Soulmaking Dyad Practice

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This evening, I'd like to offer a few pointers and guidance for working and practicing in soul-making dyads—practice in pairs. This is a vast subject with countless possibilities and dimensions to consider and explore. I want to touch on some of these pieces and possibilities, highlighting things to look out for, consider, and practice.

Over the past few years, we've worked in twos and threes through various guided meditations that we call temenos exercises. We've introduced exercises typically with a human other, though they can also be done with an imaginal other, an intrapsychic imaginal being, or with objects and beings in nature—a tree, a flower, whatever calls to you.

The foundational exercise we explore is what we call the balance of attention or two-ness. This forms a basic practice, a foundation for soul-making, imaginal practice, and sensing the soul. We might regard this as preliminary to soul-making and imaginal practice in dyads.

The other approach we've developed, which we specifically call temenos exercises, involves a three-part structure practiced in twos, threes, or sometimes fours. Participants take turns checking in with sensitivity and expressing what's happening in the energy body to the other or others. The listeners witness with full sensitivity, receiving and truly seeing the other person. The second round focuses on emotions, and the third explores sharing an image or something that recently touched your soul.

I encourage revisiting those recorded exercises from the past few years, as there are many nuances in the instructions. Even if you participated and enjoyed them—which most people seem to—and feel you understand the practice, listening again can be valuable. In the flow of Catherine's or my guidance, there are subtle details: little things to introduce, considerations to incorporate, ways to deepen the practice.

I've described this as somewhat like practicing scales. It's artificially contrived to separate energy body, emotion, and image into three distinct tiers practiced in sequence. But like musical scales, you separate and isolate elements to work on them specifically. When you later play the piece you actually want to perform, the ability to play scales well feeds into fluency, fluidity, capacity for improvisation, responsiveness, and the subtlety you can bring to the real music, so to speak.

These represent two foundational levels we've offered: the balance of attention exercise and the three-part temenos exercise. Within these, there's the possibility of sharing images with each other, which some people are already exploring. We also encourage tracking the effects of what is shared—the perceptions, experiences, and responses that arise—and voicing these effects when appropriate.

When someone shares an image or expresses what's happening in their emotions or energy body, notice what arises imaginatively for you. Consider the possibility of bringing that into the dyad, into the crucible of shared practice through careful, sensitive tracking and respectful sharing of these effects—essentially, of what is happening right now for both people. This can take various forms.

There's another level where each person becomes image for the other, or the dyad itself becomes an image. This involves sharing the perception of this meeting, of self and other in this present moment, when sensed with soul. This too can take different forms and represents another depth of practice.

There's yet another level where significant eros flows between the participants—the two elements of the dyad. I won't explore that level extensively tonight, but when substantial eros is present, the whole practice becomes turbocharged. The inseminating quality of eros makes everything very rich while requiring tremendous care and skill. All these levels, in fact, demand considerable care and skill.

Let me address several aspects of these different possible levels of dyad practice, along with some general considerations.

First, I want to emphasize how potent a dyad can be—or working in triads, or sharing images with another in that kind of intimate, open rapport. Some of you know this potency well: how all kinds of things can be sparked and ignited, sometimes yielding very beautiful soul-making perceptions, and sometimes triggering difficult reactions or contractions.

As an entity or crucible for practice, working in relationship is a very sensitive container. Little changes can make big differences. This sensitivity exists when practicing solo as well—eyes open or closed, sensing the soul on your own. Solo practice is potent and highly responsive to all our responses, relationships, manipulations, leanings, and navigation. The dyad may not necessarily be more sensitive, but it's definitely a sensitive space where everything responds: energy, emotion, heart, perception, soul, mind.

Just as we've emphasized certain prerequisites for imaginal practice, sensing the soul, and soul-making dharma over recent years, it would be wise to consider what skills are needed for dyad or triad practice to work well—to be fruitful, soul-making, safe, and beautiful; to avoid harm and prevent increased contraction and confusion.

Many skills are required here. We could outline some of them, but I want to pause with this recognition: for most people interested in soul-making, much of this work happens in relationship with other human beings. At the very least, considerable eros and image can be activated in these relationships.

And the question is, as I've just been saying, whether the initial spark that feels soul-making can actually sustain its generativity, sustain its fertility, sustain the soul-making dynamic—the eros-psyche-logos dynamic—deepening, widening, enriching both the soul and experience. Or whether that whole dynamic, and perhaps even the relationship itself, breaks in some way, short-circuits, blows a fuse, or backfires. This is really a crucial question here.

Part of the way problems can arise, and the soul-making dynamic—the eros-psyche-logos dynamic—can get disrupted, is in and around the times of relating, but also around the times of relating with another. Being conscious about boundaries, respecting boundaries—depending on people's situations, whatever their relationship commitments are and other considerations. There are all kinds of boundaries, in fact. Being conscious about boundaries, respecting boundaries, ethical considerations in some cases, being conscious of energy, emotion, psychological patterns, relational and communicative patterns and skills and possibilities. As well as handling skillfully erotic charge, desire, image, and the inevitable slides at times into reification or dismissal, or eros sliding into craving.

Noticing all this reification, responding to all that, developing one's skill and art—this is really important. A certain amount of skill with all that, and other elements too, as prerequisites for fertile and sustainable soul-making in relationship with other human beings and fellow soul-makers.

We haven't talked too much about that and given too much guidance. There's more I want to say a little bit tonight, but even what I say tonight is somewhat limited. Part of why I'm going into it is just that I'm aware people are practicing in dyads and noticing, as I said, the potency, the sensitivity, the care that's needed, and maybe getting a sense of some of the caution and skill and art that's needed. So it seems like it would be good to say a few things about that.

Again, not to underestimate how intimate it is to share in this way with others in a soul-making dyad. To share one's psychological history or one's difficult history in life, of wounds and patterns, is intimate. There's something about sharing images that are really soul-making for us, that really touch us, that feels even more intimate than, say, sharing history of being abused or something like that, or just sharing a difficult emotion or a lovely emotion. There's a certain vulnerability to that.

There's something about the level of intimacy of sharing soul, sensing the soul, sharing image with others that tends to even surpass those kinds of sharing—of revealing psychological history or emotion in the present moment. And it's curious. I've pointed this out before. It's curious—this thing, from one respect, isn't even real. It didn't even really happen, and yet it touches my soul, and it's important to my soul in ways that are so profound and so meaningful and so central that it's really an intimate space to enter into with someone. That needs a lot of respect and care, and a range and pitch of skills are needed to sustain it.

So don't underestimate the range and pitch of skills needed to sustain it and to enable it to be soul-making. Because we will need, in these kinds of practices, to be able to work well and skillfully with difficulties and relational problems when they arise. That's part of being in any healthy relationship, and it can very easily arise in these kinds of relationships when you're doing a dyad and something difficult comes up.

If we just think for a moment about prerequisites, it comes to mind: do I have, have I developed a certain amount of awareness of my emotional life? That doesn't just mean the difficult emotions. It means also the subtle movements—slight boredom, slight excitement, slightly wanting something. Do we call that an emotion? Yes, we could in the broader definition of emotion. These are all kinds of colors or leanings,

inclinations, states of the mind-heart and consciousness at any time.

To be aware, to be able to notice these movements of the heart and changes in the heart, is really crucial. The more of that there is, the better placed one is to be able to do these kinds of practices. Some people, you could say, are just not quite ready, in the same way they're just not quite ready for imaginal practice, really.

Do I have skill with my emotions? So this is happening—this difficult emotion, or this lovely emotion—can I tolerate it? Can I be with it? Can I give it what it needs? Because I may not be getting that from another person, and I may have to give it what it needs. Can I slow down, if necessary, whatever processes in the mind and the impulses that emotion has kick-started? There are all kinds of skills involved, and that's why we put a lot of emphasis in Soul Making Dharma on emotional awareness, emotional skill, working with the energy body, and integrating those.

All that would be prerequisites. Really, as you're listening, ask yourself: how well developed are those building blocks for me? Basic mindfulness—if I can't be there and be present and sustain my attention to some extent, sustain my focus on what's happening in this dyad, in my experience, when the other person is sharing or the sense of the field...

without a sort of basic training in mindfulness and that capacity to remain engaged and plugged in and alive, present, sensitive to what's going on, attentive, alert, the crucible is cracked. There's no possibility of it holding its material and holding whatever fire is there.

Energy body skill and awareness we already mentioned. Where am I with the whole middle way? The whole imaginal middle way or the emptiness middle way? Either one would help when there's reification. I start believing this image of self or other or the couple or whatever in a way that's too tight, too literal, too solid, and usually will ensue either right then or in the course of time with some kind of problems or not-so-wise choices.

Where am I, again we're talking about possible prerequisites, where am I with the fullness of intention? When I enter into these kinds of spaces, formal space of working and soul-making, what am I really wanting there? And how easily, of course, for us as human beings, the intention can contract to something smaller, less open to possibility. Something sneaks in—sometimes we're unconscious of it—I'm actually trying to get approval, respect, a good feeling about myself, some kind of... maybe I actually want to pursue a relationship with this person, which may or may not be fine. But am I clear about what my intentions are? And can I open up that field of intention to the fullness of intention and that element of the imaginal, that node?

So all these and more will be prerequisites. And really to ponder for oneself how developed they are and whether they need more work. And if so, you might want to pitch the dyad practice so that it's not further ahead than you're actually equipped for, so it's not more advanced than you actually have the tools to

cope with and the resources to cope with.

If we go back to what I said at the beginning, we talked about the balance of attention exercise, the three-part exercise—energy, body, emotion, image—and sharing it. Spending a while with those before opening up to other possibilities or other forms may be really wise, depending on where you get the sense of what's the appropriate pitch. In general, it may be actually, for a while now, I just need to practice the balance of attention thing. That's really what will serve me and serve my soul, and not be in such a hurry to go into imaginal practice.

So balance of attention is not necessarily... it's not really a soul-making practice in a sense. It's a preparatory exercise, but it's so important—so important for a healthy relationship, so important for a soul-making dyad, so important for imaginal practice. So there's this possibility of pitching, and again, the wisdom, the listening, the discerning, and getting a sense of where does it need to pitch right now? What do I need to... what's my pitch right now? What's my level right now? And that right now might be for a while, it might be right now in this moment, this afternoon, whatever it is.

Because actually just being opposite another human being and sitting a few feet from another, bodies in a way open to each other, looking at each other, for a lot of people is pretty damn intense. And for some people, it will be soul-making. It won't necessarily be imaginal, but it will be soul-making just to be in relationship, in dyadic relationship or triadic relationship. It's not imaginal, but it's soul-making in the sense that, remember, the imaginal is, if you like, a subset of soul-making.

So it might be soul-making in the sense of it's stretching one's soul's capacity and one's learning things that feel meaningful to the soul. It's not yet imaginal, but the soul is growing. So there's a kind of *hiero-psycholo gos* dynamic unfolding there. For many people just to be in relationship that way—so deliberately, so carefully, so openly, so present to each other and so intimate—will feel soul-making, and that's great. And so one should not hurry through just that level of it.

So yes, the being looked at, just being an object of someone else's gaze, a few feet, and they're sustained looking at you, they're sustained taking you in. The charge of that often, for many people in our culture, the whole complication and difficulty that can go with being seen. And then the sense of openness, perhaps in sharing whatever one's sharing, or just in being present with the body, open to another in that way. The intimacy that involves, being honest with another, learning, for example, developing the skill with this, playing with the balance of attention, playing with the sense of two-ness.

All that is really, really important stuff and may itself feel soul-making and it's not imaginal yet. So really to get a sense of the different pitches that you can play at and exercise at and what might be appropriate there rather than just, in some cases, trying to do something that's really beyond you just because it sounds like the most exciting or sexy thing or whatever. So the careful discernment there, the questioning, the openness.

If we just spend a few moments talking about that balance of attention exercise—as I said, there's quite a lot to this in the sense that it sounds really simple, but actually many people find it quite difficult. So you could very much just sit down with someone else with that intention particularly. Let's play exactly just with that, with the balance of attention, with the two-ness.

And one thing you might do if you decide to do such a thing or at another time in the context of some other dyadic practice—one thing that's really important is to notice the tendency of your attention. What do you notice over time is your kind of habit when in close relationship, when confronted with another and that kind of openness?

Is it, for instance, to somehow lose yourself? I'm so attentive to the other that I don't even notice what I'm feeling or sensing or what I need or want or all of that. Is there a kind of merging? And sometimes it actually feels like a person sort of... their attention almost goes into the other person and there's no attention in their own locus, in their own space.

So just to notice... not to judge, and this is really, really important. Can I withhold the judging?

There are going to be tendencies we notice—perhaps to lose a self, perhaps to merge, perhaps to kind of... I notice that in relationship, and it gets even more clear when we're sort of face-to-face like that, there's a kind of perhaps subtle, perhaps grosser way I kind of comply with what I think or believe or presume or perceive the other wants. I find myself bending to that, and I haven't even decided to do that. It's an unconscious bending to fit usually some idea of what the other person wants, which of course may not even be actually what they want.

So I might notice something like that. I might notice that I need to somehow entertain the other person. I need to look good. I need to perform. I need to perhaps be a certain way, whatever that way might be. They need to see love coming through my eyes. They need to think I'm attractive, that I'm deep, that I'm intelligent, that I'm this or that, that the Holy Spirit moves in me, that it's obvious that I'm an angel, whatever. It could be all kinds of things.

But one possibility is just to sit down and practice balance of attention or be in a dyad. What's my tendency right now? And then over time, one might say, "Oh, I have a kind of irregular tendency" or "It's quite common for me to take that shape or to morph this way" or whatever it is.

So really, really important—if you're doing just that level of exercise, is it possible to just notice? There is certainly the possibility of bringing different responses in, bringing wisdom or compassion or soulful responses in many different ways to open it up, to free it. But actually one really useful thing to do is just to notice and see if I can just notice... also, what the effects of that on my being are.

Now, of course, we might notice effects in the dyad that are quite complex, but we might also notice just that there's some judgment of it, or we're impatient with ourselves, or whatever. What if we just notice that? I notice this tendency, I notice the judgment, and just create some space around that. So the exercise

at this point is not trying to do anything else other than notice and create space and feel the effects of this pattern. It may be that within that then some compassion for yourself comes in, and that's going to have an effect. So that's important too.

So that's a very, very important level of exercise, but also potentially really helpful. You could say quite basic, but really, really, really helpful for many people.

Then there are other possibilities that one can explore. For example, some practices, like in some Mahamudra or Dzogchen practices, they encourage meditating with the eyes open, but relaxing the gaze. Usually what happens, the way the eyes work, the way the visual senses work, is the eyes and the eye muscles actually focus on something. And for that, the eye muscles have to kind of hold themselves in a certain focus. And there's a kind of intentness and intensity in there—it's quite subtle.

But it's quite a different mode to open the eyes and relax the gaze. So they're actually not focusing on anything. And so you can try this just... it doesn't have to be in an actual dyad, but you can just try it. What is it to open the eyes and relax the gaze? You will notice actually the rest of your body relaxing as you relax the gaze. It's like the eyes and the visual focus is not singling out and focusing on any one object. It's just open to a field of visual form and color and perception there. It's a more general field.

And in that then, in terms of the balance of attention, we could say the attention is not going out so much to this object—it's in a more receptive mode. So as I said, in some practices, some Dharma practices, some Dzogchen and Mahamudra teachings, they will practice that a lot, a lot, a lot, and really develop that practice and take it in a certain direction to do with the nature of awareness, etc., as they would see it.

But doing that just on your own in a room, doing it on your own outside in nature and getting used to that shift of being able—and then go back to focusing on something, that tree or whatever it is—really, really skillful, noticing the effects. And then for a while you could practice that in a dyad with someone. So what is it? I'm sitting opposite someone and I relax the gaze. And in that, actually, my visual field opens up to the whole space.

Now, this person might be talking and I can still hear what they're saying. I can still take in what they're saying. But I'm not focused on them as an object. It's much more that they become part of the space—they're embedded in the space and much less prominent. They're still going to be prominent, obviously, but much less so.

If there's a tendency to focus too much on the other, practicing in this way is really, really helpful. It relaxes that intensity or forward thrust into the other person, which is quite a common thing. It's possible then, within that receptive awareness, to also just be aware of one's own experience at the same time—what's happening with me emotionally.

For instance, if you do that, you'll be aware: oh, as I do that, the shoulders relax, and something in my belly relaxes, and the heart—something softens in the heart. Then one might notice other emotions. But

correspondingly, the gaze doesn't need to be so penetrative to one's own experience. This is, again, part of playing with the balance of attention there.

I hope that makes sense as an option. Another possibility, if you've done a fair amount of metta practice—and especially if you've done metta practice the way I would teach it, which is intimately connected to and involving the energy body—is to use the imagination to kind of see and sense a metta-bubble or a metta-field that encompasses you and the other person or persons in the dyad or triad. So that becomes part of the awareness as well.

There's a sense of us sitting, not me necessarily giving metta to them—I mean that's fine too—but us sitting in a field or a bubble, a cloud of metta. The more one can imagine that and get a sense of it and feel the softness and the care in it, the holding of it, and feel it also in the energy body to some extent at least, that's going to really help. It addresses what can sometimes be a problematic intensity or fear in a dyad, but also the balance of attention, because there the attention has gone to the field as well, as a total space, rather than just that person or just contracting into my experience.

What we've done in the last couple of years, when we introduced this exercise with the balance of attention, is play with: Okay, can it be 100% my attention is with my experience? So I'm maybe aware that there's a person there, but I'm really just attuning to my energy body, my emotions, my thoughts, my experience here. Can it be 20% with the other person and 80% with me? Can it be 50-50? Can it be 80% with the other person, 20% with me? So that kind of very deliberate exercise.

And you see, this gear is a bit jammed. It's hard for me to get into that gear. Or for someone else, that gear is quite normal and easy—it's the sort of default that just keeps slipping into that gear and it's hard to get into another gear. Again, we're interested in range and flexibility and freedom across different ranges. So that would be a really good exercise as well.

The other possibility, which I mentioned when we talked about the energy body in this series of talks, is rather than to see the other person with the eyes, rather than to conceive that one is seeing and sensing the other person primarily through the eyes, to play with the energy body awareness and bring—again, same as we do in imaginal practice—inhabiting, filling out that whole region, that whole space that we call the energy body.

How often, if you're paying attention, you will notice, either in your own practice, in your own times, in informal practice, but also in relationship, in a dyad or triad relationship, how easy it is to lose the energy body sense. Or it shrinks, or it's like, well, I've got my top half, I might have my heart, but where's everything from the waist down? It's just kind of a dead zone, or we're just not aware of it there.

Don't underestimate how often that happens and how helpful it is to keep checking in with the energy body and keep opening it up, opening up, filling it with that awareness and stretching it that way. So it's really like the whole sensitivity pervades that whole space. Again and again, it's going to be really, really

helpful. And one should notice the effect that has on working with an image, as we talked about, but also sensing the other with soul and the capacity to handle certain things in one's own experience or handle what's happening in the dyad.

As I mentioned in the talk on energy body in this series, there's the possibility of not conceiving or sensing that I'm just looking through the eyes. What is it to get the sense of the whole energy body as an organ of sense, as an organ of sensing? So I'm somehow seeing the other with my whole body. I bring that whole body sense into relationship. The center of knowing or perceiving is not simply in the head, the eyes or the ears. It might have a center of the heart or the solar plexus or the belly, or it might just pervade the whole space like that.

Really, really important. And then, as I said when I talked about the metta possibility, the metta field, there's also the possibility that the sense of the energy field, the sense of the energy body begins to spread to include the other and the self and one can develop a sense of the energy field between two people.

I won't say more about that now, but just how important that is and how helpful that can be when it feels like either there's a tendency to withdraw in a dyad, to sort of go back into oneself, perhaps to go too much into the other person, to merge or lose one's own sense of what's going on. Just how helpful it is to bring the energy body into play, to open up that awareness—really, really, really helpful.

We've used this word temenos a number of times, and it's another one of those Greek words. It's related to the word temple or sacred space or the boundary that protects the space and encloses it and protects it from intrusion.

The temenos is about creating sacred, protected space for this profound work. As I've mentioned, when the imaginal touches us so deeply, it needs to be respected and protected—cared for—and part of that is setting up the conditions where that care and safety can exist, so that the crucible can be there. The crucible can sustain whatever's happening without being easily shattered or broken.

When we come to practicing relationship in dyads, triads, or whatever it might be, formal space and time are really part of—can be really helpful in—setting up the temenos, the sense of a safe space, a fertile space, a special place. To share images more casually, when it's not the right time for the other person or for you—when they're busy, not completely attentive, the space isn't conducive, there are distractions, or something else is going on—none of that will be helpful at all. It will feel disappointing, even painful: I haven't been received here, we didn't meet, something felt important and it got dropped on the floor. Setting a formal time and space is actually part of the temenos. Just the formality of it helps create a sense of container, of crucible, of safety.

Posture too—to sit upright in a more meditative posture will really help. It enhances the whole capacity of attention, sensitivity, receptivity, openness, energy, engagement. All of that is actually part of the temenos. The attention—the quality of attention, the brightness of attention, the softness of attention—these are all

part of the temenos. The sensitivity, the metta is part of the temenos, as we've stressed. The intention. Again, if I have the fullness of intention, it really helps the temenos. If my intention or the other's is something different or less than that, it's also not really conducive to forming a strong and soul-making temenos.

But the posture also gives a signal to oneself, to another: This is something—now we're doing something that takes all my capacity, all my sensitivity, all my care and attention. It gives that signal to oneself in all kinds of ways, and both beings actually respond to that. So there are many components to the temenos.

I'm really happy to hear recently from a number of people in the Sangha that they took it upon themselves—saw the necessity after some experiences of really exploring this area, this domain—of exploring temenos amongst themselves, thinking creatively about it and what it needs, exploring the sense of it when it doesn't work, and expanding really the teaching. I'm happy, first, because it's an important area, and second, because as time goes on, those who are deeply interested in soul-making dharma absorb the teachings, digest them, learn and develop their art and skill. Then they may be ready—some people may be ready—to begin to be creative in what they discover and what they add potentially to soul-making dharma, how they can extend it, how they can make connections with other paradigms.

Not prematurely, before one has understood and digested and gained fluency in this paradigm, in these practices. But in time, that's part of what makes a really alive, creative tradition—that it can be added to. That there's a dialogue, a digestion of what has come before, and then a dialogue with that, and a possible extension, new angles. So I'm doubly happy, feeling really heartened and encouraged and touched by those people taking that on together as an exploration.

One of the things they came up with was a new concept, if you like, of the temenos tail—T-A-I-L. In other words, here we are, perhaps working in a dyad or a small group or a three, and we take care of the temenos there. But what happens afterwards? What happens in the hour afterwards, in the week afterwards, in the months afterwards?

There can be so much intimacy and so much sense of being deeply touched in a soul-making dyad—sharing images together that touch the soul deeply—that then two people or more people go their separate ways, and they meet again in some other situation. Just because one has been so touched, or that dyadic encounter and exploration made so much impact on the soul, it can be very easy to assume certain things about that relationship—what one expects, what one is owed, what kind of interaction should then ensue or be committed to. Not to say any of that's wrong, but what is it to care for that tail end of the temenos? We've cared for it in the formal practice. What happens afterwards? So that's also a consideration and exploration that's opening as well.

I mentioned the need to share a conceptual framework. In order for a soul-making dyad to be really fertile and soul-making—and not frustrating or limited or limiting—it's important that the two people share the

conceptual framework that actually supports soul-making. Part of that is sharing what we could call ontological commitments—a kind of sense of what is real, or what is to be respected as real. We could put it in the negative: what's not to be dismissed.

You try soul-making with someone who just considers imagination a kind of random nonsense—they don't have the same ontological commitment to the sense of the imaginal and whatever ontological realm or position that holds for soul-makers. For them, it's just rubbish. Correspondingly, if one is...

So if someone ontologically views whatever comes up in imagination that touches the heart as "real"—too real—that would also be an example of a kind of ontological commitment that's actually not going to be helpful for the diet. One person will occupy or have within their range certain ontological commitments, certain senses of what's real, what's to be respected, what's not important, and the other person holds something quite different.

I would extend this to say I wonder whether deep friendships actually often need, amongst other things, shared ontological commitments. How deep can my friendship with someone be? I can be friendly and we can have a laugh. We can share heartache and respond with kindness and engagement in all kinds of ways. But how deep can the sense of friendship be if there's not enough common territory in what I'm calling shared ontological commitments?

People don't often say this, or maybe it's regarded as slightly taboo. Even at Gaia House, when people want to establish or support more of a sense of community among the many staff, the assumption is: just give them some time together, have some practice together, meditate together, put them in a room and they'll start making deep connections. But it won't happen unless there's a certain overlap of ontological commitment—and also, I don't know if this is taboo or not—a kind of either shared eros or passion, or at least commensurate levels.

Someone who has a lot of eros, who's really on fire with eros, probably won't be that close with someone who just doesn't have much eros or it's not going on for them at the same level. The souls won't resonate with each other. I don't know—is that politically or psychologically incorrect to say? I'm not sure, but it's important. Even more so, the whole conceptual framework needs to be shared enough for soul-making relationship to really flourish and not feel frustrating.

This is an important consideration. If you want to share this wonderful new paradigm, this new practice you're into—you did this diet with someone and it was wonderful and soul-making—so you take it to another friend. You know they're heartful, interested, open, maybe open-minded, but there isn't that shared conceptual framework. The whole thing—again, the crucible is not there. This can be painful and frustrating for both people.

Even when one person is holding a conceptual framework that's limited or limiting from the soul-making point of view, and they're not sharing it—maybe not even aware they're holding it—somehow in the

mystery and magic of that connection between two people, it actually ends up limiting the experience for both. What arises for the other person, whose conceptual framework may be more open, is somehow limited by the silent and even unconscious limited conceptual framework of the other person.

Again, this should suggest some caution in trying to engage in soul-making dyads with people who don't really share the conceptual framework and haven't understood or absorbed it to a certain extent.

Let me very briefly outline some of the avenues or ways of practicing—some of the possible approaches that this form can offer or allow—and with that, some things to bear in mind and consider.

If you're practicing in a dyad or triad, it's probably a good idea if you're at home to have some little gap or separation of that practice period from other activities. It's natural to do this if there's some sense of the sanctity of it, the form of that temenos.

Sitting down together—and of course you could stand or be moving, there are so many possibilities here—but let's say if you sit down together, it may or may not need some sort of settling time, meditating in silence. Don't assume that it does. Find out. See what you need at the time.

Sometimes just being opposite each other in a formal ritual space will already support some kind of gathering and energizing, coalescing of attention and being, some quieting, some heightening of sensitive awareness. Of course, it might be that for some people or in some situations, coming into a formal space with the anticipation of doing this kind of practice actually brings up mild panic or self-consciousness or inadequacy or some other agitation.

But generally speaking, you'll probably find that just being together opposite each other in that space brings a kind of gathering. If it doesn't, then what's needed? Either a little quiet time together—meditating, being with what's going on, being with the energy body, the emotions, the breath, or metta—or bringing that difficulty you're experiencing right into the diet when you start practicing. That's what's present. Let's practice with that and see: can soul be made from this? What does it need? Maybe it doesn't need soul-making. Maybe it needs some other kind of exploration or attention or response.

The temenos is crucial, as we've mentioned. If you listen back to those recordings from two, three, four retreats ago—I can't remember—

Mostly we call them temenos exercises, I think. You'll hear that we have a stage of metta there, and I would say this is really quite important.

If you listen again, you'll notice there's the giving of metta and the consciousness of receiving. So to consciously feel oneself as an object of metta, as being permeated by metta from the other or others, as being wished well, as much as giving. Both the necessity of having access to and registering both those directions of metta—the giving and receiving.

Then the metta can kind of go to this bedrock of the whole exploration. It never really goes away, but one

isn't necessarily consciously, formally practicing the metta. One can rely on it as an intention, rely on the knowledge that the field is pervaded by that, that it is the intention, that it is part of the intention of both parties.

Only if you're really sure that it's there as a bedrock and it is unshakable—both your sense of receiving it and your giving it—only if you're really sure would I recommend skipping that step of just lingering with the metta and establishing that. Dependent on all kinds of factors, you can skip it, but be sure. Or, you know, it's a lovely thing to do. It certainly can't hurt to start that way and include that. And as I said, that's part of the temenos, part of establishing and caring for the temenos and for each other, obviously.

On those recordings that we did previously in the temenos exercises, as I said, they're kind of like scales—practicing scales. We somewhat artificially divided it into three levels: the energy body, the emotion, and then perhaps sharing something that felt soulful. We separated those out in time, and people took turns. This remains, I think, a really useful exercise to gain the facility, the skill, the fluidity, the familiarity with all that and those dimensions of practice and of being.

In time, you then might begin to include a tracking and a voicing of those three levels or elements of being: the energy body (remember, energy body also includes imaginal body now, and we've expanded the sense of what that means), the emotional level, and then the level of soul or image. So one can begin to, rather than separating them out, include them in real time in a kind of fluid real-time tracking and voicing, taking your time to feel. You don't have to be speaking or communicating all the time. You can track and then voice.

Again, we emphasize the voice and verbal communication, but it could be other kinds of voicing too. You might sing or sound, or you might gesture, or you might move or dance. Obviously the voicing, the verbalizing will be most common for most people, but there's all kinds of possibilities here. What matters is its soul-making.

So one can begin to include all that in a more fluid, real-time tracking and include with that a tracking of and voicing of how either the perception or thoughts about the other's expression—their presence, their attention, their gaze, their energy—how that's affecting, right now, my energy body, my emotion, the emotions that arise, what's happening in the heart, and the imaginal sense, or sensing the soul.

So that one's potentially including then the image of this moment, of the other, of the sharing, being seen, heard. This very being seen, being heard and being witnessed can become image. So that would be another level of domain of possibility, another avenue—just extending the exercise a little bit.

And this, how am I being affected, that latter part of that avenue and level—sometimes it doesn't make much difference. I share something and it's just how it is, or I share something, it wasn't particularly soulful, and then when I share it in a dyad or triad or whatever, it's the same. There's not much impact of that situation on the sense of soul-making or the energy body or whatever.

But sometimes the sense of how we are being listened to and looked at—including the imaginal sense of it, and of who is listening, looking... In some recent retreats we talk about being witnessed by the angel. So actually having a sense of the other as angel, as daemon, as having their roots, so to speak. One can deliberately instigate or ignite that perception of the other, of who is listening and looking at me, or it might just arise by itself. All kinds of other possibilities.

In the imaginal sense of who is listening or looking, there may be a much greater sense of soul-making. An image that originally didn't feel so soul-making, a little bit, but the effect of the potency of that situation and the sensitivity of that situation makes that image—almost in retrospect or as it's resuscitated there and re-communicated—it allows much more soul-making with the same image.

Conversely, of course, we might be sharing something, an emotion, an image, something that's in the energy body, and the partner or whoever it is in the dyad—someone was sharing, and they looked away. They told me, and I don't know why they looked away, but they just... I was sharing an emotion, and they looked away and sort of stared into space for a few seconds, and that just threw me. I felt disconnected and I stopped sharing the emotion. I was halfway through and I just stopped.

But here it's also possible then in the kind of flow and give and take, of course, to just recognize what's happening and ask: do I want to voice that, that effect on me when you just looked away like that? I don't have to blame or be aggressive, I'm just saying, oh, I notice I'm a bit thrown here by that.

And it's possible that the other person just witnesses that and tracks their response in silence to what you're sharing about that impact of whatever it is—them looking away. Anyway, if they don't say anything, if they're just taking it in in silence, there's a communication through the eyes and through the energy body.

Or it might be that they respond either there and then, or if you're taking turns in a more formal structure—now my turn, now your turn—then in their allotted time. And that response they give you will of course have an effect on the sense of connection and on what is shaped, what can arise, what can come into the field. So the whole thing can become much more fluid and responsive at times.

The point here really is to begin to notice and include and express—at this stage of the exercise, if you like—the effect of the sense of how I'm being looked at or listened to. Sometimes that's very gross and sometimes it's extremely subtle. If you're really sensitive, sometimes you can feel someone just blink or notice the slightest movement of their eyes, not even away in distraction or anything like that. And one can actually feel one's energy body impacted by that, affected by that. It's quite possible.

So there's a whole range here of what can be noticed and what can be included, of that crucible and the potentiality and sensitivity of the dyad or triad or whatever it is.

After that sort of three-tiered exercise, after you've maybe gotten used to that—and I think some people are very used to it by now, some much less so, so you'll have to see where you're at and what you

need—then you can include the experience of this now, this sharing now, and this being seen, being heard by you right now in real time. So the whole thing gets a little more fluid and inclusive.

Another avenue or level of possibility here—they're not completely separate; you'll realize this very quickly, it's hard to actually cleanly separate these different avenues and levels—but another possibility is to deliberately take the other as an imaginal focus. That is, to sense them with soul. And to voice that—again, voice is a euphemism for a much larger range of communication, expression. It may include movement, gesture, verbal or non-verbal vocalization, all kinds of things.

And then the person responds, if necessary. Maybe they feel, "Hold on, this is a bit something or other." In a way, that's a kind of slightly contrived level and maybe a little awkward, with one person just telling the other about how they sense the other with soul. But see what works. It might be you take it in turns or whatever.

I would also recommend that if you're doing that, to again include self-other-world—to include not just your sense of the other, sensing them with soul, but also take in the space that you're in, the environment that you're in. If you're inside, the room that you're in; if you're outside, wherever you are—what's the environment? And let, or at least allow the possibility of the sensing with soul to spread to the world. So other, self, and world can be sensed with soul.

And that spreading to the world—sometimes we've called it cosmopoiesis when it starts from an imaginal sense of another—but that's part of the soul-making process, and as we've pointed out, probably very helpful at times for the whole balance of the process. And there'll be a lot to learn in that triple object, if you like—self, other, world—for sensing with soul.

And then again, another level or avenue of possibility would be to open to responses, optional responses from the other. Either you take it in turns and then the person responds after you've shared for a certain time or whatever, or just in the natural back and forth. So non-silent witness—if they're responding, especially if it's more in the fluid back and forth and not so formalized, separate "now my turn, now your turn," it's less of a witness, it's just a partner or whatever in the dyad.

And what are they responding with at this level? They would be responding what arises for them in the energy body, in the emotion, in the imaginal sense, in the sensing with soul.

What they're not doing at this level is critiquing what you've just shared or your perception, or giving guidance or feedback. That may have a place at a later stage. In other words, you can decide—and I think you should formally decide if you're going to do that thing. But I would say hold off from that for a while, because obviously it brings all kinds of other complications, potential complications into the dyad and would need even more care and sensitivity and intuitive awareness.

But as I said, the partner voices their response, their experience, either in their allotted time, or in just the open, natural back and forth and flow of things. So what arises in listening, in witnessing, in looking, in

receiving the other?

I guess I should point out that sometimes you'll notice that you do, or your partner does, intuit or know things about what's going on with you. In other words, they can get a sense themselves of your energy body experience or your emotional experience or something else. But if you're sharing at this point, to really be careful with the assumptions of being right there. I think it's really important to always respect the autonomy and the mystery of the other, and their sense of their experience, and if there's a place for privacy, boundaries here also.

So yes, that kind of intuitive sense, empathic sense, of course can go on between human beings, and the range of that is a lot larger than the usual meaning of the term empathy—in terms of "I can see that you're sad" or "I can see that you're happy" or whatever it is and resonating with that. The range is larger than that. But still it's really important to respect, as I said, the other and to tread carefully with that kind of thing. If you're going to share it, you can check it out, you can say it lightly, you can say "I'm wondering if..." etc.

And it's also possible—and I've mentioned in this series of talks—that there can be a real sense of entering into and sharing an image with someone else. Sharing a sensing with soul of the environment you're in, of each other, of some other intrapsychic image.

One of you might have voiced that image first, and then both of you can enter it together. Sometimes this happens naturally, sometimes not. Don't put pressure on these possibilities to unfold. Sometimes one person simply shares an image that impacts you deeply, even though it hasn't yet become a living image for you. But the possibilities are certainly there.

With these various avenues or levels of practice, take your time to find the right pitch for you. This might vary from day to day, or you might simply feel curious about what happens when you limit the practice in this way or that way. The composer Stravinsky used to say that the most terrifying thing is an empty sheet of paper. Once he gave himself certain constraints in the creative process—arbitrary limits to what he could do in a composition—then he began discovering and creating abundantly.

Similarly with these exercises, you might think you want to jump immediately to the most advanced level, where fireworks are going off and everything is available. But you may well create and discover much more fertile ground by exploring what might seem like the earlier or simpler stages of these practices. They will lay the foundation for truly fecund, rich, and expansive practices—an opening out of experiences, insights, and sensings with soul as you continue in the whole practice, not just in dyads, but also in your solitary work.

Don't get too caught up in hierarchy or in needing to reach the maximum level. All of this asks a great deal and takes time to develop the sensitivities, skills, and artistry involved. There's tremendous depth here.

Let me mention some other possibilities. You can deliberately decide together on a theme you want to

explore. The process might be the same—involving the energy body, emotions, sensing with soul, sensitivity to each other and your own experience—but you're exploring something specific together. Rather than simply sitting together openly to see what happens, you might be exploring a particular image you want to open out and investigate more deeply. It might be a certain kind of cosmopoiesis you've perhaps glimpsed or sensed is possible. It might be a particular form of dukkha you want to bring into the field for potential soul-making.

The temenos itself might be your theme. A couple of people told me about exploring the whole area of temenos in a group over time, including the temenos tale I mentioned. They discovered it was possible to sit down in a dyad and take the idea and sense of temenos right here, between us or around us, as the theme itself. They found this remarkably lovely and fruitful.

Your theme could be one of the elements of the imaginal, one of the nodes you particularly want to explore. It could be this dynamic relationship between self, other, and world—how they ignite each other, what the tendencies are. It could be something as fundamental as the nature of matter, which I believe is a profound and important investigation, especially in our time. We live dominated by a reductionist, scientific, materialist view of matter—wonderful as that perspective is in terms of what it has given us, but also carrying massive consequences for how we live, how we treat the earth, how we treat other species.

You might deliberately enter an image together, or one person might bring an image simply to share and see what unfolds. You could even deliberately enter into an image of each other. The possibilities are limitless.

In the practice, you'll notice many of the same larger considerations about navigation and responsiveness that arise in individual, solitary practice. Sometimes the concertina opens—that node, that element expands, especially when there's a lot of eros present. And again, this isn't necessarily sexual eros. But the degree of eros, the energy and force of it, can present many imaginal possibilities all at once, numerous sensings with soul as simultaneous possibilities. Then the question becomes: which do we choose? How do we choose? Why are we choosing this one over that one? This becomes quite fascinating.

The issue of pacing arises again—where should we linger, where should we slow down? As I've mentioned so many times, the importance of energy body awareness becomes particularly evident, sometimes even more so when working with others in dyads, triads, or quartets. The energy body awareness might shrink, or you might only be aware of part of your body, not really inhabiting or filling out the whole energy body space. So it's helpful to keep checking on this, to expand the awareness, to allow it to expand, to include whatever areas of that space are not being engaged at that moment. This becomes part of the ongoing sensitivity, responsiveness, and care for the practice.

There are so many aspects of experience in any given moment, just as in individual practice—so many facets of the complex experience arising. You can focus on the totality, the whole gestalt, or you can attune

to any one or two particular aspects of this complex experience happening in the dyad or triad, deciding to explore that specific dimension.

And because this is life, things are impermanent. The attunement between two people, or even one person's relationship with themselves, comes and goes. That's perfectly okay—it's simply the nature of impermanence. Sometimes it feels like you're exquisitely attuned to each other. Sometimes one person might feel that the other isn't quite attuned to them in terms of sensitivity and attention, or that you're pulling in slightly different directions regarding what interests you in the moment, which affects the quality of attention.

All of this is completely normal and acceptable. Perhaps it calls for a moment of checking in—"Hold on, let's explore something here." Sometimes it's simply about recognizing this shift and knowing it's okay, that the attunement will return, the alignment and sensitivity will come back. You can simply wait for it to return.

But to expect that, of course. And sometimes if you do a lot of this kind of practice, you'll notice that sometimes there's an exquisite and profound and profoundly touching sense of connection and soul-making, igniting, etc., and other times less so. And, you know, that's again just like practicing on your own. So to be a little spacious and equanimous around that. Yes, we take care as best we can of the conditions and the art of it, and there's an element of grace here—it's not completely in our control. So that's important too.

I want to pick up on what I mentioned about what I'm calling the sensitivity of the dyad and just recognizing how... yeah, I think that's the best word—how sensitive that whole space is and that whole crucible is, so that little things, little gestures, little moments or movements of mind or energy or intention can really affect, sometimes quite dramatically, the sense of what's unfolding.

Remember the other day I shared about the yogi who came to an interview with the image of a really big woman, and she was resting her head, lying and resting her head in the lap of this big goddess woman. And then it became sexual, etc. Actually, when she came in that time, it wasn't the first time that she'd shared that image with me. When it first came up, it was a very brief image that arose as she was getting ready for bed. So it wasn't even formal practice. She was on retreat, getting ready for bed, and this image just came up very briefly. Then she did a dyad practice with a partner and shared that image. Quite unexpectedly to her, tears came as she shared it, when she was sharing this image. It moved her at a whole other level. Whereas when it had come up the first time, just briefly going to bed, it just sort of made an impact, but there wasn't that level of emotional and soul response.

So again, the power of soul-making in relationship where there's temenos. Something happens—some alchemy happens to an image that is possible for the soul-making associated with that image, and even how imaginal it is—to go to another level by virtue of the crucible of the dyad, by virtue of the temenos, by virtue of the space we're in and how we're being attended to. Or even the soul sense of the dyad itself. All

of that. Again, this thing ignites that thing. And sometimes this can be quite unexpected.

Of course, it's sensitive, as I pointed out before, both for better and for worse, so to speak—in ways that are helpful to the soul-making and in ways that can end up shutting down the soul-making.

Someone shared with me that they were remembering an old relationship, a past relationship with a lover, and there was still some pain and grief around that relationship that hadn't completely been resolved or let go of in them. Then they worked with it imaginatively, feeling the pain, holding that in the crucible of one's being, with the energy body, with the emotions. And it did become image, or an image came in relation to that. It's not important what the image is, so I won't share it, although it's quite interesting. But it was a sort of baffling image to her, and even more baffling was why it seemed to help and exactly what way it was relevant to the pain or meaningful, and how it was healing. So there was this, these memories, the leftover pain from quite a while ago. It became an image that puzzlingly was healing and touching the soul and very pertinent.

And then she was doing a soul-making dyad with her current partner, her current lover, and decided to share that image—the healing image with respect to the old lover. But in sharing it, unlike the example I gave before where something didn't feel that soul-making and then one shared it and it suddenly was soul-making and touching at a whole other level, this fell flat. She shared the image which had felt meaningful and profound and healing and touching when worked with on her own. Now in sharing it, it just goes flat. Why? What's going on here?

Well, perhaps there was some fear of her current partner's reaction. Why are you thinking about that? Or why are you thinking about him? Or whatever it is. And this fear perhaps led to her leaving bits out of the sharing. So because of this subtle fear, she didn't share fully, and the whole thing wasn't really allowed or supported to become fully imaginal.

Now, that could have been done differently, perhaps, in various ways, but the point I really want to make is just about the sensitivity of this space. Again, on our own, in a large group, in small groups, in dyads, you probably will have seen this now. And as I've pointed out several times, soul-making doesn't just happen by itself. We have to really care for the conditions, the temenos, all the different aspects that allow it to happen.

And sometimes that is not just a default of the being. There are all kinds of other things that can happen, and just pull the plug out of the crucible, or just shatter it a little bit, or leave the lid off, whatever analogy we want to use. Soul-making is a really very sensitive business, and the dyad or group soul-making is also extremely sensitive in the ways that things catch from one person to the other. This is very important to be aware of, to take care of, and to be interested in, actually.

I shared this before, but it's worth repeating on the same theme. I was working in a dyad, and the person I was working with was describing her experience. At that point it was really almost all about her energy

body experience. I found myself very sensitive to her gestures and her words and her energy, and I could feel the concertina was opening for me—the sort of spread of potential images, potential images waiting in the wings, their beginnings there.

But despite that concertina and the sort of potential there and the relative fecundity of that, nothing was really igniting to become imaginal fully. Something felt slightly blocked somehow, despite my partner having quite strong energy openings, which she was very in touch with and very mindful of and describing to me quite articulately.

At a certain point I asked her, "Is it energy perception, or is the energy perception an image? Are you perceiving the energy imaginatively?" As I said when I shared this the first time, she got it immediately. Then it shifted to—it's an image of her energy. And immediately I felt my experience open up to image right then, the imaginal perception, the sense of what was happening in her and myself. I just opened up from that shift.

Two points here. One is, again, the significance and the power of the option of sensing the energy body or the energy field imaginatively—sensing it with soul, rather than with the kind of usually not quite fully conscious implicit reification that we have when we're relating to energy and our perception of energy. But more importantly right now, just how sensitive the dyad is and the fact of the subtle dependent arising of experience in the dyad. My experience depended on a subtle shift in how she viewed her experience—just a subtle change from reified to imaginal in terms of her experience, and my experience changed. Again, there's some kind of magic connection that can be there in these kinds of processes that make it very, very sensitive.

I'll share something else. I was working also with someone in a formal dyad practice, and she felt stuck, and she also felt willfully stuck. Something in her wanted to be stuck in some way. I actually felt quite spacious despite the fact that she felt stuck. I was sort of metaphorically tickling her—being a little light and humorous—in the hope and the attempt that it would help. But she felt that my tickling, so to speak, dissolved her will. She was willfully stuck; my tickling dissolved her. And that touched an even deeper pain.

It was a pattern reminiscent from her childhood with her siblings. With her siblings, there was a particular dynamic—they would ridicule and she felt humiliate her when she was hurt and she wanted to kind of gather her will. When she wanted to gather her autonomy or her will, when she was hurt or crying, she would be ridiculed and humiliated. This really was quite a deep pain that was still echoing substantially years later.

We were exploring that and talking about that in a way, and it was good and helpful and honest and open, but it wasn't imaginal. Then suddenly I was able to see her and our relationship imaginally. Again, it's really to get a sense—I hope you can get a sense over time as you practice more and more—of what that territory is of the imaginal and how it feels, its particular flavors and qualities. That's partly why we

elucidated the twenty-eight elements. It does feel quite different. You can be talking about the same thing, paying attention to the same dukkha, even using the imagination in working with that dukkha, but it's not imaginal.

Anyway, at that point, suddenly I was able to see her and also our relationship as imaginal. I shared that I sensed myself imaginatively as mystical husband. We've touched on this before, this particular dyad. From there, from that imaginal sense of being her mystical husband, I said, "I will protect you. I won't ridicule or humiliate you." But then it opened up for her, and that changed something for her. The whole kind of stuck grip dissolved and she felt empowered and much better.

What's going on here? Again, the sensitivity of the dyad. One person moves into the imaginal, takes a quantum leap into the imaginal, and senses it, maybe shares it—in this case I did share that particular sense in the soul—and it opens her up and heals something in her. She caught the soul sense from me. One person catches the soul sense from another, is ignited.

by others. We could view it that way, though it might also be that the image and the imaginal is, so to speak, in the field, and one person is simply articulating or experiencing it, allowing the whole field to make a quantum jump. In other words, it's there already—the field is pregnant with it—and it just requires one or both people to become aware. It exists in potentia, so to speak.

This is really interesting: the way a sudden shift into imaginal perception can then affect the whole field. Particularly fascinating here is the fact that it affected in a healing way what was happening with the other person. So one person's imaginal perception in relation to another heals what was conceived of and felt to be real, non-imaginal dukkha. To me, this is really significant.

I would venture to go a little further and say that sometimes when that kind of thing happens, it heals more than, let's say in this instance, an actual guarantee of so-called real protection. If I had just said to her, as a human being, as a conventionally conceived human being, "I will protect you," or "I won't let that happen," I don't know whether it would have had the same effect.

This is curious, because we usually—the normal view would conceive of the imaginal as not being real. Of course you want real protection. Here's what is, in a way, non-real, imaginal protection, yet it has more power. It has more healing, penetrative power for the being that feels in need of protection—vulnerable, unsafe.

Very probably this kind of thing happening imaginatively in the dyad would also be more healing than, say, just her mindfully imagining someone protecting her, or trying to use the imagination when it's not really imaginal. Similar possibilities exist with all kinds of realms of human need and pain and experience. Someone might need to feel respected or appreciated. Again, it might be that when that comes from an imaginal level, it actually wields a power and has an effect that is not available from more conventionally conceived human communication or relationship.

So I find this very interesting. It's partly a point about the sensitivity of the dyad—how things can shift very quickly when one person's experience flips into the imaginal or opens up to the imaginal—but also about what is going on in terms of dukkha and image, dukkha and the imaginal.

What exactly is the relationship between experiencing the need to feel the dukkha as real and linger there with that pain, and the opening up of the imaginal around and in relationship to that dukkha? Again, there may be different orderings. Sometimes—we've talked about this with dukkha and soul-making—you really need to be with the dukkha, experiencing it, taking it as real, feeling it. Then from that ground, from that soil, from that opening, an image can come. Sometimes it's the other way around: the introduction or reception, the birth, the opening to an image actually does something that allows the dukkha to be experienced more fully and to heal.

Is it that different dukkha, different situations need different approaches? Do different people have particular preferences in terms of the order they follow? I don't know. But the same choices, questions, and possibilities that arise in solo practice with dukkha and the imaginal also arise in the context of the dyad. The same kind of sensitivity, care, openness, and curiosity in navigating all that is required in a dyad.

I mentioned at the beginning—and possibly you can begin to hear as I share some of this—just how much this kind of practice demands of us good relational skills. On the last retreat, someone asked me about dyad practice, and one of the things I said in response was that it's really important to have the ability and willingness to "kiss and make up."

In other words, of course people bump into each other. Of course there are misunderstandings, conflicts of interest, things said that weren't so sensitive that cause pain and spin off, carrying residue, making impact, creating closing. Of course all that happens in human relationship. And in a dyad, working in this very intimate, very open, very sensitive and deep way with another person—it's a very sensitive field. So yes, expect that. Expect there will be things that happen that need attention and require considerable skill in repairing and taking care of.

I made that point on the retreat, and Yasmin picked it up in the closing circle—quite rightly, and I'm glad she said it—because "kiss and make up" sounds kind of superficial and flippant. It wasn't how I meant it, but it does sound something akin to brushing difficulty under the rug: kiss and make up, get on with it. That's not what I meant, and I'm really glad Yasmin pointed this out.

What I really mean is the willingness, the ability, the care, the carefulness, the precision, the patience, the humility, the openness, the flexibility, the love, the equanimity—all that is necessary, plus the sheer hard work sometimes of addressing difficulties that come up, whether in a dyad between two people, with one person in the dyad, or in a group.

Are you able to do that? Do you have that range of skills? They're not that common, actually. Certainly not

commonly exercised in our world. There's not a lot of training in this—not even in the Dharma. But to be able to do that, I would say, is necessary to this kind of work.

So again, if we go back and talk about prerequisites, we really need to think: do I need to develop this if I want to pursue this practice? If I kind of like the sound of it, or I've had some times where I've practiced dyads or triads and it felt really beautiful, and I want to pursue it further?

Okay, but check your relational skills. Maybe they need some work, some exploration, some cultivation. Perhaps that can go on in parallel—maybe you take a little time and just develop that. Sometimes this needs to happen in the moment, in the fluidity of the back and forth of a dyad, in the give and take of real time. Sometimes something happens and people separate, then three days later they say, "Well, hold on, I really need to tell you something that happened the other day—I just feel really shut down." Then you talk about it after it happened. That's really important. But also in the moment, in the fluidity of the moment. So relational skills—really, really important. Indispensable.

One will also notice in practicing in dyads and triads and larger groups with soul-making that you're going to notice all kinds of relational patterns. You'll notice your particular poisons, stances, contortions, inclinations in relationship coming up and hopefully beginning to be made conscious in the dyad. There are all kinds of possibilities here for what you might notice.

It might be the patterns of the way your energy is, or the energy body—there might be a certain contraction of the energy body, or a certain kind of brash throwing it out, or domination, or being dominated in ways that may be fine in some respects, even soul-making, but in other ways they manifest not so fine. It's a kind of habit, unconscious, not desired, and not very soul-making. You start to notice that one person or the other is doing most of the talking, and you think, "Oh, that's a pattern."

It might be patterns of the balance of attention—we talked about that. It might be a pattern of being more interested in one's own experience than the other, or vice versa, or not noticing the environment. It might be something quite subtle to put into words, not quite the balance of attention, but it might be that the gaze tends to be more penetrating of the other, and one person might have the pattern to be more penetrated, so to speak. I don't necessarily mean sexually, but there is that as well. It's more the intensity and intentness of the pattern of gazing.

All kinds of possibilities. I'm listing just a few general areas that one might notice patterns in. What gets really interesting is seeing and working with the subtleties of each individual and their patterns in terms of energy, emotion, psychology, relational patterns brought into the dyad.

We will notice all that. Sometimes these patterns will just change by themselves in the context of doing dyad practice. Because there's the natural expansion of the soul-making dynamic, of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, with all the change in perception and perception of self and sense of self and sensing the soul and sensing of other, sensing of relationship—all that naturally expands and can at times break certain

structures, the breaking of the vessels. So sometimes these things change by themselves by virtue of the usually gradual alchemy that's happening in that particular crucible.

It's also really fine and available to notice certain patterns you observe about relational dynamics coming up in the dyad and decide deliberately to experiment with doing it differently. For instance, letting oneself be more the penetrated one, so to speak—more the gazed-upon one, more aware of oneself as object, as erotic-imaginal object for the other, rather than aware of one's erotic-imaginal gaze and attention penetrating the other. One decides to do it differently, or it might just change by itself.

Deciding deliberately to experiment with changing something—not changing this forever, but just trying to do it differently now, deliberately—again, that could be a theme. Remember, that's not ego. Just because you decided deliberately to experiment with something and do something or make a change in practice right now—just as in imaginal practice, when I decide to introduce something into the image or change the image or bring this image into relationship with that image, or bring this image into relationship with a certain dukkha—just because I decide to do that doesn't make it ego and thus not soul somehow.

The question, as always, is: Is it soul-making? Does it feel soul-making? Did I make this happen or did it happen by itself? It could be either. It's irrelevant. What matters, what's relevant, is: Does this feel soul-making right now, in whatever is happening, whatever direction one is exploring, whatever thread one is following?

Now in relation to all this—relational patterns, relational skills, the sensitivity of the dyad—I want to touch briefly on what we might call the different kinds and levels of fabrication that can happen in a dyad, specifically of self and other, but really anything. Specifically self and other, the different levels and kinds of fabrication of self and other in the dyad.

In soul-making dyad practice, we can welcome, expect, and be interested in and become familiar with and skilled with and get clear about whole ranges of the senses of self and other.

So we could divide that into, let's say, four right now.

One is what we might call the normal self-sense, the conventional human self-sense. Two normally conceived, conventionally conceived human selves in relationship, in conversation. So even though I'm sitting down to do a soul-making dyad, that level of perception, that level and type of fabrication—in other words, just the usual, normal, most popular level of fabrication—is just to fabricate the usual conventional sense of self and other.

That level is important and never just—even though my intention is to do a soul-making dyad, that doesn't leave that out as a possibility. It doesn't shut the door on that possibility. And often, this particular, this kind of conventional self-sense, if you like, is a really important stance when there's difficulty or relational stuff to talk through together or negotiate. So I'm sitting in a soul-making dyad, and it might be that actually for our whole time or some portion of the time, we're actually just talking as two human beings to

each other on that level, working through a difficulty, whatever. And there's the kind of normal range and the normal type of the fabrication of the perception of self and other.

A second possibility is what I'm going to say in inverted commas is "no-self." And I'm putting that in inverted commas just because it's so common for people to report, "Oh, no-self, there was no-self. I was sitting with so-and-so and we were doing this or that soul-making dyad or whatever and there was no-self." I would say actually this refers to a range of ways and degrees of less self and other fabricating. So there are so many possibilities here.

We could feel like everything, including you and me, is all one awareness, one cosmic awareness, one cosmic love, as classic examples. There could be just the fading of personality. So my usual self doesn't arise and I'm not even really framing the other person in terms of their personality or their usual personality that I'm used to or they're used to. It may just be the fading of a kind of gross reactivity. So there's a really deep equanimity and quieting of the push and pull, the rub, the reactions of the being to whatever is happening. It could be very light experience. There are just five aggregates here, and there are just five aggregates there. And then all kinds of deeper perceptions of emptiness.

All of these involve some degree of fabricating of the self and of the perception of other, but less than the normal one that we usually are used to. So that's a possibility too. The normal self-sense, number one. Number two is just, let's say, not no-self, but less self in all kinds of different ways.

Third possibility is soul-making, imaginal perception, the sensing with soul of self and other. In other words, the self that I feel myself to be right now, and or the other. It's not the normal self-sense. It's not the conventional self-sense. Neither is it particularly unfabricated, like far down that spectrum. But it's an imaginal perception. It's a sensing with soul of the self, and other. And again, world and eros and whatever. And that would be the third possibility.

The fourth, which I can't remember if I've mentioned yet, is a sense of a third. Sometimes what can happen in dyads is this: I sense you, I sense me, and then I sense we, I sense us, and that us feels like not so much an independent soul entity, but it feels like it's a kind of soul. Somehow it includes us, somehow it's separate from us. So there's a sensing with soul of the dyad itself as a soul, if that makes sense. And that can arise in addition or at the same times as the sense of self and other. So that would be a fourth kind of sense of self and other that we could delineate there as possible, something to look out for.

This arising of a we—well, maybe I'll let you explore it, but it's potentially very significant. And I remember an interview with James Hillman that I read some years ago in a book of interviews. I found it a very interesting read. He said, he was talking about love, and he said, "Love needs a third. Love needs a third." So two is not enough to sustain love. There's I love you, you love me, wonderful. And for that love to be really—for it to be fertile, and when it is fertile, there's the arising, the sense of a third. And that the two, each both together, are in relationship to that third.

And if that third also becomes sensed with soul, if it has soul significance, soul resonances, if it's an imaginal perception—I don't just mean an intrapsychic, but if it's sensed with soul—then that allows... It's another level of, again, anchor for the relationship, another kind of influx or nourishment or service for the relationship.

So I'm reminded of a friend and her parents, sounds like, stayed in love with each other right into their very old age in what sounds like quite a delightful way. And partly, I wonder, unlike some other relationships that I can think of where that withers or something happens to the love there, her parents were actually both very committed Catholics, but also their Catholicism had a sense of depth and soul meaning for both of them.

And so there was this third that they were kind of in service to through their marriage, and they were in relationship to it. But there are many possibilities for this sense of "we." It doesn't have to be quite something like that Catholic example.

It could simply be the sense of we two sitting here. I can see that you're separate, and I feel separate to a certain extent. And yet there's this sense of a third that we can both access—not quite an amalgam, because the separateness, the two-ness, is retained within the we. But the we forms itself as a kind of third unit. You could say we're in it; you could say it's separate from us both. It's hard to articulate, but there are many possibilities.

I mention this as something that's possible to open up and discover.

But let's go slowly here. If there are all these different possibilities for the self-sense and the other-sense—in terms of whether they're imaginal, whether they're less fabricated, whether they're conventional—again, we're potentially faced with choices of navigation. How much conventionally human perception versus more fully imaginal at any time? Where on that spectrum toward the fully imaginal, fully authentic sensing with soul and eros—on that whole spectrum from the conventional to the fully imaginal—what's right right now? What feels right? How am I going to decide? What determines that?

And there's the possibility of steering it. Sometimes when things are really imaginal, we're not so interested in our personal stories, in the conventional human personal stories. We're almost other beings relating to each other. Sometimes the personal stories are then viewed imaginally, and they're sensed with soul, so there's not necessarily a separation there.

Sometimes attraction might come up of different kinds. Maybe there is eros; maybe it's sexual; maybe there's a sexual image and sexual energy arises. Or maybe there's sexual desire, but it's not really eros in the full sense that we mean it—in terms of impregnating the imaginal. There might be imagination there, but it's not really imaginal. Then the question becomes: is that okay right now, or do we want to steer away from that in different ways? Can I, for instance, see this human as divine manifestation—this human

or that human as our portal into the divine? And that will do something to the whole sensing, the whole perception. Or I may be able to see and sense my human eros as the manifestation of divine eros.

All this range is possible, and all this navigation is possible. And again, the question is: what's right right now? What's necessary even?

What can also happen sometimes is that if you consider the self and the other, and also the world or environment, each of those—and the couple, the two—can be perceived either conventionally humanly or imaginally, or somewhere along that spectrum. What that means is you have four elements: self, other, the couple (the we), and the world. Each of them can be—let's just put it in binary terms—either imaginal or conventional, with all the different permutations of that.

So in one example I could give: there might be an imaginal self relating to a conventionally conceived human other. They might sense themselves conventionally in this conventional human sense, not imaginally. I might sense them that way. Or we both might be imaginal. Or of course, both can be conventional. Or it can be that my partner is an imaginal being—we're both perceiving her imaginally—but I'm still in my usual conventional sense of self, and she is looking at me from that imaginal perspective and talking to me. Maybe even that kind of gaze and that kind of relating from an imaginal to a conventional is healing.

You have all these possibilities there, with all those different elements, each of which can be in any position. You have to be a little careful if one is an imaginal other speaking to a conventionally conceived human self. I'm a little cautious about New Age channeling things and such. So all of it's imaginal middle way. All of it's with the fullness of intention for soulmaking.

But again, there are all these possibilities and directions that can suddenly find themselves in a certain constellation of these different permutations. Or deliberately, you're aware of it and you're actually cultivating a certain relationship between one kind and another. But all these are possibilities of what can open there. And healing is relevant—all that is relevant to healing sometimes—but again, fullness of intention, not just for healing, although that's in the bag of gifts.

But again, the question of what feels right here, what feels the most soulmaking, maybe at times what feels the most healing—how do we want to navigate? How do we navigate with that?

So in a way, what we could also say is that all these kinds of realms and possibilities of practice demand of us a great sensitivity. We could say, just in relation to what I just described, it demands a kind of triple sensitivity and triple capacity, at least:

One is sensitivity and capability of skillful relationship to the human level of the other—regarding them, relating to them, respecting them in the conventional human sense. Is that there? To what degree is that there? How can I cultivate it more?

Second sensitivity and capacity needed is to my human level—my conventionally human conception, sense of myself. Actually being sensitive to "Ouch, that hurt when they just said that," or "I need this right now," or whatever it is.

And thirdly, sensitivity and capability of skillful and artful relationship with an image that's present.

So the needs and requests of all three—conventionally human other, conventionally human self, whatever images are present—they determine together what is then appropriate.

I hope all this makes sense in terms of possibilities and things to look out for.

Now, I said I wasn't going to talk much about Eros, or rather, I'm not going to talk much about when there's really a lot of Eros between the two members of the dyad. I'll say just a little bit, but I won't really go into it and that whole realm level of possibility.

Just to be aware that in some instances, or with whatever, when there's a certain spark, or just the conditions are supportive, just how much eros may arise for the other. And then, you know, this brings the questions: Can I contain it? Am I okay with that? Are they okay with it? Can we hold the boundary, whatever the boundary is, if there is a boundary? Can I handle all that eros, all that desire, all that sexual energy, if that's what's arising?

What about the boundaries, but also what about just the inevitable slips of eros into craving, the contraction into craving, of the imaginal into some kind of reified perception? Does my art extend to the ability to notice when that's happening? Because it feels very different. I notice when that's happening and I can open things up, I can change things, I can support the movement, the expansion of craving into eros and of rarefied perception of fixation, fixated image into imaginal image.

And again, what else am I bringing in? Do I need to feel attractive here? Because that's not the fullness of intention, is it? As always, checking: okay, there's a lot of sexual energy, there's a lot of desire, whatever, it's definitely got some eros in it. Is it soul-making? And as always, letting that be the guide.

Some people will be practicing this kind of dyad where, this situation, either they are already in a romantic sexual relationship or they want to be and it's fine, there's no other issues, there's no boundary issues and it's all, it's kind of open territory. And they might be open and okay to having, you know, sex or some degree of sexual intimacy.

And it might be that in the course of working in a dyad, there's a lot of sexual eros that arises, and people decide to be sexual together. So as I said, that's grown-ups consenting adults. It's their choice, of course, and that's available as human beings, as long as it's okay with the other people.

But just a word about that. Careful, if I'm interested in the soul-making dyad, careful about the intention. It may be that actually having some physical, actual sexual contact may be soul-making. Or you may find, if this is your situation, this is what you explore as part of your larger explorations, you may find that

being sexual in a soul-making dyad or kind of a soul-making dyad leading into that may actually squander the erotic charge and the erotic tension necessary to sensing the soul. The two-ness collapses, the sexual energy and charge collapses in different ways.

Now, that in itself is fine, but it's a certain choice and it's something to be aware of and something to decide: is that what we want right now? Or it could be that you decide to be sexual and physically sexual. And what is needed if we want to allow that and support that sexual contact to be sensed with soul, to be soul-making?

So remember, soul-making is more than heart. We can have our lovely, heartful, making love or whatever. It has a whole range, but soul-making means more than heart and more than a lot of other things. So what might be needed? If that's what we decide in this instance or whatever, that we're going to be sexual, we're going to make love or whatever it is, have some kind of sexual intimacy, actual physical sexual intimacy, and we want it to be soul-making, then what supports that?

Does it have to do with the intention? Does it have to do with attention? What kind of attention? Does it have to do with the pacing of the whole unfolding of the process? Perhaps. So I don't think there's any formula here, but you'll have to, if this is speaking just to those where this is relevant to at the moment, you'll have to kind of feel: okay, well, how does that happen?

You can have a lot of sense of soul and sensing the soul at one moment, and then it suddenly collapses. Like I said, you can't assume that just because I had it now, now we change to this activity, mode of behavior, whatever it is, we're going to have sex, and I assume that the soul-making sense continues. Maybe, but often not. It needs a certain kind of care. And what does it mean? I have to kind of experiment and find out, perhaps.

Or it might be that you decide: okay, there's a lot of eros, there's a lot of charges, maybe you're talking about it, maybe you're including it and working with it, but you keep the formal time, whatever that was that you decided to devote to soul-making dyad practice, you keep that formal time for practice and that formal space, and you let the eros channel into the sensing with soul without acting it out during that time. And afterwards, you know, your mobile phone timer goes off, right, the dyad's over, then you can do whatever you want, you know.

But these are choices. Again, it's not for me to set any rules or whatever, but again, just to point out how much, how sensitive the whole thing is, how sensitive the sensing the soul is, how sensitive the dyad is, how sensitive we are as creatures and as souls, and what care is needed and to find out and to experiment.

A couple more things. I mean, sometimes, and again, depends on the situation, depends on the actual relationship between two human beings who are in a dyad, etc. But it may be that one feels lots of sexual desire, sexual eros for the other, and lets the other know. So person A feels a lot of sexual desire, etc.

And person B actually feels it and is aware of it and lets person A know that they can feel it and can feel it flowing toward them. And actually they appreciate it and that it's lovely. And then it may be more bearable energetically in and for person A. Is it just because they shared it that it's then spread, so to speak, to be held in a larger field of the dyad? So there's less pressure, more space, and they're not just carrying it themselves? Or is it the fact that in knowing that it's okay and being reassured that it's okay for that degree of eros and desire and sexual energy to be around, that the other person doesn't feel threatened by it—that they feel less need to button it down and repress it or hide it?

So again, depending on the relationship, depending on the trust, depending on the context, including these things and talking about them and being careful how you hold them together, what you do with them, how you decide, how you sense them, how you relate to them—all of this is really, really important. But there's so much potential here in diet practice.

I'm not, as I said, just mentioning a few things about when the sexual eros gets really quite strong and intense, but really when there's any eros between human beings—not even working in a diet, not even sexual eros. That eros, as we've pointed out so much over the last few years, is a key and a galvanizer of the whole soul-making dynamic and therefore the sensing with soul and what that can open us to and bring to us and give to us.

There's a couple of lines from Rumi in this regard. I don't know where it's from, but I'm assuming it's a poem that he wrote to Shams, his mystical lover. And it says:

"The tender words we said to one another are stored in the secret heart of heaven. One day, like rain, they will fall and spread and our mystery will grow green over the world."

We could hear that—I don't know exactly what Rumi's whole philosophy was, despite the beauty of the poetry—but "stored in the secret heart of heaven," the tender words we said to one another, stored in that realm or dimension of being of eternality. They're stored there at that level in the angelic realm when our tender words are spoken out of sensing each other with soul. When not even just words, but those perceptions, that sensing itself is stored somehow eternally.

And you have, again, eternality as one of the nodes, one of the elements of the imaginal. There is that sense that they exist somehow. They make an imprint, an impression, and somehow they're eternal. Of course it's impermanent, but in some other way, this profound sensing with soul has touched my being, touched my heart and soul. It feels to be eternal. I sense it as eternal, stored in the secret heart of heaven, in the mundus imaginalis.

"One day, like rain, they will fall and spread, and our mystery will grow green over the world." It's like a kind of cosmopoiesis. Those words, that gaze, that sensing with soul will spread and its mystery will grow green over the world. It changes our sense of the world that we're in.

And as I said, I shared in an earlier talk on this series, sometimes there is a sense with any image,

intrapsychic or extrapsychic, but perhaps more keenly I wonder when we're working in a diet or when we're sharing this sense of participating in an imaginal sense, participating in an image with another—that sense of participating, the privilege of participating in that dimension of being, in that, whatever we want to call it, the mundus imaginalis, the angelic dimension, can be felt to be such a privilege, such a grace, to participate in the eternal that way, and in the divine that way.

This can be sensed and felt in the depths of the depths of one's soul as perhaps one of the greatest privileges of human being. And to taste that, even if it's only for some moments or a few minutes, can change the whole tenor and outlook and relationship with existence, with life and death. To taste that for a few minutes, to taste that for a few moments even, changes my relationship with dying. Changes the way I sense myself, my human being, this particular other, but human being in general. Changes my sense of the world.

So that's there with all images, intrapsychic or extrapsychic, all sensing with soul. But I'm wondering whether there's something about sensing oneself in relationship with another actual human being that way that can bestow this gift and this grace and this sense of profound privilege.

Anyway, so much is possible. So much awaits discovery and creation.

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