what's happening, then we've moved into the kind of conceptual rigidity that blocks the very aliveness we're trying to cultivate.

This flexibility around causality is just one example of what I mean by logos serving soul-making rather than inhibiting it. The concepts become tools in service of opening rather than closing, of dimensionalizing rather than flattening. They help create the conditions where images can emerge, where soul can be sensed, where the whole dynamic can unfold more freely.

Or this angel is grieving the plight of the earth, and the grief feels so deep, whatever it is.

So this third possibility, teleological causation, there's a telos there—something, a goal, something, an end, the angel out ahead, something we're being propelled or pulled towards.

Again, is it possible to open up that range, that range of possibility, and to exercise some flexibility in picking up and putting down, including focusing on these different causal explanations and trying them out? And they will make a difference. They will make a huge difference to how something is sensed, what the experience actually is that unfolds.

So again, we could add that to our list in the spreading of five wings. I can't remember if that one was already in there, or we can certainly add it. So just like the range of perceived density or substantiality, or insubstantiality of the energy body as a range, or the pathologizing or non-pathologizing images, there's this openness to the range of causal explanations right now. And sometimes these are just unconscious, so you can actually make them more conscious and deliberately play with them.

But there is that possibility—opening up the logos away from the typically narrowed, constricted range of causal explanation that goes with our contemporary culture, or the dominant culture at least. There's the possibility of that flexibility, that openness, that playing, that investigation. Really important.

In a way, the causal explanations also have to do with the nature of time. How can you have a cause in the future? That doesn't work, we would tend to think. But there's something here to open up.

There's a lovely passage regarding the conceptions of time from—well, Henry Corbin is reporting it. I can't quite remember where he's reporting it from, so forgive me for that. But he talks about it in his book *Temp le and Contemplation*.

Some of you will know the story from the Old Testament of Moses as a baby. The pharaoh of Egypt had a premonition or an intuition or a rumor that a son would be born to the Jewish people and would be destructive for the Egyptian people—something like that, I can't remember exactly. It would be a threat or would liberate the Jewish people from their enslavement and their utility as a workforce for the Egyptians, for the Pharaoh. And so he received this warning somehow, and he tried to kill all the male

infants to prevent this prophecy or whatever it was from unfolding in those ways—retaining his free workforce, essentially, and his power.

What happens is Moses' mother and his sister hide Moses in a little kind of wicker or woven willow cradle or crib or basket, a little ark that floated, and hid him in the bulrushes on the Nile, on the river Nile. So this little cradle was floating there on the bulrushes out of sight. The story goes that his sister Miriam was working as a servant, I think, for the Pharaoh and found the cradle, and they adopted Moses for Pharaoh.

But of course, if Moses had stayed there in the water, then he would have eventually sunk and he would have drowned. What Corbin reports here—and I'm not sure where it comes from—is that one of the symbolic properties of water is to typify the sense of time and of engulfment in time, according to some kind of system of symbology. That means engulfment in the inexorable movement of past, present, future—the usual linear sense and interpretation of time, the usual interpretation and reading of history, of past, and of events in time.

"Pharaoh's aim," he continues, "is to make all male children sink into time, sink into water, succumb to the indifferent uniformity of all that is encased in time." So this indifferent uniformity of all that is encased in time is just to sink in flatland, basically—to be engulfed by a flat perspective on everything. Time is just what it seems to be to the flat view.

And Pharaoh's aim is to prevent them from rising to the height of the worlds, of other worlds that can be revealed. In other words, the worlds of the angels, of the demons, the worlds of the archetypes and the myths, the worlds of the angel out ahead, the world where everything is, this is always already happening. The worlds of eternal time, hierophantic times. Pharaoh's aim is that they are to drown in the waters of secular one-dimensional history—one way of reading events.

It's also what Corbin's main point here is about—one way of reading the Bible or sacred literature as just a historic document, a collection of stories, some of which may be true, some of which may bear some relevance to so-called fact, some which may be made up, but they're all taken as literal rather than as symbolic and multidimensional and endlessly open to interpretation, to infinitely fertile hermeneutics.

They are to drown in the waters of secular one-dimensional history. And so in this little ark, this little ark preserved Moses from the flux of historical time—we should say from the perspective of that usual flux of historical time. What Pharaoh wanted was that only normal man should survive. So he was afraid, according to this interpreter, he was afraid of someone who could see more than just the linear, flat view and interpretation and sense of time. What Pharaoh wanted on the other hand was that only normal man should survive.

The man who conforms absolutely to the norm of a world which, he says, does not wish to know that it is in exile, but also does not wish to know that there are—what he really means is that there are other dimensions. That there is hierophantic time. There is the sense of the eternal and a whole perspective that,

instead of regarding the eternal as just unreal imagination, recognizes that what is eternal, what is timeless, actually emanates or projects this world.

The events of this world, the events recorded in time, stories of scripture or whatever, are potential symbols opening up this other world, and the power of that, and the beauty of that, and as I said, the anchoring of that, the rooting of that.

So again, there's this causality which is obviously tied into our notions, our views of time, and the possibility of opening that up, shifting it, not dogmatically replacing one with the other as if there is no causality from the past. Of course there is. As if events don't happen in linear time or can be sensed that way and it makes sense to understand them that way. But that's not the only way we can sense things. And if it is the only way, then we're impoverished by that. We are limited by that. Our soul and our soul-making is grossly limited by that.

But more widely, we can again stress the real indispensability of concepts and conceptual frameworks for soul-making. You know, an imaginative experience is not a non-conceptual experience. There are concepts operating there. They may be subtly in the background. They may be at the foreground. They may have initiated the whole process. They may result from the process. They may be just woven in with the whole thing. The concepts are operating.

And more widely, as I said earlier today, the whole conceptual framework is necessary for a certain kind of fertility of imaginal practice. It won't really be that soul-making without a conceptual framework that supports it.

I remember talking with someone who reported in an interview that she'd been practicing with the imagination and being with images for years, but it all kept kind of collapsing into a kind of unfertile soup. She would be drawn to it and then the whole thing would seem ridiculous to her, or she would just get very confused, or it would all really stagnate. Nothing really blossomed much at all despite years of good intention and practice and curiosity.

As we were talking, it became clear to me that there was no conceptual framework supporting the imaginal or supporting a really fecund and rich working with image and sensing with soul. Rather, she had been a long time in the Dharma, in a certain tradition, and so the conceptual framework that she was bringing to meet the experiences of images was actually a much more typical Dharma conceptual framework. For example, everything's impermanent, as well as typical modernist views about reality, what's real and what isn't.

And there was also mixed with that a certain "loyalty"—I'll put it in inverted commas—loyalty to Buddhadharma, loyalty to being a Buddhist or identifying with being a Buddhist. The absence of a really coherent and supportive conceptual structure for the imaginal and to open up the imaginal and the sensing with soul, together with this kind of infection or infiltration with just typical Dharma conceptual

frameworks about whatever it was—impermanence and death and the meaningless of the existential fact of impermanence and the pathos of that, that kind of secular existentialist dharma, together with modernist views about what was real and not—all that led to this stagnation and kind of circling in doubt for years.

So it's so crucial, and I know that some people struggle with the conceptual piece or it seems a bit heady or whatever, but again, see for yourself. Without it, the sensing with soul, the imaginal practice will either lack a lot of dimensionality and power, a lot of range, a lot of depth, and possibility of what can open up. Or it will kind of veer into a path that looks ostensibly similar at one level—some kind of shamanism or energy healing or whatever it is. All of which is fine if people have their choices of what they do, but if we actually want to really support what we're talking about by sensing with soul and the imaginal and those words, then the conceptual framework is crucial.

Same with emptiness practice or whatever. The conceptual framework makes a huge difference. People can have all kinds of experience. As I said, I mentioned someone could have an experience of the Unfabricated. Everything fades completely. There's a complete disappearance. And I've met several yogis who've reported to me in interviews something like that, but they don't seem to have got any liberating insight from it because they haven't tied it to a conceptual framework that understands emptiness and dependent arising.

Sometimes fortuitously they do. There's the opening of a mystical experience and it does something to their sense of this world and this self. Other times it doesn't. It's not helpfully underpinned by a conceptual framework that allows this opening and absorbing of things, their place and their power. So this is really worth bearing in mind.

And some of you may have had this experience. You can see just how important conceptual frameworks are. Sometimes when you're working in a dyad and doing soul-making practice, for instance, sharing an image or working with an image together, you can notice, or you will notice, how a limiting conceptual framework, even if it's held unconsciously by only one of the people in the dyad, by only one of the pair, is amazing. Two people are working. One person's conceptual framework is more full and more supportive of the whole sensing with soul paradigm, and the other's is not. There's some limits to it, or it's very partial, or it's not really there at all, but they like images and they like hanging out and they like the sense of intimacy or whatever it is.

Something in the magic of dyad practice and the mysterious nature of connection reveals just how powerful our conceptions and conceptual frameworks truly are. When only one person holds an unconsciously limiting view—perhaps not even realizing they're constraining a particular logos—it limits what can arise as image and energy for both partners, even though this view hasn't been spoken aloud and may not even be consciously held.

This suggests it may not be wise to engage in soul-making dyad practice with someone who doesn't share

or understand the conceptual framework. While you can certainly practice many forms of dyad work together—balance of attention, sharing feelings, insight dialogue—attempting soul-making dyads without shared conceptual grounding will likely fall flat, feel limited, and prove frustrating or even painful for one or both partners.

I'm not suggesting this because soul-making is some kind of religion requiring adherence to a particular credo. Rather, I'm pointing to something fascinating: the profound power of concepts and conceptual frameworks to either limit or open, inhibit or support and deepen soul-making perceptions. This is crucial to understand for one's own practice, and dyad work provides additional compelling evidence of these dynamics.

So here's some practical advice worth considering: it may prove unsatisfying and unfruitful to attempt soul-making dyad practices with someone who doesn't share or know the conceptual framework. I understand the impulse—when this material feels exciting and transformative, you naturally want to share it with friends who are good practitioners or skilled at intimacy. But it may not work without a genuinely shared and supportive logos.

This consideration touches on questions of temenos, caring for your soul, caring for soul in general, caring for practice, and caring for your relationship with that person. If you feel frustrated and unfulfilled, they may sense this and feel rejected or somehow inadequate, which serves no one.

The importance and centrality of logos—concepts, ideas, and conceptual frameworks—cannot be overstated. They are indispensably crucial to soul-making practice.

Now, let me say something about how this can actually work. When I've explained the Eros-Psyche-Logos dynamic—and Catherine has offered some lovely explanations as well—we've often presented it as if eros comes first, inseminating and fertilizing psyche or image. As psyche and image expand, open up, and diversify, our sense of things in the world or aspects of ourselves opens through the experience of image. Over time, logos expands too. We begin questioning our views of reality, considering that maybe things could be seen differently, that there are other ways of understanding.

So the sequence appears to flow from the initial impulse of eros, through the expansion of psyche, to the expansion of logos. But it doesn't have to work in this order.

There may be eros for logos itself. Perhaps after years of resistance or wanting to push away conceptualization and intellectualization for various reasons, a person begins to fall in love with logos—with the whole realm of concepts, potent ideas, poetic ideas, and their transformative power in the soul. This might manifest as love for one particular idea, for the entire conceptual framework of soul-making, or for logos in general.

When there's eros for logos, the logos itself becomes ignited. Instead of eros inseminating psyche, the logos becomes image—an erotic, imaginal, beloved other. Logos is ignited through eros's passion for it,

engendering more creation and discovery of other concepts and conceptual frameworks. Rather than logos always trailing in third place, expanding last as a result of eros and psyche, eros can directly impregnate logos with passionate engagement, igniting logos and giving birth to more creation and conceptual discovery.

The entire soul-making dynamic—the whole Eros-Psyche-Logos interplay—might be stimulated into expansion when logos itself is directly impacted, stretched, shattered, or ignited. You might read something, hear an idea in a talk, encounter a concept someone shares, or have a thought arise spontaneously. The mind of the soul becomes impacted by this idea, something breaks open in the entire realm of ideation, logos expands, and from there eros and image can emerge.

So there are all kinds of possibilities in this dynamic interplay.

And I gave some examples in this series already. So if we go back to that example of me reading about these ten sefirot—the teachings from the Kabbalistic tradition about, well, some would say the inner nature of the Godhead. Some would say the teachings are actually about the emanation of God or the energy of God, the manifestations of God, either way.

And the possibility of regarding them too, because, to quote the passage from the beginning of Genesis, humankind made in the image and likeness of God, that our human psychology, our soul, also has refractions, mirrors that structure of the ten sefirot that the Buddha nature has, that the divinity has. So that there's a kind of parallel process or even a connected process there.

Well, all that's an idea. It's quite an elaborate idea. And one can take that idea and begin with that in practice. One is actually deliberately taking an idea that's attractive to one and putting it in the gun chamber, so to speak, and seeing what comes out of that, what shoots out of that in the looking.

So that's an example of quite an elaborate idea. It might be a much less elaborate idea. There's all kinds of possibilities. And I'm sure over the years I've given many, but that's one from so far in these talks.

Or I also shared another one where I said I was talking with Catherine and we were talking about, or she was sharing with me this idea of "I am soul." And she was sharing what that meant to her and how that stimulated a certain direction of exploration in her practice. And I was listening to that, but I was left with this phrase, "I am soul." And I worked with it myself, but it took me in a different direction than what she was talking about.

So there's this kind of germinal idea, this seed of an idea: "I am soul." And I think I was even interpreting it—even though what those three words mean—it was taken up in my soul, in my mind, in my being and practice, with a different interpretation than Catherine had elucidated to me and explained to me about her practice.

So there's this—like seeds in nature, they float from one flower or plant or tree to another resting place

and they give birth there. And the form that they give birth to might be slightly different. Just so we share ideas and we inseminate each other and we are inseminated by the ideas of others. But what arises from those sort of little germs or seeds might be quite different than what had transpired or arisen in the source of those ideas, where we heard them from, where we read them from.

So I'd shared this "I am soul," this idea, this phrase really that I got from Catherine, and how I'd shared it only partially about that, so I want to say a little bit more about it. In a way, there were a few ideas wrapped up in it, and that's partly what I want to emphasize.

So the "I am soul"—as I think I already explained when I mentioned it first—it kind of relativized the relationship with and the view of the ontological status of body and matter. So "I am soul" made the principle, the sort of weight of the principle identification—if you say that, I was playing with a different identification, "I am soul." And soul as this, as I said, loose definition, this organ of perceiving in soulful ways. This instrument that wants to perceive and does perceive in ways that are soul-making.

But that kind of then relative diminishing of the ontological status or the primary reality sense or degree of reality of, say, body and matter, did something to perception which became less substantial. In other words, it was fabricated less. It was fading to a slight degree. It loosened and liquefied the whole of perception. And then with that other elements came in like the fullness of intention, et cetera. And so there was a real malleability with regard to perception.

So that was one—one in these three words, "I am soul"—an idea that Catherine was communicating to me, it was picked up differently, and it also kind of became a constellation of ideas, a constellation of logos. It's not quite a framework, but it was more like a few ideas were sort of coalescing together, stitched loosely together in a way that was very fertile.

Because the second one—I can't remember if I shared this the first time round, but was that "I am soul," and what is the nature of soul? It's that there is an open two-way participation between God or Buddha nature and my soul. That God, Buddha nature participates in my soul, participates in that sensing the soul, in that organ of soulful perception, that instrument of soulful perception. And two-way, my soul participates in God, in the Buddha nature.

So that was a second idea or a kind of double idea, the double participation that wove its way into this and mixed with this other idea that kind of relativized the ontological status of soul and body and matter. So they became mixed together.

But then actually a third idea was woven in with this idea that I, and all that is happening—meaning my narrative, and I think at the time I was doing this was particularly prominent, was the sense of my illness and dying, et cetera—so I, and all that is happening, my narrative and all that, and all I perceive, including others that I was looking at and the surroundings, all of that is soul. I could say my soul, I could say the soul.

So you get the sense how there's all these kind of sub-ideas that are wrapped up in a kind of loose and light ideational structure. There wasn't a great deal of intellectual grinding and pondering and heavy, "Okay, let me really focus on that idea." It was all very light, very delicate. They're like little drops of tincture in the waters of soul, and they—

things and alchemical reactions start happening from dropping this tincture in or dropping a seed into the water or whatever. Things start flowering.

But actually it's a kind of mix, a loose mix of strands of ideas. In that last sub-idea, the perception of sensing the soul there is kind of similar to emptiness practice perception of self and other not being separate. Some of you who have done some emptiness practice know that as a kind of staging post or important perception or way of looking at certain levels of self and other subject and object not separate. So it's akin to that. It has some similarities.

But here, the difference is, in that sub-idea, the difference from the emptiness idea is, it's not universal. Again, the particulars are retained and important. And even more than that, they're necessary to soul. The particulars, my particulars, my narrative. It's not just that things get equalized and kind of universalized and a little bit faded in the non-separateness of subject and object, of self. Rather, all these particulars are retained and sensed as necessary to soul, necessary to Buddha nature, necessary to God.

Necessary to God, this dukkha, this narrative, maybe even this tragedy if one looks at it a certain way. Retained and necessary, but somehow beautiful, precious, ensouled, divine, and lighter for that view. There is a relief of suffering with it.

So again, there's even another aspect to the idea. As I said, all these kind of seeds begin to coalesce a little bit loosely and give rise to the perception, the sensing of soul.

So you can, if you go back to the original, I am soul. So I wasn't so much thinking all this in some kind of mental verbal process. It was just, I was holding this idea, I am soul, and that three-word phrase, really, you know, short words, I am soul, it's almost as if it functioned as a kind of orientation and a stimulant to the sensing with soul, but it contained as a sort of silent subtext all these other ideas, these sub-ideas, subtexts, they're kind of written in small print, so to speak. They're implicit, but powerful.

So when we say idea, we don't necessarily mean, again, we don't necessarily mean some kind of slow, laborious cranking of the mental cogs with a lot of wordiness. They can be really, really subtle. They function like little seeds or germs or like a yeast or something. Poetic ideas, poetic seeds, but they include subtexts that slant and direct the sensing and the opening in different ways.

Some of those ideas, when this works, and again if you try it out, some of the ideas will still be very powerful even when they're very vague. They're not completely worked out ideas or completely coherent or I'm not really clear about exactly what I mean when I say that, but it still has that power. The ideation is functioning enough to have power, but not so much that I've worked everything out and certainly not so

much that it becomes this kind of overly clunky, laborious pondering or cogitation or thinking through something. Not that that might have its place at other times, but when we're actually engaged in practice or employing ways of looking, then the ideation, this goes for emptiness practice as well, the ideation needs to be very light, feather light, really like little drops of tincture or seed or something.

So there's subtext, there's coalescences of sub-ideas. They may be vague ideas and concepts, and they may be illogical. It may be that they don't make logical sense. You know, there are some philosophers of science who are wanting to open up different kinds of logic just because of what's been discovered in quantum physics and with subatomic particles. So usually logic would say a thing cannot be A and not A. It's called the law of the excluded middle. Either it's A, either it's this, or it's not this, but it can't be both at once.

But when physicists look at the behaviour of subatomic particles, sometimes even molecules, so larger than atoms, and they see actually it's somehow, it's called the superposition principle, it somehow seems to be in a state where two contradictory states or conditions are existing at once. And so that needs... That's one example, but other findings as well suggest a need for a new kind of logic. Other people, like the philosopher J.M. Findlay, just in a kind of phenomenology of everyday experience, and in his kind of like, look, even everyday experience doesn't really add up and needs a different kind of logic to kind of understand it better or feel out better what's going on.

But, as I said, there's subtext, possibility of vague ideas, and possibility of ideas that don't even seem logical.

This idea of subtext is also common in emptiness practice. So, I think I might have mentioned in this series already, like the way of looking that sees just a perception, and looks at things, decides to look at everything, it's just a perception, it's just a perception. Actually, there needs to be a consciousness of what is the subtext for what I mean by just a perception. Because it could mean something like, it's not solid, it's just of the nature of awareness. That would be one possible subtext for the emptiness way of looking, just a perception. Or it could be, it's just a perception. In other words, it's fabricated by the way of looking, by clinging. And that's a slightly different subtext. And they will have different deliverances and different degrees of liberation. They will take you to different depths, the second being deeper than the first.

So this idea, when we're talking about ideation in practice and incorporating concept into perception, into ways of looking, again needs to be very light. And the subtext needs to be conscious, but not too heavy that it's clunky. We need to retain a kind of agility with it.

But these ideas, like I said, they flow between human beings, what we read, what we hear, something in conversation. Sometimes even mishearing something or misunderstanding something ends up implanting some misinterpretation that becomes a very powerful and fecund seed in one's consciousness.

Sometimes people - someone said to me the other day - "You know, I can't get on with guided meditations or people suggesting do this, this, this, but somehow I listen to you talk and you share this or that and I

somehow absorb a certain idea. I adapt that idea and try it out in practice, and it opens up sensing the soul."

So formulae for using certain ideas might work, formulae for guided meditations might work at times or for different people, but there's also this possibility of more opportunistic seeding and stimulation of ideas between people.

As always, we create, discover. We create and discover these possibilities, sensitive and responsive to the soul-making resonances and the sense of soulfulness, and that allows us to navigate.

So an idea - we might discover it, and so it's given to us. We might create a certain idea. We might meld, as I gave that example with the "I Am Soul," bringing together in this very gentle weave, very light touch, bringing together certain ideas and seeing what alchemy happens when these ideas are lightly entertained and then allowed to shape and influence and determine and fabricate the perception, the sensing.

As always, the navigation has to be in response, in sensitive response, to what actually feels soul-making right now, what feels that it's opening that. All these possibilities, and many more obviously, are there, just to give you a little idea tonight.

Thank you for listening.

Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.