Sīla and Soul (Part 5)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 2:06:31

So it's possible in life, and even among the complexities and difficulties and the busynesses of life, that we at some point start to feel an erotic attraction. We have eros for values, for moral values, and that eros allows, instigates, stimulates soul-making in relationship to those values. In the dynamic, in the process, in the journey of soul-making, at some point moral values begin to come alive, begin to be swept up into, included, involved in the soul-making dynamic.

As such, either way, the values become for us erotic images. This value, or that value, or values as a whole, moral values as a whole, become erotic images, become ideational images. The ideational, imaginal sense of values can begin to open up. With that, implicit in all this, is the sense of these moral values as ideas, ideals, having ideas pregnant with meaningfulnesses and gracing us with a sense, an expanded sense of meaningfulness. All this is part of what happens as soul-making starts to involve values, as values start to stimulate the soul-making and the eros. They complicate, enrich, deepen, strengthen the relationship with moral values in this sense. Of course that affects our choices in life, affects our perspectives on life, our sensibilities in life, and our choices.

So it becomes easier to choose that which is not easy—to make this ethical choice, this sacrifice, this renunciation, this involvement in activism or protest. We're not so limited that we are pushed and constrained to choose just what is easy or what we think makes us happy. We can talk more about the joy of this kind of relationship. Joy for me is a richer word, is a more soulful and spiritual word than just happiness. And part of that whole relationship is the capacity to be challenged and the willingness to be challenged, even the desire to be challenged by and through the calling and the beyondness of this sense—a capacity, a willingness to be stretched, to stretch oneself. Aspiration grows. Nobility, dignity comes with all this.

A capacity, an ability, a strength to abide and choose independent of the dominant view, the common view of those around us in the wider society or in our particular subcultures or sub-traditions. Beauty in all of this, devotion and meaningfulness can all come once the values in this sense start being incorporated, worked on, fermented in the soul-making dynamics. And that will, of course, like working with any image, working with the ideational imaginal in this sense, start to include the perceptions of self, other, world, and the eros itself—our love, our passion for the values themselves. All those aspects—self, other, world, eros—start to become imaginal, start to gain all this dimensionality.

So there's a lot of power in this, in the best sense, a lot of enriching and deepening. And strength comes, and capacity and willingness comes, as I said.

A little while ago I was on a panel about climate change responses in religious groups. One of the other panelists was George Marshall, who some of you will know. He's based in Oxford and does research in sociology and psychology on messages about climate change—how they impact people, and what basically works to make a difference, to engage people, and what doesn't work.

While we were on this panel, one of the things that struck me in what he was sharing was that he'd spoken to Islamic communities and asked them about their response to the challenge of climate change. What struck me was that they said, in terms of how they want to respond to the challenge of climate change, that they want it to be a jihad—a holy war. Take away all the craziness that goes with that word, unfortunately. Jihad means holy war, holy engagement in a noble struggle. So they didn't want to just remember to put the recycling out or something like that. They wanted something that was really genuinely a stretch for them. They want to feel like they're engaged in that way.

So there is both a certain soul stance of the religious orientation and sensibility that actually wants that beyondness, wants that stretch. It's related to all this business about dimensionality and beyondness and meaningfulness. But there is also, as I said, once the soul-making starts involving the values, once the values become erotic objects, then also the willingness and the capacity to stretch and be stretched are there. And the strength to undertake all that starts to come. As I said, we can start more and more to stand in our values, for our values, stand by our values.

I remember being part of a Dharma group talking about climate change and trying to make different creative responses to it—the Dharma Action Network for Climate Engagement. One evening we were in a group and a couple of the people were saying that they were a little aversive to protests and engaging in protests around inaction against climate change and for action against climate change. The sense that they had of protests and why they were a bit aversive and disinclined was that for them a protest seemed to be a negative thing, protesting against this or that. They didn't like that negative connotation, which had to do with anger.

But actually, the etymology of that word protest—protest means pro is for, and test is related to testify or testament. From its Latin roots and through the French, it originally meant something much more positive.

Protest, I testify for something, I bear witness to something. I make a declaration, a testament for, pro something. And that was the original meaning. It had a much more positive connotation.

Implicit in that bearing witness for something, or to something—I bear witness to something—only as a consequence of that particular orientation and commitment is one bearing witness against something else. So I bear witness for, I take a stand, I testify for the need and the importance of immediate prioritizing of action on species loss or climate change or whatever it is. And as a consequence, I'm bearing witness against inaction—the laissez-faire, the empty words.

So all this moral strength, moral courage can come when the relationship with values opens up. And we said the importance of anchoring, and the anchoring needing to have another dimension, a beyond to it. And so when there's difficulty—whether difficulty in terms of personal renunciation, difficult choices in one's life because they're the right thing to do, because they're ethical, but there is cost involved—or whether it's the difficulty of being in a protest or an action of some kind, an activist action of some kind, we need that strength, we need that steadiness, we need that anchoring. We need that courage and that largeness of soul.

Or when it's difficulty in terms of—as many people are increasingly, I hear many people who are doing research—predicting that species loss and climate change is happening so quickly that there will be all kinds of breakdowns in terms of social structure and our larger structures of civilization in the not-too-distant future. I don't know if that's the case or not, or to what extent it's the case. But then there's difficulty on a massive scale, not just personal difficulty, not just difficulty in this situation, but a much wider social difficulty.

But it's interesting—the word crisis is at its root from a Greek word, I think, which means decision. So crises are often decision points, points of decision, moments, times of the necessity of decision, this way or that way. And crises, difficult as they are, challenging as they are, costly as they are, can often also be doorways, opportunities. In fact, that word—as I've mentioned, I think, several times in different talks—opportunity is, its root porta, which is door. So a crisis is a time for a decision, but it can also be door, opening a door that goes through this door or that door, and a door to what? It's opportunity to practice in the deepest, fullest, widest, and sometimes most challenging sense of the word.

And you can see this relationship between crises and opportunity—not that we wish crises, not that we want them to come—you can see this relationship in its extreme form again, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as I mentioned in the talk. Very extreme crisis situation, and it brought out such courage and such moral integrity and steadfastness. Or, as mentioned also in a previous talk, Viktor Frankl reporting on those among the starving concentration camp inmates at Auschwitz—those few who would give away their last piece of bread. An intense crisis situation. And it brings out something so profound in humanity, something so beautiful in the soul.

In that desert, in that ravaged landscape of flower blooms. And we can enjoy and be touched by its fragrance, its perfume, its color, its beauty, years and years later. And it makes a difference to us.

So it might be crises at different levels, as I said—personal, or in the middle of a difficult situation like a protest or an action when it gets a bit hairy, or much wider with climate change and species extinction, the possibility of social collapse, societal collapse, the collapse of certain structures that we've become very used to in our civilization. These might also—they present themselves as crises, but they can also offer doorways.

So in the midst of the most difficult situation is the possibility of the most beautiful soul expression, the

most beautiful soul allegiance, the most beautiful and deep and touching and far-reaching soul stances.

So, again, I want to quote from Nikolai Hartmann, who points out, quite interestingly, that—I have to preface this because he uses the word reality and I think we should better use the word real and reality. He uses the word for—we can, because I'm confused about ontology there with different systems of ontology—we can substitute the word actuality. So, in other words, when a value is actualized, we talk about the reality of that value, when it's actually present, manifested, chosen.

So, the value of that actuality of a value is immediately evident. In other words, when there's kindness there, when there's justice there, clearly it's valuable. We know that. We feel it as a value wherever that is the case.

However, he continues, the non-actuality of values also has a value. In other words, the absence of a value, the blocking of a value, the pervasive blindness to a value that may be around us—the non-actuality of values also has a value. This becomes perceptible as soon as we consider that active intended realization is possible only where a value is non-existent. And that in addition to that, it is active intended realization in which the higher moral species of value is realized, is actualized.

In other words, in a situation where there is no justice, to work towards pointing that out and supporting the possibility and the actuality of justice to come there—that

That initial absence of justice was a value in that it enabled the values of sensibility, choice, action, and actualization. All of these—sensibility, choice, and actualization—together make a moral value. In other words, that active engagement, that doing, that choosing by a human being is itself valuable.

This reveals a strange fact: the absence of a value has value because it allows our moral being to engage, to work, to grow. Hence, the value of attaining something in the world stands in opposition to the value of attempting the effort, even if the goal is not attained or not even attainable. Again, we return to that quality of beyondness and to this question of intention being central, as the Buddha pointed out in his teachings on karma and sīla.

So strangely, crises, absences, immoral situations—situations of immorality—are potentially valuable because they allow us to exercise our moral being, through which we grow, through which the soul grows. This echoes teachings from the Zohar, which offers a curious observation: "There is no good so perfect as that which issues out of evil." This poetic line can be interpreted in multiple ways, but perhaps it relates to this point about crisis as opportunity and the non-actuality of a value having value.

There may be a relationship here with our emphasis in the soul-making dharma on being with dukkha, working with it, having this crucible-like relationship that allows soul-making. Sometimes the profundity of the soul-making that emerges from dukkha is truly worth the effort. Whether the best kind of soul-making always comes from dukkha, I wouldn't necessarily claim, but there's something significant here.

Adin Steinsaltz, commenting perhaps on that Zohar passage, writes that it is only in a world on the brink of disaster—one where the potential for evil, suffering and ignorance is always at hand—that such values as kindness, compassion, courage and wisdom can be actualized. A paradise, a Garden of Eden world, he suggests, would afford little or no opportunity for the exercise of values and for the development of character.

Nikolai Hartmann offers another perspective on conflict and situations in life—not just wars or arguments, but the complexity of different choices, different parties wanting different things, values pulling in different directions. He writes that we can speak in a certain sense of conflict as a value. In the domain of knowledge, problems correspond to this principle. As in knowledge, a problem is a basic value, although it is the opposite of insight.

We want the insight, but a problem—difficult and troublesome as it may be—is actually a basic value because it's an opportunity, a doorway into insight. It's something we must work and wrestle with, digest and assimilate. Out of that compost, something beautiful can grow.

So as in the realm of knowledge, a problem is a basic value, although it is the opposite of insight. Similarly, in ethical life, conflict is basic, although it means incompleteness, disharmony, indeed a lack of indubitable value. Yet conflict is that which keeps discernment and the feeling of value alive and opens up new vistas.

As much as we might want simplicity and peace, thinking we'd prefer everything to be perfect and uncomplicated, there's something strange about this realm of saṃsāra. Conflict keeps discernment and the feeling of value alive and opens up new vistas, partly because of the complexity of our lives and situations, especially in this age of globalization.

Hartmann continues: "Moral life is, in general, life in the midst of conflicts. It is concentration upon them, a constructive solution of them through the commitment of the person." He uses strong language for what happens when we avoid this reality: "All ignoring of it is a sin, an irrevocable injury to ethical being, even to that of one's own personality."

To withdraw, to put on blinders and ignore the complexity of a situation—the conflicts inherent in it, the obscurities, the incompleteness, the differing demands within oneself and between people—is to injure our soul. We somehow wound our ethical being when we choose to ignore conflict and complexity for the sake of simplicity and peace.

As all this works together, there's nothing that really comes first, reflecting the nature of the dependent arising of things.

They're all pieces that feed each other. The values becoming erotic and caught up in the soul-making dynamic, the dimensionality, the beyondness, the meaningfulness, the willingness and capacity to be challenged, stretched, to aspire, the strength, the courage, the devotion. Crisis as opportunity, conflict and

absence of value—also as the ground, if you like, of our moral being, the soil out of which our soul grows, our moral being grows. All these factors can feed each other.

And with that expanding, enriching, deepening, widening of our soul's relationship to values in this sense, there will come, in the dimensionality, in the sense of beyondness, there can come a sense of the divinity of values, the divinity of these ideas as I touched on in the last part—that possibility.

It's interesting, going back to Plato, when he writes about virtue. I was reading an article by Julia Annas, and she points out, she traces through his works over many years different positions that Plato took, or presented, with regard to the relationship of virtues and divinity. It's quite interesting in that we see similar positions in different traditions of Buddha Dharma.

One, in the Phaedo for instance, there's a teaching there, a thrust to the teaching there, that is really about the practitioner, the philosopher, dying to the world, detaching themselves from the everyday concerns and the everyday desires and beliefs. True virtue there does not actually deal with the concerns or the events or the matters of everyday life, but actually true virtue, she writes, consists in an escape or purification from them. Socrates in Plato's text of the Theaetetus says, "Human life must unavoidably contain evil, so we should try to flee from here to there, to the divine realm, away from life, ending rebirth. So we should try to flee from here to there as quickly as we can. And flight is becoming like God to the extent that we can. And becoming like God is becoming just and pious with wisdom."

So there's one teaching here, one thrust through the writings of Plato, that's this very world-escaping, ending-rebirth kind of thrust in which virtue has its place either as a stepping stone to this escape from the world, this removal from the world, or virtue is identified with being exactly that removal from the world. So there is this kind of going hand in hand of the movement of transcendence and the opening to what is transcendent to the world that goes hand in hand in that particular thread of Plato's teachings—that transcending and opening to what is transcendent to our world goes hand in hand with this kind of regard for our world and the affairs of humanity as insignificant.

In later dialogues of Plato, a different position is presented. The idea of the individual's becoming like God is framed as the divine has, if you like, operates with goodness and as goodness and wants goodness, so that when we see aright, when we act and choose and sense in line with goodness, we're actually putting ourselves, so to speak, in the service of, or we become part of the unfolding of the divine goodness and the unfolding and the enactment of the divine's intention for goodness in the world. So you get that in the Philebus and the Timaeus and sometimes in the Laws.

"The work of the divine reason is to organize things for good," Annas writes, "since the divine is good and seeks to spread goodness in the way it orders things. Becoming like God thus comes to be construed as aspiring to identify with the goodness-producing works of the divine, which makes it less surprising that this is a characterization of virtue. Virtue continues to be seen as imposing rational order on potentially refractory materials, like our desires and our obstinateness. But this is connected with the divine."

So one is a world-transcending movement, which regards virtue as either a stepping stone to that transcendence and escaping and disregarding the world, or identifies virtue with that very escaping and disregarding the world. And then in the later dialogues, there's more a sense of virtue, our virtue being, if you like, almost an identification with or an instrument of the divine virtue.

Can you hear already there's parallels between the sort of classical Pali Canon thrust, which I mentioned, I think, near the beginning of the talks on ethics—to end rebirth, to transcend, to be removed from the world, and whatever care we take with paramis and other dhammas and cultivation of sila is really secondary. It serves the purpose of a springboard or an enabling of that transcendence; that's the primary purpose of them. Versus other interpretations or spins that you get in Mahayana Buddhism, for example, where it's possible that the Bodhisattva or the Buddha, certainly a Buddha, certainly, but also Bodhisattva or practitioner, through the Buddha nature, is expressing, manifesting, radiating, if you like, the Dharmakaya, the body of beautiful qualities, of virtues of the Buddha in this world.

Of course, if we practice soul-making in relation to all this, and as we've said, in the context of soul-making Dharma teachings, in a way both of those options can open up for us. But we would certainly expect the second option to open up. Why? Because as something gets involved in the soul-making dynamic, as something becomes an erotic, imaginal object for us—in this case, the ideational imaginal, or through an imaginal figure, the values become erotically imaginal for us—then the self-sense is subsumed into that, becomes imaginal, the world-sense, all of it. Our eros itself, our passion itself becomes imaginal. And in that, it gains, all that gains dimensionality and divinity.

So again, with the soul-making dynamic, there's a possibility for us to see our virtues—the virtues that our life enacts, plays out, our sensibility to them, our choosing them, our courage to enact them in body, speech and mind—is actually the experience in this world of the Buddha nature's virtues, of the Dharmakaya, of God's goodness, of the attributes of God. We would expect that perception to become available, that conception to become available as something we can entertain. It's just a sense and an idea that arises naturally through practice. And with all that, other possibilities start to offer themselves, become available.

Again, I want to read you a passage from, I think it's from Hartman. Here he writes—he's talking about how we sense values—and he says, "Grasping a moral value is sensing it, or more precisely, being gripped by it."

Grasping a moral value is sensing it, or more precisely, being gripped by it. I was struck, reading that, by how interesting I found his choice to put it in the passive voice. We are gripped by a moral value. For us to grasp the moral value is for us to be gripped by it. The ideal moral value, the ideational-imaginal moral value, has some agency on our psyche—just as we speak about with images. They have autonomy and agency. That's one of the elements, isn't it?

This being gripped by a value, by the angelic quality of a value, by its autonomy and its

independence—this being gripped by is the crucial thing for effecting change. Perhaps the strength of that grip and the number of people who are gripped in that way is significant in terms of developing a current, a wave, a momentum for political or social change.

Again, we relate this to the elements of the imaginal when we speak about autonomy of image and of self. We never lose our own autonomy, and I think it's important to realize we can grasp a moral value. It grips us, but there's still an element where we remain free to choose in that direction or not, to be in service to that moral value or not.

Is it the case that there is no free will here? That the moral value utterly determines my will and I have no choice but to realize it? Or do I retain some autonomy, some freedom of will? This is a related question, a whole question of freedom of will. But we can begin to sense more and more this autonomy and agency of the imaginal as potential.

All this, again, is part of the enriching and deepening, dimensionalizing and divinizing of our sense and concept of this ideational imaginal, of the moral values.

It's interesting to consider: is it the case that the higher values and virtues, the ones that are more redolent of divinity, are in a way more easily disturbed? They're weaker. Hartman would say they're weaker—they're higher, but they're weaker. They're less popular, less commonly realized. But at the same time, they also seem to be the ones that elicit the most profound dedication and sacrifice in the relatively fewer people who are devoted to their actualization. Those values that seem more noble, more divine, give rise to the most profound dedication and sacrifice in those who are sensitive to them. Could this fact be significant when we speak of potential systemic or political change, social change?

Think about figures like Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Mandela—three almost iconic figures, completely devoted to justice, or at least a huge part of what they did was this devotion to justice. They were powerfully influential figures. But I wonder whether they had something about their person as well, about their own ethos. They were rarely explicit about it or trumpeted it, but it was there. Something of their ethos had something of the spiritual and the holy and the noble in it. They had what Hartman calls radiant virtue—this radiancy of being that bestows a spiritual light on those around one.

Did they exude or transmit or communicate in their being and in their rhetoric something more than merely the values of justice? They're talking about justice, they're working for justice, but there's something else going on here. In contrast, there are other situations where there's a need for social justice, other social justice movements where the higher imagination, the sense of higher values, has somehow not been ignited. That higher imagination, the imaginal, hasn't been captured there.

Many issues contribute to this predicament, partly because they might lack a person who, in their being and in their speaking, communicates that, exudes that radiant virtue. But is it possible that with the values, when there's a sense of more divinity, there's a deeper and fuller, more intense devotion to and

dedication and willingness to sacrifice for those values?

This can come through the value itself, or it can come through a person who, in a way, is a channel—whose being, as we discussed when we spoke about the self, is a refraction of a daemon that embodies that value, or a reflection of that. They're refracting an angel, or they're refracting an idea, an ideal, in this sense that we may know.

With the sense of divinity somehow present around that issue, it becomes part of what people are actually dedicated to. It's more than just the plain issue of, say, social justice, in whatever context it is. It includes that, of course. It never removes itself from that and completely transcends that.

But it has other dimensions because other, even higher values are wrapped up in it, exerting an attraction on the soul and a loyalty in the soul that is sensitive to them—devotion, dedication.

So with all this dimensionality, this sense of divinity opening up in regard to values, there is also the possibility of the sense of divinity in the values themselves being opened up. And then that has an effect, again, on choices, on stances, on sensibilities, on capacities.

This dimensionality is actually, in certain ways, part of different teachings and different cosmologies. There are some Islamic cosmologies that present a kind of three-tier picture of the universe, if you like. I want to read you a passage from Henri Corbin, who is writing about the works of a Shiite philosopher, Qadi Sa'eed Qummi, but it describes a certain cosmology. What he's describing is actually quite a common cosmology, again, coming out of the original Platonic ideas and Platonic maps and notions and cosmologies and through the Neoplatonic and into Christianity and Islam and Judaism and all kinds of other philosophies.

He says there are three categories of universe. First, there's the phenomenal world, a realm where things are perceptible to the senses. So that's the world that everyone would agree on. But then there is the supersensible world, the world of the soul or angel souls, commonly designated malakut, the place of the mundus imaginalis, the world of the imaginal, whose organ of perception is cognitive imagination. And then thirdly, there is the intelligible world of the pure intelligences or angel intelligences, whose organ of perception is the intuitive intellect.

That three-tiered cosmology was, as I said, very, very common. The second two tiers are alien to our normal, dominant Western outlook. The second of those—the world of the soul or angel souls, the place of the mundus imaginalis—is, of course, one way of framing what we've been talking about a lot with the soul-making teachings. And now when we talk about the ideational imaginal, one way we can think about it is as corresponding to this third tier, this third level of cosmology.

It's such a strange concept and language, it almost doesn't resonate for most people, I would imagine, in the modern Western world: the intelligible world of the pure intelligences or angel intelligences, whose organ of perception is the intuitive intellect. So our intuitive intellect can perceive these ideas, these

ideals, this ideational imaginal. And these intelligences or angel intelligences that exist there are also said to be—and they are unified with their object of intellection.

This is all strange language. What it means is that the angel or the intelligence, the mind, if you like, the consciousness in that realm is united with its object. And so, for example, the intelligence that knows and meditates on in that realm, let's say, justice or kindness, is itself one with the kindness. There's a unity of subject and object postulated there.

Interestingly, I'll just read a bit more because I find it very interesting. Our philosopher—he means this Qadi Sa'eed Qummi—relates these three categories of universe to three categories of space and three of time. There is the obscure, dense time of the sensible world, so our usual sense of time. There is the subtle time of the imaginal world, of the malakut, of the mundus imaginalis, and then there is the even more subtle time, the absolutely subtle time of the world of the intelligence, the world of the ideational imaginal.

It's quite involved—he says a bit more—but all of them come from, all these worlds open up from the energy which is sometimes designated as nafas al-rahman, the breath of the merciful one. The breath of the merciful one, Allah, is what opens up and keeps in existence these levels of world. Sometimes it's called that, the breath of the most merciful; sometimes it's called the primordial cloud, amma.

And then he writes: Having established this initial schema, our philosopher is now in a position to conceive the reality of events and forms, which, while not ceasing to be events and forms, possess a time and a space that are in no way those of the sensible world to which we are accustomed exclusively to relate our notions of event and form.

In other words, we usually think of event and form as being in our world, and we say this happened on June the 14th at this time over there, and this form—I saw this form or this event happened or whatever. But with this scheme, there's then the possibility of events and forms that happen at other levels, in other times, in another time frame, if you like, another dimension of time, another kind of space than what we're used to in our sensible world.

So again, there's this dimensionalizing that doesn't—there's not just a duality between form and formless. There are different levels of formation.

Actually, I'll just read a bit more, because: There exists between these three categories of universe a certain number of essential relationships in that each higher universe is the cause of the one below it, and contains, in a manner more subtle and elevated, the totality of universes below it.

So, in some way, the mundus imaginalis contains and corresponds—has correspondences between the mundus imaginalis and our world, that everyone would agree on, the world of sensible physical phenomena.

Moreover, he continues, while thus containing and enveloping the totality of the universes below it, each higher universe is also the esoteric aspect, the hidden aspect of this totality, its hidden inner aspect or centre.

So the esoteric, hidden aspect of this world is the world of angels, of the imaginal. As we say, we look at this beautiful flower on my desk, and it's gorgeous in its form and color, etc., in its materiality, and it's also refracting, reflecting, echoing, mirroring, expressing, corresponding to something on another level in the mundus imaginalis, as is myself and yourself. Daemon refracted. We echo, mirror, refract, reflect, express, manifest something in the angelic realm. And the whole world is like that.

There's a complication here that I think is important, and I won't go into now in that—well, two things actually to say. One is that in the particular cosmology he's talking about, it's almost like each person has or creates their own universe. So the mundus imaginalis has this objectivity to it, and yet my mundus imaginalis is different than yours, and correspondingly with the others.

So there's a personal nature to this cosmology. It's almost as if different universes are opening up with each person at their center. And yet there's still an objectivity there. That's the first point.

The second point is that usually, or often, what goes with that kind of three-tier cosmology is a hierarchy. And some of the dangers we talked about and what that can do in terms of attitudes to the material phenomenal world. I'm not sure that danger is automatically implied or consequent, but it might be there or not there, even if there is postulated a hierarchy. In other words, the level of the ideas, the intelligences and the objects of intellection is higher than the *mundus imaginalis*, which is higher in hierarchy than the phenomenal, sensible, physical world.

Even if that hierarchy is there, it may or may not lead to denigration. It may actually increase the veneration, the devotion to the sense of beauty of the phenomenal physical world. By giving it that dimensionality, by giving it that rootedness, by giving it that beyondness and mystery, all that. Or it may not.

We're also free to entertain a conception that doesn't hierarchize, if that's a verb, doesn't place those three levels in any kind of hierarchy. So it's almost like we can regard—what we're trying to open up now is the ideational, imaginal—we regard that whole realm or sphere of ideas, ideals, as not necessarily higher than the world of images, the *mundus imaginalis*. We could regard them as non-hierarchical realms that open up for perception, for experience, or we can regard them hierarchically. That's part of our freedom of conception, freedom to entertain different conceptions.

But where there is soul-making in relation to values... where the soul-making dynamic, as I said, starts to open, starts to subsume and draw into its process the whole realm of the ideas, of values, and values as ideas, ideals. Where there's eros of values, something like these kinds of senses of the values, of the moral values as divine ideas. I use those words, as I said, interchangeably, as they have been in history.

Something like those senses, something like that will emerge out of the sense of dimensionalizing. Some kind of sense of their autonomy, some kind of sense of their agency, their pull, their demand, their call, our duty to them, etc. All that will open up. The possibilities are the particulars of the possibility, the way it opens up for each soul, or different times in practice, etc., in life. That might vary, but something like this, I think, will be inevitable once the values are caught up for us in the soul-making dynamic, once we have a soul-making and erotic relationship with them.

And then we can sense ourselves in our meditations, in our life, in our being, in our sensibility, in our acts and choices and stands as participating in that divine sphere realm of ideas. And in participate, we participate in this or that value. Like this or that moral value. And there's a nobility that comes with that. There's a grace and a privilege. It gives our life a sense of beauty, nobility, along with everything else.

Nobility is a word we may come back to because Nikolai Hartmann uses it in a particular way and that's not the way I'm using it right now. So we may come back to that, what he means by that, because it's quite interesting. But I mean more that the participation in values in this way, the sense of participation, comes with the soul-making participation being an element of the imaginal, an element also then of the ideational imaginal. And it brings with it, among other gifts, among other graces, a sense of nobility.

Noble is also a word, of course, that we have in the Dharma tradition. Noble truths and noble ones, etc. *Ar ya* is the Pali. And I don't know, there is some relationship between *Arya* and Aryan and somehow the peoples that traveled over to India, emigrated from India, from Iran. And perhaps it might have had some ethnic or even racist implications as they were purer or better, I don't know. And in our culture, in English, nobility also has a kind of class association with it. But I mean it more in its soul sense, in the nobility of a being, of a soul, of a disposition, of an ethos.

And to me that's very much part of the territory that opens up for us and the flavor of soul that opens up in our self-sense as we allow the soul and encourage the soul to engage with higher values, moral values in these ways.

I remember teaching quite a few years ago with a teacher, a colleague, and she was giving a talk and I was obviously there present. Some part of it, she started talking about this word noble, as in noble truths and noble ones, etc., that the Buddha used quite a lot in his teaching in the Pali Canon. And she said, "I just can't relate to that word." And she seemed quite embarrassed about it, or embarrassed even about talking about it, or imagining that it might be something that had anything to do with herself, or that she might grow into. I can't remember what the larger point she was making was.

But I was struck by that, because for me it's a very beautiful word. It captures quite well certain qualities of soul, and directions and alignments and devotions of soul and ethos. And I think where there is soul-making, it will bring a sense of nobility. And where there is this kind of soul-making relationship with the virtues and with moral values, with the ideation of moral values, it will bring that, inevitably. It will weave it in.

So all this asks quite a lot of us, as is often the case with soul-making teachings.

And as I mentioned earlier, there's often—not always, and the relationship is complex, so I don't want to oversimplify—but there's often a correlation between how entangled we are in the pain of the inner critic or anxiety about what others think of us. There's frequently an inverse relationship between the strength of this self-anxiety and inner criticism, and our capacity for virtue and for developing sensitivity to moral values, especially the more elevated ones.

I remember seeing a television advertisement for some car. Like most car commercials, it featured someone driving, presenting that person and their driving experience in an almost fantastical way—as if this particular car would transform you into someone wonderful, make your life extraordinary, allow you to experience yourself in this elevated manner simply through owning it. The soundtrack included the line "dance like no one is watching," which I believe was from a popular song.

The entire tenor and thrust of this advertisement centered around a woman driving alone, emphasizing themes of independence and freedom—freedom to be herself. The marketing strategy relied on the allure of individual self-expression, assuming that our attraction to this concept would, by association, create desire for the car itself.

But "dance like no one is watching" is actually about self-acceptance and relief from anxiety—specifically, relief from worrying about others' judgments. If the advertisement had presented this more truthfully, it would have acknowledged the real question: why do I care if someone's watching? It's because I'm concerned about their opinions, anxious about their judgments of me.

This self-anxiety is, at most, a lesser concern than authentic individual self-expression. The latter sounds more noble, appears to be a worthier value. But the advertisement was conflating these two very different things. This conflation reflects our problematic conception of and relationship with individuality—individuality as a diminished value in our broader society, precisely because we lack a deeper, richer understanding of what true individuality might be.

Wrapped up in our current understanding is social anxiety, the inner critic, the persistent concern: do they think I'm okay? What will others think of me? As I mentioned, there's a relationship between this anxiety over self-appearance and a diminished capacity for virtue. It's a reciprocal dynamic: the more self-anxiety and inner criticism we carry, the less we tend to care for virtues in their full breadth and height.

When the inner critic gains a strong grip, it can actually prevent ethical sensitivity from developing. But the reverse is equally true. When we begin cultivating this ideational, imaginal sense of values—when we develop a soul-making relationship with virtue, giving attention to these qualities so they can grow within our soul—the self-anxiety often diminishes naturally.

This happens partly because the self becomes subsumed into the soul-making process, and we begin to

sense ourselves as image. Social self-anxiety is related to not sensing the self as image, to lacking a sense of dimensionality, divinity, archetypal or imaginal roots and origins to the self.

Catherine shared that Ruth King, an African-American Dharma teacher, had observed that many Westerners seem to have very little roots at all—virtually no sense of grounding. There are complex social and historical reasons for this phenomenon. She was speaking particularly about white people in the United States, though this might extend to Europe as well.

But there's the possibility of cultivating an entirely different kind of root system—roots in sensing oneself as connected to the divine, having imaginal origins and foundations. Without this deeper rooting, we have no anchor. We're blown about by every wind, desperately vulnerable and fragile in the face of others' opinions.

We live within a culture that promotes an impoverished, shrunken, narrow and shallow form of individuality. It has no roots, or very poor roots planted in depleted soil—flimsy, dry earth that cannot sustain genuine growth. But we can open up and deepen those roots, which gives us tremendous strength and capacity.

There's this reciprocal relationship where causality flows in both directions—an inverse correlation between care for ethics and self-anxiety. Part of what emerges from that strength, from that deeper rooting, from the involvement of values in the soul-making dynamic and the corresponding recognition of self as imaginal, is what allows us to experience what we might call healthy guilt, or what I prefer to term remorse. I use "remorse" to distinguish it from guilt, which, as I pointed out in earlier talks, is usually unhelpful.

Nikolai Hartman makes this point quite emphatically—that healthy guilt and remorse are actually necessary for our moral being. So again, let me share a passage where he articulates what's demanded of us in our relationship to values, in our exploration of morals, for cultivating a wide, deep, rich and beautiful relationship with moral being. He also illuminates what might grow from soul-making that includes and involves moral values.

He writes: "There is a will to responsibility, even to guilt, as regards one's own conduct. There is a repugnance to the presumption of exculpation, of being rid of guilt, as implying a repudiation of guilt. It is not as if one wanted guilt as such; one would be glad not to have it. But once we are laden with it, we cannot allow it to be taken away without denying our selfhood, our personhood. A guilty man has a right to carry his guilt."

He must refuse deliverance from without. To retain his guilt is valuable for him despite its oppressive load. It signifies for him the retention of his personality, of his personhood, the preservation and recognition of his freedom—his moral freedom, his freedom of will. With his guilt, he would lose a greater moral good: his manhood. In other words, if he lost his guilt in that way, if he just ignored it or zapped it,

he would actually lose something else. He would lose his personhood.

"In taking upon himself his own deed and his guilt, in asserting his responsibility, in his sincere willingness to carry it, there is a moral pride in the free deed which speaks out. It is the majestic right to manhood"—let's say personhood. "It is the majestic right to personhood, the foundation upon which all moral being and non-being rest. To surrender it is moral meanness, betokening incapacity to be free."

He continues: "The presumption in washing away guilt, in discharging it, the admission of 'mitigating circumstances,' is at bottom a moral disenfranchisement and a degradation of the man."

So it's a strong teaching there. And again, it's difficult for us in our culture of inner critic and the pain that causes—the pandemic of that. It's difficult for us to recognize the place and the necessity, perhaps, of guilt or remorse. I admit that I acted poorly there, that I chose not in line with my highest aspirations.

He also makes the point that "a conflict of values inheres in the concept of guilt is not to be overlooked." Basically he's saying guilt is an interesting phenomenon, because "guilt is and remains a disvalue in man. No one, so long as he is guiltless, could wish for it. But the astonishing thing is that when a man has once burdened himself with it and bears it, it gains the character of a value which contradicts the value of innocence."

So there's something—no one would want guilt. It's a disvalue, something we don't want. But once it's there and we can open to it in this way—what I prefer to call remorse—once we accept it, hold it, work with it, and take on its lessons, are taught by it, it actually has the character of a value. We become more mature; our moral being grows through it.

So is there a necessity for the self, for the soul, for a certain kind of relationship with guilt or remorse? Might it also be a necessity in our relationship with such difficult and fundamental issues—issues that question our fundamental orientations, priorities, and perspectives on almost everything, but fundamentally on the world and on humanity's place in the world? Is there a necessity for remorse and guilt in our relationship with issues like climate change and species extinction?

Just as there is—and many people have pointed out—a necessity for grief. And some people, myself included, would say there's a necessity for anger, righteous indignation. Maybe there's a necessity for guilt.

I remember Catherine leading a guided meditation on one of our soul-making retreats. She had seven stages, I think. We had to choose something to become image for us—maybe it was on Sensing with Soul. Something in the world that we would then... She was guiding us through ways we could support the possibility of sensing that thing with soul. I chose an apple tree in my garden.

One of the stages she went through—I can't remember how she worded it—had to do with either asking forgiveness for or feeling remorse for how we have looked on that thing in the past without soul, and so

not seen its holiness, not conceived of or sensed its divinity, its dimensionality. That particular strand at that point really touched me in what she was guiding us through.

Even with this apple tree, which I very much enjoyed and loved, I could feel pregnant in that stage my own and also humanity's impoverished, shrunken, narrowed, and shallowed relationship with nature, with the things of the world—and allowing my heart and my soul to be touched by it. It felt very beautiful, very important.

But in relation to issues like climate change and species extinction—massive, massive issues, fundamental issues in so many ways—might grief, anger, and also guilt, in the sense that Hartman is talking about, remorse, be part of healing? Part of allowing us greater strength, greater uprightness, greater capacity for courage, for action, and a greater capacity of heart to hold all this, the depths of emotions?

If we think about the actuality of our lives and their complexity, whether in a much wider social or global sense or just even in a personal sense, sometimes the structure of situations creates or presents to us choices between what basically, if we look at them in terms of values, are choices between different values. If I do this, I'm prioritizing and validating and choosing in line with this value, but I'm neglecting this one and transgressing, if you like, a commitment to that other value.

Opposing values present themselves to us and we have to choose. So it might be just in a very personal situation where it's a matter of truthfulness to a beloved one, but one knows that truth will hurt them. Notice I didn't say harm, which is one of the Buddha's stipulations about right speech—that it's not harmful. But hurt is not harm.

That a person might find this truth that I'm sharing or telling them about, or whatever, they might find that hurtful, may not be harming to them. It might just hurt. Life hurts sometimes. Truth hurts sometimes. But it might be that kind of choice. What's my loyalty to in that kind of situation? The truthfulness or the non-hurting? The kindness? The compassion?

There's not a formulaic answer to that. Each situation is different. Each situation is new, has a different subtle particularity and nuance to it.

Or it might be in a wider social situation. So, for example, with the Extinction Rebellion actions, they disrupt, to a certain extent, the business-as-usual functioning of at least portions of a city or society for a certain amount of time. It blocks traffic. Some people can't get to work. Some people are trying to go here or there. They're delayed. Or if you want to disrupt Heathrow's functioning in protest at the building of a third runway, it will disrupt and it will upset a lot of people.

And so one has an allegiance to a certain extent to not wanting to cause upset, not wanting to inconvenience. And on the other hand, one has an allegiance to the need for action and waking up with regards to climate change and species extinction. And so these two values are in opposition. And myself and some friends as well, when we were considering getting involved in Extinction Rebellion actions, this

was part of what came up. Certainly it came up for me and I think for others as well. I'm not sure about upsetting people. I'm not sure is it ethical to do that? Let alone the possibility of a kind of backlash for upsetting people.

So there's no real escape from this in life, this fact that we will be culpable in one way or another in situations. Even when we're choosing a certain value, we are often culpable because there's another value in the situation that in choosing whatever we choose, we're neglecting the other one. So that happens often.

Let me read a passage by Hartman on that very point. So he's talking about this kind of thing, these kinds of situations: "It is inherent in the essence of such moral conflicts that in them value stands against value and that it is not possible to escape from them without being guilty."

Here it is not the values as such in their pure ideality which are in conflict. That's something we'll come back to. But he says, the conflict arises from the structure of the situation. This makes it impossible to satisfy both at the same time.

Important point, important for our moral maturity, also our moral intelligence. We have to realize this is the case. If I'm trying to wend a line, to travel a path where I'm guilt-free, maybe that's a pie-in-the-sky delusion. I will be confronted very often in life, in small ways and in large ways, with situations where I have to choose one thing over another. Not to choose is a sin, in Hartman's words. It's a withdrawing of my soul's engagement with life, with the sphere of morality. It's a refusal to participate in life, in values. It's a refusal to grow my soul.

But to engage and think I can be guilt-free is also just lacking in a kind of mature understanding of the nature of our life, the nature of samsara, if you like, the nature of moral situations.

So, it's asking quite a lot. We can be given quite a lot through the soul-making process and dynamic, as I said, as it starts to subsume and involve values, but this is asking quite a lot, as does all deep and wide practice, and certainly soul-making practices.

And is part of what's necessary also the kind of training in regard to our heart and our emotional capacity and our emotional awarenesses we put so much emphasis on in the Soul-Making Dharma? Is that also a kind of necessary prerequisite or at least part and parcel of our ethical training? So the ethos and emotional training are linked.

So as I said, our capacity to feel certain emotions and difficult emotions, like guilt, like grief, like anger. And sometimes, particularly with grief, it can be heartbreaking. Do I have, is the heart big enough? Have I made my heart big enough? Have I somehow opened the capacity of the heart that it can hold all that? Am I able to discern and disentangle the different strands of emotion that might arise as what feels like just an overwhelming and confusing emotional complex?

Can I see, oh, there's this emotion, there's that emotion. Can I just see, ah, there's a few different things in there. And can I focus on perhaps each one in turn as well as on the whole complex? Do I have clarity as well as capacity?

This development of emotional skill takes real dedication to cultivate. Do I have the ability to prioritize certain emotions, for example? Can I focus on my love for a particular value and prioritize that? Can I stay steady with this strand of emotion, dwelling in that deeper current of devotion and alignment, that love for this or that value, as we discussed earlier regarding guilt?

All these aspects of what we might call training of the heart—our emotional awareness and skills—may well be necessary prerequisites for our further growth in terms of our ethos, our relationship with ethics. And all this takes tremendous sensitivity.

The soul's sensitivity to values and virtues is something that, as Hartman noted, varies among individuals. Not everyone has equal sensitivity to moral values, to the range of values, or to certain higher values. But we can care for our soul's sensitivity to values and virtues. We can nourish it and seek to support its growth—its widening, deepening, and heightening.

Our sensitivity to values and virtues allows our participation in them to flourish. The degree of our soul's sensitivity is the degree to which our participation in them is supported. It begins with sensitivity—with the soul being stirred, feeling resonance and beauty. Through the natural eros present there, we are drawn into participation in these values.

This soul sensitivity to values and virtues, in their breadth, height, and depth, is itself a virtue. Sensitivity to virtues is itself a virtue. When we survey the world around us, we might notice that some sensitivities appear much rarer than others. The sensitivity to not killing, for instance—while there are many forms of killing in the world—represents a fairly common ethical sensitivity. Not stealing, similarly. But other sensitivities seem far more rare, much less commonly encountered.

Consider, for example, that moment in the Polly Higgins interview when something shifted in the flow of conversation—the perspective that valued the earth in and for itself, not merely as support for human survival and prosperity. That value in itself seems far rarer. Are there indeed higher and more rarely sensed values? I believe there are.

How much of this rarity regarding certain values and sensitivity to them results from historical conditioning and the partiality of moral vision in any culture? How much is trainable, and how much is innate to particular souls? These are fascinating questions to consider as we explore what it might mean to reopen avenues of moral education that seem to have vanished from our culture.

Caring for and valuing the ethical rights of the earth, of species, of ecosystems—this involves a different ontology altogether. In terms of ethics and ethical sensibility, this may be more rare and relatively unusual. Several factors may contribute to this rarity: the dilution of our perception, the dispersal of

effects from our personal actions and choices within the vast web of others' choices, and the decline in recognizing virtue itself as important alongside efficacy in ethical life, especially when situations become complex or appear hopeless.

Related to this is the rarity of a metaphysics that supports recognizing the earth, an ecosystem, or a species as valuable in itself—over and above the sum of its individual members' suffering. Why do some people seem more aware, steadfast in their commitment, and attuned to certain moral principles than others?

I was struck by Greta Thunberg when I first read about her solitary vigil outside the Parliament building in Stockholm. Her lonely determination, her steadfastness, her will impressed me deeply. The article mentioned that she had Asperger's, placing her on what's called the autistic spectrum. This led me to wonder about something: one characteristic of Asperger's, as I understand it, is that someone with this condition may not be as relationally empathic or sensitive, not as attuned to or impacted by what another person is feeling or expressing through facial expressions, gestures, or emotional tone. They don't pick up on these social cues as readily or feel such sensitivity to them.

Setting aside the pathological implications of the term "Asperger's," someone who leans more toward principles and abstractions might, in the absence of such pulls from others' opinions and emotional cues, be able to remain more steadfast and clear. They can keep their sight fixed on principles and what might seem like abstractions—virtues and values—that exert a felt demand of duty stronger than the emotions of people directly in front of them, who might be angry about blocked traffic or upset by challenging statements about what humanity needs to renounce.

For most people without Asperger's, while there remains some sensitivity to the impact and demands of abstract principles like values, they are more impacted by, sensitive to, and swayed by other persons' emotions. They feel more empathy toward other people. This suggests that for some individuals, the path into soul-making with regard to values—this whole approach to ethics—may lead more naturally through relationship with an imaginal figure who is a person. Through this relationship, they implicitly connect with the values embodied by that figure.

Remember that values constitute an element of the imaginal. This way into soul-making—through an imaginal figure with its implicit or explicit values—may prove more powerful in affecting moral allegiances, choices, and behavior in actual life.

So there may be differences among people in whether one gravitates more easily toward principles, ideas, ideals, values, and virtues, or toward people—imaginal or actual. This difference may have implications for the possibilities and particular path of moral training and moral development.

Consider how much of Jesus's moral power and influence comes from the stories in the Gospels rather than from Christian dogmatics or theology. There's something deeply touching in the personhood revealed

through those stories of Jesus, which for many people carries the moral power and influence of the Christian message.

But there exists this possibility for everyone—though perhaps with personal predispositions—that relationship with what may seem to others like abstractions—values, virtues, beauty, ideals—can be genuinely soul-making, as we've been exploring.

Is there, then, a kind of pull in opposite directions between ethical ideas on one hand and relational empathy on the other, between principles and personal sensitivities? It's not simple, of course. One could imagine someone with very little empathy for persons yet maintaining allegiance to some principle or order. This still needs directing in the right way.

But for most people, there's probably this double possibility—both through the imaginal and through the ideational imaginal. As part of the complexity of our moral life, there's often a call, a tug from both directions. So there emerges a kind of fluid and sensitive balance, a conversation of allegiances to principles and to immediate empathy.

Consider again the example of participating in an Extinction Rebellion action while people around you grow upset. Maybe both these capacities—principled commitment and empathic sensitivity—are part of a good life, a beautiful life. They're both virtues.

Obviously, if we were completely without empathy or sensitivity to others, to whoever stands before us and how they're feeling, that would not be virtue but dis-virtue. But this possibility to widen, extend, and heighten our sensitivity to values, to grow in our relationship with moral values by deepening our commitment and prioritizing of them—this is both possible and deeply beautiful.

Let me read another passage where Hartman describes a kind of maturity and depth of relationship with moral values. He writes about the wise person:

"To the wise man, the domination of values in their ideality—the domination, in Platonic phrase, of moral ideas—is something natural. In this sense, Plato was right when he joined this virtue to the beholding of ideas, and indeed in such a way that a man returning from the vision of ideas sees in their light everything which appears to him in life. The wise man carries into all the relations of life the standards of value which he possesses in his spiritual taste."

So you meditate, you have that direct encounter with what might seem an abstract notion—this ideational, imaginal moral value. One carries that back into life where it colors and shapes our perspective, our perceptions of our lives and relationships. It orients us.

"He saturates his outlook upon life with them. This domination of values does not come to him by way of reflection or through knowledge of commandments, but is an immediate, intuitive, emotionally-toned domination, which from the centre of moral perception penetrates all unobserved and impulsive

excitations, and is therefore already alive in them."

There's something very beautiful in this description. It's not something we arrive at through logical deduction. We're not simply obeying commandments or following the five precepts. Rather, there's something immediate, intuitive, emotionally toned. Something in our heart and soul is touched, comes into contact with the ideational imaginal of a moral value. This spreads out into our life, our sensibility, our perceptions, our choices and actions.

With all these possibilities and relationships, Hartman writes something crucial: "Man, as the product of conditions, is neither good nor bad, however much disposition, upbringing and milieu may smooth or make difficult the way to moral goodness. He can only become one or the other, become good or bad, insofar as he enters the conflicts of life and makes decisions in their midst."

And then there's a third possibility, which is meditation on these ideas or ideals that we've been discussing directly - not through an imaginal figure first, but approaching them straight on. We can take the idea of justice, or compassion, or courage, or beauty, or truth, and work with these directly as meditation objects.

This requires a different kind of approach than we might typically think of when we consider meditation. We're not working with the breath, or with a visual form, but with something more subtle - with the very essence of a moral quality or value. Yet this can be profoundly nourishing and transformative for the soul.

We begin by bringing the concept to mind - let's say justice. But we're not approaching this intellectually, analytically, trying to define it or think about it. Rather, we're opening to it imaginally, allowing ourselves to sense into what justice feels like, what its essence is. We might sense into its qualities - perhaps there's something of equilibrium, of rightness, of restoration, of fierce clarity.

As we open to this ideational imaginal object, we can feel our whole being - heart, body, energy body, soul - beginning to resonate with this quality. We might feel our posture naturally adjusting, our breath changing, our energy reorganizing itself in relationship to this value. There's something happening at the level of being, not just thinking.

And as with the other forms of meditation we've explored, eros can arise - a deep love for this value, a longing to embody it more fully, to serve it, to let it shape our life more completely. This eros then becomes part of what feeds and sustains the meditation, creating what we might call a virtuous circle of aspiration and realization.

Through this kind of practice, these moral values begin to work on us, to shape us, to become part of the fabric of our being. They're no longer abstract concepts but living realities that inform our perception, our choices, our way of being in the world. This is how we participate in that "building of moral being" that Hartman spoke of - not through mere intellectual understanding, but through this deeper soul-work of imaginally engaging with the highest human values.

these moral values directly.

Actually, a sense of justice, or the idea of justice, or beauty—if we say that. Okay, it's not strictly a moral value, but it almost is for me. But anyway, one can get a sense of, in meditating on that, get a sense of that idea.

I'll come back to that in a second, but in any of these ways—any of those three ways—in meditation, in just being sensitive to, in developing and allowing our sensitivity to, our allowing ourselves to be touched by these values, in feeling our devotion to these values, and in the choices of our actions, of our speech, of our thought, of what we cultivate—all of that, the meditation, the sensitivity, the feeling of our devotion, our actions, our choices, all of that feeds our virtue. It grows the virtues in our soul and grows our soul. It's part of our soul-making. And it starts to seep out, to extend to our whole life.

And in all of those ways—the meditation, the sensitivity, the devotion, the feeling of the devotion to the choices, the cultivation—it's possible to sense or conceive the self and the soul, as I said, as participating in that. If we use that phrase from the Korban passage, the angel or intelligence whose object of intellection is one with it. We sense ourselves participating in these divine ideas—the divine, ideational, imaginal of the values. And there's a privilege, a grace, a beauty in that, a strength, there's meaningfulness in that. We can actually sense it and we can conceive it, this kind of participation in that level of being.

In the third possibility, just in that little list there, so it's possible to take an idea—it might be a certain kind of, as I said, it might be justice, it might be beauty, it might be a certain kind of love. So we may come back to one of the kind of loves that Hartman talks about: love of the remote, love of those in the distant future and the noble soul. One can orient towards that kind of love, or the idea of that kind of love.

And, you know, it might start with reflecting on how I am with that in my life, and sensing my life, and sensing perhaps, maybe I do orient that way, or I don't, and what would open that up, what would make that beautiful for me? Or as I said, I see it in my life, I sense, I'm already touched by that value. I'm already devoted to that value. I can see it in the kinds of choices and sacrifices I make. So again, allowing oneself one's story into it, and then it can kind of crystallize down to the purer idea, the purer ideal. And that can become a meditation object, and we can become kind of absorbed in that sense.

So I'm not talking about a lot of thinking at this point. It's really a kind of a space with the essence of this ideational-imaginal in it.

But in that process, in that meditative process that's possible there, it's, again, at some point it will be inevitable that we will notice, just as in meditation on an imaginal figure, an imaginal other, that self and the world become involved, become implicated, become infected in that meditation, in that opening up of the soul-making sense. So that there starts to be a corresponding sense or image, sense of the self and of the world that is part of the larger picture, larger dynamic, larger actuality of meditating on that ideational, imaginal object.

And the same principles of meditation apply. Here's that beloved other. In this case, it's an idea—moral value, as idea, as essence. But as we meditate, as we meditate and get absorbed in it and feel it with our whole energy body, etc., and that sensitivity and the attunement, the resonances, we start to notice, we will at some point start to notice that self and world are also become caught up. The soul-making sense expands to our sense of self and world. And that's actually, again, part of the deepening and the stabilizing of that kind of meditation.

And there may be, if you do pursue this kind of thing, there may be too, at certain points, a kind of quantum leap. So at first, as I said, it might start—one's actually sort of kind of reflecting on that value or kind of just holding it a little bit in mind and there's thoughts around and then maybe, as I said, a sense of one's life and what the status of one's relationship and orientation is with regard to that ideal.

But as one practices with it, it might then take a kind of quantum leap to another level where there's a sense of another realm. One really feels, "Oh, I'm in another realm here." There's a kind of beatitude there. The pure essence of the idea. And that kind of quantum leap—may or may not, it might be gradual—but there's the possibility of a quantum leap and the possibility of, let's say there's a gradation of possibility in this kind of meditation.

So sometimes you get these quantum leaps in a kind of jhanic meditation, suddenly—I mean really, now I'm in the third jhana, it's really a different realm. It really feels I'm in a different realm here. And so something similar may happen. We enter the sphere, the realm of ideal being, the realm of the ideational, imaginal. And in that, as I said, there is great beauty. There is a beatitude.

So those are possibilities to explore, and certainly in meditation, but also in the wider range of what I've been saying here. So if you want, you can explore that. Perhaps some of you will even develop these ideas and these possibilities and these connections more than I have as time goes on.

Again, with soul-making, there's the opening, the complexifying, the enriching, the extension of the reach, the drawing in of more and more areas of our being, of existence, of our lives, the creation and discovery of different, more and more erotic objects for us, erotic others. And so endless possibilities. That goes with the soul-making dynamic.

So that's here, and it can open out, and perhaps, as I said, some of you will also get likewise interested in this as a certain kind of area of potential opening and exploration for soul-making.

Thank you for listening.

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