# Sīla and Soul (Part 4)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:14:14

Let's try to elaborate a bit more on some aspects of the connection or potential relationship of soul-making practices and these ideas of values and virtues, connecting them through this notion of imaginal ideas. Let's try and unpack that a little bit, unfold it, explore it.

There are probably different orders we could go through this. We could approach it from different directions, different orders. But I think I'll start by saying a bit more about the ontology of values, actually taking a certain view of the ontology of values, somewhat similar—in fact, very similar—to Hartmann's.

Now, there are other ontologies we could adopt or take, entertain, with regard to values. In fact, a whole spectrum of ontologies. But I want to dwell on this one, partly because nowadays it's unusual, and it opens things up in a certain way. It's less explored, and hence the soil there may be fresh and fertile and offer new possibilities.

Again, Hartmann made the point that values are not created by a culture or a person. They're not cultural, personal creations. They have a kind of independent existence. They're real existences and exist independently of our desires, of what we want to be the case, and also of our consciousness—so whether we're aware of them or not, they exist. But they exist in a particular way in what might be called the realm or the sphere of ideal being.

That word *ideal* is important. It's related to the word *idea*, specifically, but also *ideal* in the sense of when we have ideals and what's ideal—as in what's the best possibility. So there's a lot wrapped up in that word *ideal* and *idea*. There's a long history there. That sphere of ideal being—the realm in which values, for instance, among other entities exist—has its own ordering, its own structure, its own laws.

This notion of a sphere of ideal being goes back to Plato, maybe even before that—I don't know—but as far as we know, it goes back to Plato, who talked about the realm of ideas. And Aristotle as well, with variation, talked significantly about *eidos*. And the scholastics in the Middle Ages, the Christian scholastics in the Middle Ages, also talked about *essentia*, essences. So there's a long history, a long pedigree, and it tends to be very out of fashion these days. It went out of fashion, but it had a lot of fruit and implications in the history of Western philosophy and thought and the way we look at the world for many, many years.

Before we get into that just a bit more, again, we could adopt the stances, the perspectives of various other ontologies with all this, and we don't actually need to adopt Hartmann's kind of postulate of an existence completely independent of consciousness. Remember we talked in the past about how it says in the Zohar that we create God as much as God creates us. And this whole notion of participation that we have in the

imaginal soul-making teachings—that somehow, mysteriously, soul and its beloved, erotic other, or soul, consciousness and its object, mind and matter, they participate in each other, they co-create each other in a way that transcends or complicates, takes to another level the division between consciousness and object, between subject and object.

But that notion of participation is actually very much one that Plato talked about in explaining ideas. And he said that the things of this world participate in the ideas. So the kind of existence, particular to an idea, is that kind of existence through which everything participating in it is just as it is. That's a quote from Hartmann. In other words, when we resonate with a certain moral value and when we act in alignment with that and inspired by that, we're participating in the moral value and we're participating in that level of being—or when an object in the world that's circular or triangular is participating in that ideal geometrical structure of circularity or triangularness.

That notion of participation was always a bit mysterious to people, what Plato meant by that. And it's still a little mysterious, but that notion of participation is key to this whole idea, this whole notion of the realm of ideal beings, of ideal existence, of ideas.

So values are one subset of ideal beings, ideal existences, or ideas, or *eidos*. Others might be mathematical entities and laws. This was originally where Plato, probably through Pythagoras, perhaps got the idea of this whole realm of ideal being, and it remained central to Plato's thinking and a kind of basis and model for his whole thinking.

Mathematical entities and laws, mathematical laws like the laws of geometry and entities like pi or other mathematical entities, don't have spatiotemporal existence. They don't exist in space or time. I cannot come across them. I cannot lay my hand on them. They don't exist in the way that we tend to encounter other existences as existences in space or time. My body, this book, whatever exists in a certain space at a certain time or for a certain time. But mathematical entities and laws—you know, a certain mathematical equation doesn't exist in space and time, yet it has an ideal reality, a reality in the realm of ideas, in this realm of ideal being.

It's not impermanent. It doesn't arise and pass. It's not like this mathematical law comes to an end or gets created. But the mathematical entities and laws actually pervade the world of, say, real things—let's say physical things. They manifest in them. Those mathematical entities and laws are actually part of the principles of reality. So this is one area, perhaps the only remaining area, where this whole notion of a sphere or a realm of ideal being, of the existence of certain ideals...

On a more abstract level, this notion remains current among certain thinkers, scientists, mathematicians, and physicists. However, it's not at all popular when we come to ethics and discussing values as possible kinds of ideal being, as species of ideal being within this realm.

I mention mathematics because perhaps you can get a sense, even from what you might know about

mathematical principles, of this possibility—that there might indeed be such a stratum of existence as this realm of ideal beings. It's not something that can simply be dismissed or ridiculed as a silly notion.

When people introduce teachings on Plato, they often talk about the ideal horse or the ideal dog existing somewhere in this realm. That approach has always struck me as unhelpful—it almost sets up Plato's entire philosophy for ridicule. But if you sophisticate that understanding a little more, it becomes quite workable and certainly not ridiculous.

Mathematical entities and laws should, for most people, more easily strike one as genuinely interesting. They seem to have this existence in another dimension. They're real. They're not mere creations of human thought. We can't simply get rid of them. As I mentioned, they pervade the world of physical things and manifest within them. They are the principles of that reality.

To quote either König or Hartman: "Things, acts and occurrences in the real world, in the physical world, necessarily comply with the principles of mathematics." When I drop this pen, it moves through the air toward the ground in a trajectory based on mathematical principles. The way it holds together depends on forces governed by mathematical laws—the molecular bonds, the relationship between circumference and diameter. All these mathematical principles shape and govern physical actuality.

But there's a crucial difference when we consider values as species of ideal being. Values differ from other kinds of ideal being, such as mathematical entities, in that values don't automatically shape real things or physical phenomena. They may be realized, they may be actualized in physical existence—we may act on a value, express it, and manifest it—or we may not.

The physical world, what most people call the real world, may not correspond to the ideal world, to the ideal being of a value. Unlike mathematical laws, where correspondence is necessary, physical things must conform to mathematical principles. But as Hartman explains, values are not inviolable determinants to which everything physical is subordinate.

So the notion is that there are real entities existing in this ideal sphere. They're not creations of ourselves, not merely human constructs. But unlike other entities and laws existing in the ideal sphere—mathematical laws, for instance—everything in physical existence doesn't have to conform to them. Values may shape physical reality, or they may not.

Values have a particular mode of being, Hartman says, in relationship to the physical world—a mode of "ought-to-be." They ought to be. Value is what ought to be. There ought to be justice. There ought to be kindness. There ought to be mercy. There ought to be truthfulness.

When the ideal finds itself in opposition to the real—when there isn't justice, for example, in the physical world, so the ideal of justice stands in opposition to what König calls "the real"—when it remains unrealized, the ought-to-be becomes actual. The ideal itself becomes stimulating. The ideal "calls out," as he puts it, to be realized.

So values are not automatic determinants. They're not necessarily present in every case, but there's this quality of ought-to-be that accompanies them.

As we discussed in the last part of our exploration, humankind—human beings—are the point of contact between the physical world, the world of perishable things, of impermanence, of coming and going, birth and death, and the imperishable, timeless realm of moral values, of these ideals. Human beings have access to and contact with the ideal world, particularly that portion concerned with values—that section of the ideal realm.

Human beings have this crucial linchpin function. Everything depends on them. In Hartman's view, human beings are the only beings capable of grasping values, sensing them, and acting upon them. Only they can convert the ought-to-be into physical reality—transform the ought-to-be of the ideal into actual manifestation. Objects and other beings cannot do this.

König writes, really in summary: "The rest of existence is dull and dead to the call of the ideal. Man, humanity, is the guardian of the ought in the world of physical being, in the world of what he calls real being." In human beings only, the ought-to-be is transformed into the ought-to-do.

The ought-to-be that forms the core of moral value in the ideal realm, in its relationship to the physical realm, transforms into the ought-to-do. Humankind—this person, that person, I, you—ought to do this. As he writes, "In man only the ought-to-do is transformed into a moral act."

We've touched on this before, and we've also explored the fact that this knowing of the elements of the sphere of ideal being—this knowing and perceiving of what we might call ideas—is intuitive. It's what philosophers call a priori knowledge. It's not a deduction. I grasp it intuitively, and that goes for values as well as the laws of logic and mathematical laws. They're intuited, and we know something with immediacy and a kind of certainty. We recognize that it's a necessary and general truth.

One difference between Hartmann and Plato concerns the question of what is more substantially real, more true: the realm of ideas, the sphere of ideal being, or the realm of physical being. Plato considered the realm of ideal being and the sphere of ideas as having a more fundamental and truer kind of existence. The instances in the world were reflections or shadows of that truer, more fundamental existence of ideal things, of a realm of ideas.

Hartmann inverts that. He says this "nimbus of loftiness surrounding Platonic ideas" Hartmann rejects. Ideal being for Hartmann is a thinner, floating, insubstantial being—half-being, so to speak—which still lacks the full weight of proper being. He criticized Plato, along with many others, along the lines that if one gives primary reality to the sphere of ideas and to that realm of ideal being, one denigrates and devalues the things of life, the things in the transient world of physical existence.

I don't know whether that's actually true. And certainly whether or not that was Plato's intention—you could read it both ways, and probably different traditions arose out of Plato's thinking with different

emphases. But anyway, Hartmann makes that reversal. I'm not sure it follows that if you give primary reality to the realm of ideas over and above the instances and reflections and instantiations of those ideas in physical reality, whether that corresponds to or leads to a denigration, a disinterest, a rejection of the world. But Hartmann thinks it does, along with many other people. That's a main criticism of Plato through the centuries, for this and other reasons in terms of his larger system of ontology.

Hartmann rejects that idea and inverts it. So the realm of ideal being for Hartmann is something that has less reality, but is still real.

In the centuries following Plato and years of neo-Platonism and Christian thought, this realm of ideas was quite central. There's a long thread of development of that whole notion, exploration of it into theology, into philosophy, into all kinds of areas. As it came into different kinds of theology, these ideas, this sphere of ideas, was considered sometimes a part of divinity itself. In other words, they were aspects or attributes of the divine, sometimes even names of God. So in the Islamic tradition and in the Jewish tradition and also in the Christian tradition through Pseudo-Dionysius, they talk about the names of God related to this notion of the ideas.

Or sometimes they are conceived of slightly differently, as if they are almost angelic existences close to the divine. They're the first sort of orbit of being, created being, around the divine—the first kind of rung of an existential hierarchy. There are many different variations, or they're emanations or expressions of the divine. So as this notion of the sphere of ideal being filtered into history, got digested, assimilated, worked on, taken up, pondered upon, reflected upon, it took slightly different forms in the way it was worked into different philosophies and theologies, with great consequence and a lot of fecundity over the years.

Now I want to pause on this question about which is truer, which has the more fundamental kind of existence: the sphere of physical things, of physical reality—which would be the view of most people nowadays and for quite a long time—or the sphere of ideal being.

I'd like to talk a little bit about mathematics. At this retreat, I know some of you are very traumatized by mathematics classes in school or poor mathematics teachers or whatever, but I just want to linger on something as a way of expanding this territory perhaps. So breathe—it won't be terrible, I hope.

There's something in mathematics called an irrational number. It has a very specific definition, but for our purposes, we're going to define it in a slightly imprecise way as a number whose decimal points go on forever. So it's a very loose, imprecise definition—it's not actually the definition of irrational numbers, but it goes with being an irrational number.

You know that number pi that's involved in geometry and circles, with the Greek letter π, is an irrational number. What is it? 3.1415926, and then it just goes on. I don't know the other digits, but those decimal places go on forever. They never stop. And that's bound up with what it means to be an irrational number.

Apparently, the existence of irrational numbers was discovered by a guy called Hippasus. The story goes,

he was on a ship with some Pythagoreans, some followers of the philosophy of Pythagoras. Now, they too believed in the kind of divinity of numbers and the fact that numbers were mystically woven into the cosmic fabric, the fabric of the cosmos. So he was on a boat or ship or some kind of maritime vessel with a bunch of Pythagoreans, and on the deck, with the help of geometry and some sticks and stones, he was explaining to them about his discovery of irrational numbers and proving to them how they must exist, for which he got very little thanks.

In fact, they were completely outraged and threw him overboard. So I hope that they were in a small boat on a small pond and that he could swim and just swim to shore and was safe. I don't know. But it so offended their system of philosophy and their sensibility, this idea that a number could be irrational like that, could not be specifiable, its decimal points go on forever. But there are the existence of these irrational numbers.

So pi, as I said, is an example of an irrational number. What is pi, if you remember from school? If you measure the diameter of a circle, then you can say that the circumference of the circle will be of a length of pi times the diameter, or two times the radius times pi. And the area of the circle will be pi r squared. Again, there may or may not be pain associated, but I'm sure you remember this from school.

But pi is an irrational number. So is—and this might have been what Hippasus was showing—the square root of 2. So that, again, if you have a right-angled triangle with its two shorter sides being each one unit in length, then the hypotenuse, according to Pythagoras' theorem, is the square root of 1 squared plus 1 squared. One squared plus one squared is one plus one, which is two, and so the hypotenuse is the square root of 2. The square root of 2 also turns out to be an irrational number—1.414 something or other. It goes on forever.

There are many other numbers like this. Famous numbers, but there are all kinds of numbers like this. There's Euler's number, the natural logarithm. In fact, all square roots of natural numbers other than perfect squares—like 4 and 9, which have square roots of 2 and 3—all other square roots, like the square root of 6 or the square root of 8 or whatever, are also irrational numbers.

So there's this strange class of... I'll explain why I'm talking about this in a second. There's a strange class of numbers called irrational numbers. There's also a whole class of numbers called imaginary numbers. And again, some of you will know this from slightly higher mathematics. They are called i or j—the square root of negative 1. So when you multiply negative 2 times negative 2, you get 4. What that means is two numbers are the square root of 4: negative 2 and positive 2.

What you can't get, usually, in the usual way of thinking, is the square root of, say, negative 4. I can multiply 2 by negative 2, and I'll get negative 4. But if I multiply 2 by 2, or negative 2 by negative 2, I get 4. So the square root of negative 4 seems to not exist. So mathematicians at some point just made an imaginary number called i, which is the square root of negative 1. It's sometimes called complex numbers. So there's a whole other class of numbers that kind of has a strange existence.

But these numbers, as I said, turn out to be fundamentally woven into the governing of the universe in mathematical laws, but also in physical laws. So they govern the geometry of things in terms of the fact that the circumference will have a length of pi times the diameter. The hypotenuse of that triangle, if it's one unit and one unit, will have a length of the square root of two, an irrational number. All kinds of physical laws, especially when we get down to quantum physics, include this imaginary number of the square root of negative one, and numbers like the natural logarithm, Euler's number e.

When we think about this, this is quite interesting. So numbers like pi and i—this imaginary number, imaginary square root of negative 1—and numbers like the natural logarithm e, are fundamentally wrapped up in physical reality. They are, if you like, dimensions of physical reality. They govern physical things and the laws that pertain; they're part of the laws that govern physical things. Yet they never manifest themselves precisely.

Why don't they manifest precisely? Because for an irrational number, imagine this circumference is exactly the length of pi times the—let's say the diameter is 1—is exactly the length of pi. Well, the hypotenuse of that right angle triangle is exactly the square root of 2. So that means if I try to make a triangle with that size hypotenuse, or I try to make a circle with that size circumference, I cannot do that. It cannot exist because the actual length of it is infinitely specifiable.

In other words, I get it to 3.1415 and just a little bit more because it's 3.14159. And then I go to that—it's just a little bit more: 3.14159262. And then this will just go on forever. We'll never reach the exact length there of the circumference. The circumference can never be that exact length. It's always going to be a little bit more, a little bit less, because I can always go to the next decimal point.

So here are these things, here are these entities—pi, i, e.

They're fundamentally wrapped up in physical reality. There are, so to speak, dimensions of physical reality. They govern physical things. They're involved in the laws that govern physical things. Yet they never manifest exactly or precisely.

And if we're talking about abstract imaginary numbers, like this imaginary square root of negative one... it never manifests. How can it manifest? How can I have it? I can have one apple, I can have five apples, I can have eight apples, I can have half an apple, but I can't have i apples. I can't have the square root of negative one apples, or the square root of negative nine apples. It's, in a way, abstract and imaginary. It manifests in this indirect way. It itself doesn't manifest, but it governs manifestation.

Actually, there are also quantum mechanical reasons why a perfect circle can never physically manifest. In other words, that circumference can never exactly be pi times the diameter. This has to do with Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in terms of measuring the actual location of something. If you get down to the atomic level, where actually is that atom? We can't locate it precisely. So if we measure the length of this piece of string or piece of wood, actually it doesn't have a determinate length. It doesn't have

an exact length that we can know exactly.

Maybe there are also issues at an even deeper quantum level about the quantum nature of space and time so that even when we consider this atom might not be here or there, or we can't determine exactly what distance it is from something else, but space itself can have a distance—but actually recent quantum theory more and more starts to dispute that.

Why am I going on about all this? Some of you might be wondering. It's certainly not for intellectual titillation. It's certainly not to intimidate or to confuse or to re-traumatize anyone. That's not the point. That's not why I'm going into this. It's not that it's merely kind of, oh, that's interesting. How interesting. Nor is the point to induce in you a kind of genial bafflement at existence, which sometimes seems to be, for some people, the point of emptiness teachings, as if that itself were some kind of achievement or goal, to be sort of puzzled by the mystery of existence. That's not the reason.

But there's something about this parallel with certain mathematical entities, and this notion that there might be a realm of ideal being, a sphere of ideas—eidos, idea—that pertain not just to mathematical entities, but also to things like love, beauty, goodness, and so forth, that can never perfectly manifest. But still, they shape, govern manifestations, they direct manifestations, and they exist, kind of, in this other realm.

So there's a parallel here. Actually, there's another class as well of these kind of abstract or ideal entities. One is these irrational numbers, like we talked about pi and e. One is these imaginary numbers, like the square root of negative one, i. And another is the entity that's called the wave function in quantum mechanics. It's also called Schrödinger's equation. It's actually an equation that's a sort of fluid mathematical entity, if you like, that exists in an abstract, multidimensional mathematical space.

When you square the solution of that equation, you get the probability of finding a particle here or there, or with this velocity or that velocity, or whatever, at a certain time. So the actual existence of it is this fluid mathematical entity that exists in a kind of abstract, multidimensional mathematical space. What kind of existence is that? The mind can hardly get around what it means. It's an ideal kind of existence, very abstract, and yet it bears a direct relationship with the shaping of our physical world and reality and what manifests on the physical plane.

So two points here. One is not only might there be this realm of ideal being, which we can see more clearly and more obviously for most of us in the realm of something like mathematics, but it might also apply to the realm of values. Point one.

Point two is this question of which is more real? Which is more real? Is the law more real that has the number pi in it, even though I can never manifest that number? Is the law more real when it has the imaginary number, even though I can never manifest that imaginary number itself? Is the wave function more real that exists in this kind of ideal, abstract, multidimensional, mathematical space? Is that more

real than the physical manifestation? Which is more real? The realm of ideal being, or the realm of physical instantiation of ideal things?

As I mentioned, this realm of ideas was often considered divine, as part of the divine, or very close to the divine. And I wonder whether, with regard to values and virtues as species of ideas, whether they too we might consider them divine, just like Plato's ideas. They have this kind of infinite beyondness to them, yet they are also immanent.

They manifest in shaping and manifesting physical realities. We can have, just as with divinity, this infinite beyondness and imminence, this transcendence and immanence. Just as with divinity, we could have a clear concept of what that divinity is, or a vague and more obscure concept or idea or notion. There can be, just as with divinity, something divine and soul-making in relation to that, or they can become image.

Regarding their not having spatio-temporal being, we could say the same of images. An image doesn't really have spatio-temporal being. It exists, as we say, timelessly with this element of eternality. We could say, as Corbin suggests, that images happen in hierophantic time, in the *mundus imaginalis*. Perhaps that's the same thing—this quality of eternality.

Koenig observes that ideas or the elements of the sphere of ideal being don't have spatio-temporal being, but they're attached to and carried by spatial and temporal being. So again, there's this notion of participation in the Platonic sense.

We're exploring how we might possibly conceive of what kind of nature, what kind of ontology these values possess. There's something important in this kind of leaning toward such possibilities that opens up profound avenues of understanding.

Let me offer another example in the realm of values as ideal being. Sixteen or seventeen years ago, I had an operation in the hospital. They gave me a general anesthetic, and just as they were about to inject it, they said, "Okay, in about ten seconds you'll start to feel sleepy and then you'll lose consciousness." They were preparing me, which sometimes they don't do, but in this case they did.

I was aware of the possibility—however small—that I might die in the operation, that those seconds might be my last seconds alive. As they told me this, with only about ten seconds until I would lose consciousness, I instinctively and spontaneously said to myself: *metta*. *Metta*. And I put my faith in that—that was what I aligned myself with.

I didn't think much about it at the time, but several correspondences made me reflect on it recently. I wasn't practicing *metta* at that point. It wasn't that I was generating "may I be well" or an intention of loving-kindness toward other beings and myself. That was tangentially implied, but I wasn't actually practicing that. I certainly wasn't making some kind of rebirth wish for myself—you know, hoping that having *metta* in my consciousness when I died would ensure a good rebirth. I wasn't hoping that

somehow *metta* would magically protect me from death and harm, as the Buddha sometimes describes in his teachings. Nor was I dissolving my being into the feeling of *metta*.

Looking back, I wonder: could it be that without realizing it at the time, I was orienting myself to, giving myself to, somehow viewing my life and death as given to, as participating in, as devoted to, as in reverence of *metta* as a kind of idea in the sense we're discussing—as a kind of *eidos*?

We've talked about the need for anchoring and how human beings need anchoring, especially when things are difficult. We've noted that anchors work best when there's an anchoring in something other. An anchor for a ship floating in water needs to be made not of water, and the anchor itself needs to have contact with something that's not water—something that has more steadiness, that's of a different substance.

For us as human beings, this is profoundly helpful. If there's something we can find to trust that can serve as a spiritual anchor, an anchor for the soul—I'm not speaking of an anchor for attention, like a mantra or breath or body sensations or even *metta* as an anchor for attention, but something, so to speak, on another plane that we can trust.

Even if our sense of that is vague, something that, like in the example I'm giving, if I knew I was dying in the next minutes, I could give myself to. I would give myself to that, abandon my being to it, see my whole life in the light of that—not hoping it would somehow save my earthly life or cure disease, but something I would want to give myself to, give the gift of my being to.

There are many possibilities here, and obviously we each must find what works for us as an anchor. This isn't a prescriptive formula. But there's something in the notion of the realm of ideal being, and in certain elements of that realm—for instance, values—that might function in this way.

If I'm going out of existence right now, if things get really difficult, what do I trust giving myself to? What do I bow to? What do I trust bowing to? What do I pour my remaining being out to? It's not really for me, even. It's not for anyone specific. It could be love, goodness.

These are vague notions, you know. It could be a notion of a deity—Kuan Yin, God, the cosmos if it has a kind of soul sense, or the earth, or Buddha nature.

As I said, we're not talking about practicing metta or mantra continuously for the sake of an anchor in difficult times or whatever. Obviously that's helpful. There are times when that is helpful. But we're talking more like a devotion of the heart and soul, a devotion of the being—some kind of fundamental statement or orientation from my soul to existence, to being, to the mystery of things, to the cosmos, to the divine, to the Buddha nature, about what I want my life to be and to have been about.

Even—and this is important—given the fact that for anyone orienting this way, giving themselves in this way, aligned in this way, devoted in this way, their actual life will have come up short from that idea and

that ideal in so many ways. Of course. But what we're talking about here is getting in touch with a sense of another level of things. And it might be this kind of—what I'm talking about—it may be only a moment here and there. But what may come out of that can give this other dimension of anchoring. And then that gives a different perspective on our life, a different perspective on what happens.

So there's a possible kind of meditative journey there. It's hard to put this stuff into words. There's something mysterious in it, for sure. But it's also hard to articulate, and it's so foreign to our usual way of thinking of things. Because it sounds quite abstract. Sometimes when I try to explain this, I get the sense that the person thinks I'm talking about something material. It's hard to grasp, or it's hard for people to sometimes get a sense of something that's not material, that's timeless.

And this notion of giving myself to that ideality, to that eidos, to that idea—it's not only a kind of actual giving myself to it in life. So my metta and your metta and anyone's metta will never be perfect. It will never be constant. It will never be complete. I will always fall short of the ideal. So this immaterial, timeless, ideal existence that I give myself to—but in ways that giving, like the existence of the eidos, the giving and the existence have other dimensions to them, beyond the actuality in life. It includes the actuality, but the actuality never really measures up.

But this notion of eidos—they're like images. They're not material, they're timeless. And they have this beyond to them. They have other dimensions, and that is what gives them traction as anchors for us.

It doesn't imply that our actions and choices and how they mirror or refract the ideal or the image is irrelevant. So an idea or an eidos is only abstract if how we are in the world and how or whether it instantiates is irrelevant, if we don't pay any mind. Then it's abstract. But there's something here—this ideal being, this strata of existence, these ideas, this ideational, imaginal.

It's something greater than this impermanent phenomenon that I am, or I appear to be. It's something also beyond me. And in the case of that example of the metta, before the operation, that something beyond me is not the fact of all beings, metta to all beings. Sure, that's beyond me. We're talking about it's beyond me in a different way—something deathless and timeless, as I said there, greater than this impermanent mind-body practicing metta and then extinguished by death, for example.

But we're not talking about something that goes on forever. Neither me nor my metta go on forever in time. The deathlessness, the timelessness is of the order of eternality. It's the non-spatiotemporal being of this realm of ideas.

But back then, I didn't really understand, I didn't really have this language for it, but remembering back, oh yeah, beauty was there in that orientation of my being in those seconds before going unconscious. And a vague sense, very vague at the time, of the kind of particular ontological category or kind of being, the kind of truth that such ideas have, that such values have as species of ideal existence. Trust was there. Trusting somehow in that. Little as I could even articulate or conceptualize or delineate what it was at the

time that was exactly going on there.

And there was eros in relationship to it, and dimensionality. So you can see how many of the elements in the imaginal—trust, beauty, eros, dimensionality. We're talking about something, we could say it's a kind of imaginal. Ideas become imaginal, or the ideational imaginal—how much it overlaps there.

But we need, I think, this kind of sense of beyondness and of other dimensions, and we need it for our soul. We need it also in our ethical orientations and considerations. There's something that underpins our ethics. That's why someone like Richard Rorty finds it so difficult to talk about ethics—they have very little to say because they absolutely refuse any sense of dimensionality.

Without a kind of beyondness or transcendent element, without this dimensionality shading into divinity, without that aspect or those dimensions in relation to the virtues and values, those virtues and values that we still somehow in our society honor and enact to some extent become perhaps just a pale ghost, almost a charade of what virtues and values can truly be. We still kind of go along with certain values and virtues—perhaps that's the dominant view—but without that dimensionality, without that beyondness, without that transcendence, without that dimensionality shading into divinity, they lose their transformative power.

What happens to eros when it's not allowed dimensionality? We've talked about this before—how if eros is not allowed dimensionality, it has to go horizontal. But right now I want to explore something different: what is the flavor of it when it doesn't have that dimensionality, when it's not allowed those dimensions?

Sometimes people spend enormous amounts of money on weddings, for instance, which is a kind of celebration of love and eros. But how often does it have that real dimensionality to it? There's this celebrating of love, this making a big thing of it, but it might also be limited in these very important and fundamental ways.

Consider the value of determination—the passion of footballers and football teams. But what's that determination in service of? Again, there's a lot of hoopla, a lot of investment in it, but it's not seen in this light that allows its dimensionality to be sensed. We're caught in some kind of in-between place, perhaps.

Or sexual enjoyment—when there's no dimensionality allowed, what does that become? It's a pale ghost.

Or individuality. We tend to celebrate and respect and value that. It's considered a virtue. But why? Without the dimensionality, it's not any kind of manifestation of an echoing or mirroring of divinity through and in my personhood.

Or dynamism, restlessness as values—deep restlessness, dynamism, but without any deep purpose. It becomes just a kind of reactive busyness.

Or peace, in contrast. Without the dimensions of depth or sacredness, it becomes just about relaxation and de-stressing.

All these values—peace, dynamism, individuality, sexual pleasure, love, eros, determination—they all become atrophied or have had their dimensions amputated in many cases. Or perhaps people are still unconsciously responding to a sort of implicit sense of the dimensionality in them. I don't know. But there's potentially a kind of poverty in our life and our society without them, and also poverty when we then come to consider and ponder the realm of ethics.

The notion of values as having ideal existence, as existing in this sphere or realm of ideal being, gives them a certain dimensionality. And again, dimensionality shading into divinity, which we'll return to. This does a tremendous amount for the soul. It's necessary for soul-making, and it's necessary for soul-making in relationship to values and virtues and ethics.

Remember I mentioned working in a dyad and being struck by the sense of participating in the image of myself and my partner in the dyad, and the grace of that, the privilege of that—the privilege of participating in the image which has these higher roots in divinity and eternality. All of that, just a little glimpse, gave a different sense of the relationship to death. So touched, so blessed, so graced, such a privilege to touch and to participate in, to be graced by and to participate in something which has these higher roots in divinity, which has these other divine dimensions.

But might the same be true also of values when we sense them that way? When they're dimensionalized, when we open to the sense of participating in their ideal being, participating in these other dimensions of being, shading into divinity, they give our life meaningfulness. That's what gives our life meaningfulness. That's what touches us. That's what makes a difference.

I'd given the example previously in the talk on *dirti* practice, I imagine, but it could be with any image. And now I'm saying as well with values: when we sense them in this fuller, richer, more soulful way, there's a privilege and a beauty there, and a grace in being touched by them, in being called by them, in participating in them, in being aligned with them, in sensing them.

Even in sensing them, the soul receives, graced with a sense of meaningfulness and beauty, loftiness, aspiration.

So there's a lot shared here between what we're calling values when we give them—when we allow them to have this ideal level of being, this existence at the level of the realm of ideas, just like images, just like imaginal images. And with all that, there comes the eros, the beyondness of them, the dimensionality shading into divinity. It calls our eros. Our eros also will reciprocally create more of that beyond. Hartman wouldn't like that, I suppose, because he just leaned on the discover side rather than the create side. But we can have an erotic relationship with values. And in a way, they have this unfathomable, inexhaustible dimension.

Just like pi and e, those mathematical examples. And just like images, where our life echoes and mirrors and refracts an image, the image refracts into our life—it won't be 100% identical. There's a kind of

unattainability. We cannot attain a perfect instance of living out an image or mirroring an image, or a perfect instance, a complete instance of this value in our life, this or that value. There's a certain impossibility, unfathomability, unattainability, inexhaustibility to values when they have this sense filled out, when we fill out the sense that way, when we perceive them that way.

I'm going to read you a passage by Hartman. It's quite an interesting passage which we could use and take in different directions—also regarding climate change, particularly when the outcome is uncertain or even likely that we're going to fail to avert tragedies. So with regard to action of faith and doing the right thing with respect to climate change, but also in regard to this beyondness of ideas. They have dimensions of beyondness.

And so he writes—again, pardon me for the gender-biased language—"It manifests itself in a capacity to detect what is good and genuine in another's disposition amidst less worthy tendencies, and to seize upon the good, to have faith in it, even to draw it out and develop it by the influence of one's trust. But beyond this, there is still a higher ethos of faith."

So he's actually talking about the value of faith. That's the context of this passage.

"Beyond this, there is still a higher ethos of faith. In the vision of the great moral ideals of life, which the individual person does not actualize, and in the vision of the great upward strivings of humanity, distant goals and vast enterprises require a different kind of faith, a faith which temporal unattainability does not stifle."

The fact that I will not reach that goal, or this goal, this ideal, will not be reached in time or in my lifetime even—in my lifetime even, or even in time—it doesn't dampen the faith. It doesn't dampen the devotion and orientation.

"It inheres," he says, "in the essence of all such outlooks upon life—and these are those which lend its highest meaning to our existence—that the non-actuality of the goal does not prejudice the reality of the undertaking."

So the fact that we may not actualize the goal does not stop us from undertaking that venture and that aspiration and acting on it.

"Herein the potent moral element of not seeing and yet believing"—I think that's a reference to doubting Thomas and Christ—"attains its culminating point."

So I haven't seen the fruition of this. I will not see the fruition of this. It will never be perfect. It will never manifest completely, certainly not in my lifetime, and yet I have the faith, I have the devotion, I have the alignment. I can instigate action. I can devote and commit my being to that ideal.

"For it is the high ideals," he writes, "which man never sees actualized. It is the high ideals which man never sees actualized. To this lofty spirit of faith corresponds hope, a valuational sense of a distinct kind. It

is not properly a moral value like faith. It is not a new virtue, but only an accompanying emotional factor, the form of happiness which accords with faith and which anticipates its contents."

So this faith and hope in an ideal context, and in working towards and trying to manifest an ideal, even knowing it won't manifest completely or in my lifetime. There's a lot here that's related to the movement of eros. And eros, remember, will always create more beyonds. The angel is always out ahead.

So especially in the higher ideals, in the higher values, there is a kind of impossibility that goes with them, that pertains to them. The image, or the idea, the ideal, is the impossible. Actually, there's a whole other reason why values have a kind of impossibility to them, related to their antinomies, their oppositions between contradictions, between values. But I don't want to complicate things, so I'll come back to that later. But an image is an impossibility in terms of its manifestation, its full, complete replication, echoing, mirroring in manifest physical reality in our lives. So the image and what we're talking about, these ideas or ideals, are the impossible.

But the impossible is, if you like, the milk, the sustenance, the seed of the possible. It points a direction, it inspires, it emboldens, it roots us, it anchors us. But there's always the beyondness. As we said when we talked about images, the angel is always out ahead. It's moving away from us, but beckoning us, and we're pulled as if by magnetism—we move with it. Our life moves with it.

Now, there are all kinds of implications here, so very much to do with eros and soul-making, of course, but just to touch on one briefly right now, regarding guilt and healing.

Sometimes we feel great dukkha when we have, or we believe we have, acted in ways we don't respect. And it's easy or common then for that to become a kind of quagmire or storm of repetitive papañca and self-judgment, and that whole nexus and difficulty of guilt. In all that though, there is probably something—a value, a moral value—that we are or want to be devoted to. In the middle of all that mess, self-recrimination and self-obsession, there is actually a value that we are or we want to be devoted to.

And that value may become clear to us as an idea, as an ideal, and or as an image. Remember, values are an element of the imaginal. So it may become clear as a value idea itself, or it may become clear as an image or both. So that's quite important. Within all this storm of papañca and guilt, the swirling vortex of that, it's possible—it might be possible, with a little careful discernment and work in meditation—to find, amidst all that, what is the value that we're devoted to. And either it comes in image form, or it comes in this ideal form, in the form of an idea of a value itself.

And having contacted this sense of and clarity about the value, then a couple of things might be really helpful. We can meditate on that value itself in a way that our devotion to it, our love for it are felt deeply. So I get clear what it is and then I feel my love and my devotion to it. I feel it deeply in the heart, in the body, in the soul. So obviously again here the energy body is going to be very important. The sense of alignment, of energization, of harmonization are integral to that sense of devotion and necessary.

And then within all that maelstrom of guilt and self-obsession, etc., we can find the value. We can meditate on it in a way that we feel that devotion and allow that sense of devotion and love for it to align the being, the heart, the body, the energy body, the soul. And dwell there. Stay steady with that alignment and energization. So that something beautiful and positive comes out of the mistake, the shortcoming, the ethical transgression.

But a second piece is important here, related to what I was saying just before. It's important to recognize that both values and images have always some portion of them that is transcendent in the sense of beyond—beyond what we can ever perfectly mirror or manifest. We can never perfectly mirror that image or manifest perfectly that idea. Their beyondness, their transcendent dimension is necessary if they are to remain always erotic objects for us.

So eros needs this beyondness. It needs something to be able to move into. It also creates that something, that beyondness. So we can live and try to speak and act and feel and think in service and devotion to these values and images as much as possible, as much as possible, but that will always fall short of their ideal or imaginal fullness. Accepting this and still striving and devoting oneself in the gaze and in the act is a kind of soul wisdom. And it relates to that passage from Hartmann that we just read.

And the residual dukkha there, from the awareness of their forever beyondness—remember with the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, the sense of the erotic object will always grow and deepen, always the angel out ahead, no matter how much we grow—but that residual dukkha from the awareness of there forever beyond us is just part of our existential situation as souls, as human beings.

Sometimes people have told me, oh, this happened in a relationship with someone and I was like this or I did that or I didn't do this. Some people are just spinning and spinning in guilt about that. And very painful. But is it possible to go right to that dukkha? Right to that painful spinning? And the pain is telling me about my love. It's telling me about my devotion. Find what is this devotion to, and can I feel that devotion, can I let it align me, and also do I realize that I cannot perfectly mirror, echo, replicate that image in my life.

So sometimes people are, for example, in a romantic or sexual relationship, kind of inspired or led by a certain image of themselves as lover, or relating their relationship and how they are to an image, a potential image of lover. But it will fall short. And that doesn't mean that we don't aspire to that, we don't have that magnetic pull, we don't have that devotion. But there's a wisdom in knowing, yeah, I'm never going to completely replicate it.

Okay, I want to say more about this relationship of soul-making and values, virtues, and the ideas-imaginal. Let's stop there for today.

---

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