Preliminaries, Regarding Voice, Movement, and Gesture (Part 4)

Rob Burbea · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Rob Burbea · 1:59:56

Before I introduce exercise five or the fifth set of exercises, I'd like to say a bit more about exercise four and add a possible variation.

Given the instructions for exercise four and the first part with blessing, it would be quite normal and certainly understandable to hear those instructions and think, "What does blessing look like? What does blessing sound like? What would that look like as a movement or gesture?" There's a kind of process instigated by the mind, perhaps drawing upon past associations with blessing—though in our culture it's not a word in common currency anymore, having much currency only within certain circles.

We might think of placing hands on the head, as in some traditions one blesses by placing one's hands on someone's head and uttering a blessing. Or in other traditions, marking a cross or small crucifix on the forehead of the one blessed, or gesturing in the air marking a crucifix—all very beautiful gestures from other traditions. We might think blessing involves bowing, or hands in namaste prayer pose, or palms tracing over the energy body, conveying and conferring the energy of blessing through the hands into that space, penetrating the energy body and energy field with blessing.

When we think this is what blessing looks like or sounds like, out of that thinking and those associations comes the movement, gesture, or vocalization. All that's really great. When we've done rituals and ceremonies on past retreats and included these kinds of instructions with blessings, this is part of what's gone on for people, and it's wonderful, beautiful, and can be very powerful.

But it's possible to open up the recognition of a slightly different way of entering into this intention—where the whole propulsion and instigation of the movement, gesture, or vocalization doesn't come so much from an idea. Not so much an idea leading to an action, an idea of blessing or associations about what blessing looks like. Yes, that has its place, but I want to invite and open up space for a different possibility.

Starting instead just with the intention of blessing, even if I'm not quite sure what that actually means for me. Let it be an open word. Go with what I've got. Let the word itself be a seed—who knows what will germinate, what will sprout from that seed. Just start with the intention of blessing and begin moving, gesturing, vocalizing, whatever it is, depending on which part of the exercise you're doing.

So there's the intention, even if it's not quite clear what that word "blessing" exactly means, and just start

moving with the intention. Almost like incorporating feedback from the movements, gestures, and vocalizations you're doing. Sense as you're moving, gesturing, vocalizing: Does this feel soulful? If I do this, does it feel more soulful? If I do that, does it feel less soulful?

Just as we do with imaginal practice and soul-making practice, maintain a part of your awareness as very attentive, refined, careful mindfulness on the sense of soulfulness in the moment—what is supporting that and what is not supporting that, where it opens and blossoms and grows and deepens, and where it shuts down a bit or gets flat or narrow. It could be the sense of soulfulness, the sense of blessing, or both.

What you're really doing is starting with an intention and beginning to move with that intention. Whatever actions, movements, gestures, vocalizations you're doing, you're receptive to and attuned to how that feels in line with the intention. Let the movement, gesture, vocalization shape the action in time as it goes—playing it by ear, creating it like pottery on the potter's wheel as you're going, through the feel of it, through the feedback and signals of soul and blessedness coming back to you. This is slightly different than starting with an idea and then replicating that idea, perhaps without putting so much attention on what feels soulful and what doesn't.

Both approaches are good, but I really want to open up that space. If we have space for that second possibility, if we do it that second way, or if at least some of the time we're in that second mode, then a couple of things arise. One is: what helps me be in that mode? It's quite difficult—actually quite difficult to dance, for example, and really be sensitive to the sense of soul-making in terms of the genuine, authentic imaginal and all the elements. So what would support it?

Well, one thing may or may not be—I have to find out—do I need to slow down? So do I need to slow the whole movements down, for instance, or pause between movements? What's the kind of rhythm that allows me to read, to sense, to be attuned and receptive to the sense of soulfulness in the moment and whether it's being opened and supported or closed and not supported—the sense of blessing?

So what pace do I need to go at? It's just like doing walking meditation, doing any kind of walking meditation. There's always this question: what pace should I walk at that right now most helps whatever meditation I'm trying to do, whatever way of looking I'm engaging in that walking posture?

So one is a question of pacing. It might be slowing it down. It might not be. So don't necessarily assume it is. But sometimes going slower allows us, affords us a greater sensitivity, a greater attunement and a greater reading of the soulfulness and the sense of soul-making, the sense of blessing that is there.

A second consideration may just be—and this goes for so much, of course—to the degree that we're judging ourselves in the moment, that will usually, almost always, shut down my sensitivity, my capacity to notice the sense of soulfulness and blessedness in the moment.

This is strange, you know, by most people's—by conventional behavior in our society, all this is pretty strange, some of these exercises. And this one in particular may be very strange. And then you're doing it

in a group. So there are all kinds of reasons it would be quite normal and expected for fear of judgment or self-judgment to arise. "Oh, I'm silly" or whatever it is. "I look silly. I'm not getting it. I'm not doing it very well." Whatever it is. Is it possible to just let that go? It's a question. But I'll come back to that actually a little bit later.

But to the degree that there's judging there, self-judging there, and fear of judgment from another, to that degree it shuts down our sensitivity generally speaking, but also in this particular exercise and the kinds of sensitivity we need in this particular exercise.

But this second way of doing it, where we're sort of just focusing on the intention, planting the intention, letting the intention instigate and lead our actions, even if the intention is not fully comprehended by us. What does blessing mean? What does it mean to bless someone? I don't know. Maybe, or I only know a little bit, or whatever it is.

But in the second way of doing it, or second leaning, let's say, second emphasis, then we're letting that intention lead us and just starting the movement and kind of reading it, surfing the whole situation, responding with our receptivity, with our sensitivity, responding to what we sense in terms of the soulfulness and the blessedness, and letting that shape the movements, the gestures, the vocalizations we're doing. So we're letting the body and the energy body and the sense of the soulfulness in the moment guide the movements, the gestures, the vocalizations, at times at least.

Seeing if it's possible to lean into that mode, let's say more, sometimes at least, more than the other mode, which is a kind of—almost like a preconception, an idea, a notion, a memory, an association of blessing and what it looks like or sounds like. An idea of what the movements, gestures and vocalizations convey blessing.

So both good, both fruitful, but see if you can sometimes get a sense of moving between those different modes, or at least between those two different emphases, let's say, because it might not be so black and white.

As I said, this is quite a strange exercise by sort of conventional understandings and the way we conventionally understand what the voice is and how we use the voice, for example, how we communicate. So usually, of course, we use the voice and we think of the voice as an instrument, a vehicle through which, by which we communicate, share or communicate something. And that usually implies describing something.

Through our voice, we share, communicate, and thus describe what I'm feeling or my story or something that happened or an idea or an image or whatever it is. And that's usually the way we relate to how we use the voice and what the voice is—communicating something through trying to describe it, to represent it.

And even often sometimes when we're doing mantra practice or we introduce chanting and we kind of

hear, "Okay, this is the mantra," we learn the melody and the syllables or whatever. And part of us is thinking, "Okay, what does it mean?" Or if not, "What does it mean?" What's the character of this mantra? Whose mantra is it? Which deity does it belong to? "Ah, it's, for example, Avalokiteśvara. Then I know. Then I know."

It's invoking compassion because Avalokiteshvara. So that in the chanting of the mantra, the reciting of the mantra, I'm invoking, I'm thinking—I'm obviously concentrating on the sound and the voice, but I'm invoking the meaning of compassion. Even if those syllables, I don't know what they mean, and some of them don't actually mean anything. They're seed syllables that don't actually have meanings. Others are seed meanings as well, in different mantras, but anyway.

But oftentimes we as Westerners will want to know, well, who am I invoking? So that when I'm chanting the Om Mani Padme Hum, and it's Avalokiteshvara, it's compassion. And part of me is thinking about the meaning of compassion. Again, I don't mean a lot of discursive thought, but I mean the whole vibe of compassion. And I realize that that's what this mantra means.

Now, of course, that's not wrong. It's not wrong at all for a mantra. And it wouldn't be wrong for the first part of this exercise, exercise four, where the intention is towards blessing, letting that word blessing be soft and elastic and expandable. But what if the sound itself, as sound, was sensed with soul? Not to do with its meaning. This is where the second part of the exercise comes in. Maybe they're already coming through and being predominant even at times in the first part of the exercise where there is the blessing.

So some sound itself sensed with soul. We're moving towards a jungle of sound, a landscape of vocalizations, mysterious, because not necessarily meaning anything, or at least not just meaning anything.

Now I've said this before—I've mentioned it several times, I don't know how much it's landed, because again I've been too quick, too brief in going through it—but the voice itself, my voice now, is trying to convey certain meanings. And there's a logical path through what I'm saying, and each sentence is structured grammatically, syntactically, and all that. But at the same time, there's a level of the sounds that you're hearing that transcends meaning.

Yes, there's a meaning there, and hopefully you're listening for the meaning, and you're understanding it, so you can apply it in exercises and understand soul-making and all that. But there's also a music here. There's also just the sensing the soul of the sound. The mystery, the ineffable mystery of the sounds, and so the sounds right now of my voice. And there's an unfathomable mystery in that, if it's sensed with soul. If I can sense it with soul. It opens up a whole other—it opens up other dimensions, but it opens up a whole other direction of dimensionality.

So the dimensionality of any kind of verbal utterance can be through the meaning. For instance, when we convey something and it's beautiful or poetic or we convey an image or even convey our life story or

something that happened or how we're feeling or an image, in the meaning of what we're conveying, we can convey mystery—the mystery of what we're conveying, the mystery of our being, the mystery of being in general, the unfathomability of it, for example, the unfathomability of the image. All that's conveyed when we share an image and the person gets the image or starts resonating with the image.

So the person listening also—the dimensions of what is heard, of the sounds that are heard, open up through meaning, but also not through meaning, through just sound themselves, sensing the soul of the sound themselves. Now, as I said, they can be there both at the same time, if we enter a certain mode of listening and mode of speaking. So right now, for instance. The meaning of this and the dimensionality of the meaning of this and the sensing the soul of what's opened up through the meaning of what's being said in my voice. But also the dimensions that are opened up just through the sound, through the music of it, the mystery of it, the miracle of hearing and of sound. This particular sound right now. This particular music. Different than other musics, unique, particular.

So, both can be there at the same time, depending on both how one is speaking, but also how one is listening, whether we are sensing the soul, of course. In this exercise, especially in the second part of this exercise, we really want to emphasize—really in both parts, because we're not using verbal sounds, we're not using traditionally understood verbal sounds, or verbal sounds as traditionally understood in the first part of the blessing. But there's still meaning there. But in this exercise, especially in the second part, we want to emphasize that second direction of opening up dimensionality, beyond meaning, just in the sensing the soul of the sounds themselves, and the mystery of that, the incantation, the invocation, the spell-making.

So in terms of instructions for this exercise number four, for the witness, the person who's just silently watching, sensing with all their senses and the whole energy body, remember, and listening and looking at the person blessing or the person moving, gesturing, vocalizing. In a way, the exercise there, or the emphasis of the exercise, is really just on noticing.

And I think we demonstrated this at the beginning, if I remember, of movement, voice, and the possibilities of soul, or something like that. And Catherine and I demonstrated as a duet, and I asked her to move, and she made very, very subtle movements. Very subtle. In fact, almost none. She hardly did anything apart from blink a few times, if I remember. But if I'm open enough, and the whole body in relationship, sensing with the whole energy body—we talked about this several times, bringing the whole energy body into sensual relationship there, without touching in this case—then even the blinking of an eye, I'm going to notice that that has an effect in my energy body, even in my emotional body, and in my soul.

Actually, any movement, any gesture, any vocalization will affect the energy body, and the emotions, but we're talking about very, very subtle. If it's a very subtle movement, it might be very subtle, or it might be very, very strong.

It depends on all kinds of things, of course. But there's no pressure for the witness—no expectation that it must be this or that experience. Really, I'm simply noticing what effects I observe in my energy body and in the field through these movements, gestures, vocalizations, pauses, silences, and all the rest. Just noticing. It doesn't have to conform to any particular expectation.

So it becomes, for the witness—for that person in that role—truly an exercise in relational sensitivity. And that's the emphasis.

For the person who's moving or gesturing or vocalizing, it may be that one feels quite baffled by these instructions, or it goes along well initially, then one becomes completely stumped, or at a loss for what to do, how to move, what to vocalize. Again, this would be very understandable, very normal, and completely okay.

If this happens, one way of responding is simply to pause, just stop, and sense. Sense the self, sense the other, sense the space you're in, sense the energy body, sense what's happening emotionally, and just be with that sensing. From this sensing in the pause, without pressure, perhaps allow yourself to truly pause—not feeling compelled to keep producing some kind of movement or gesture or vocalization. Allow yourself to stop, pause and sense, taking the pressure off in this way, while remaining attentive and connected and alive and attuned to the experience of self, other, world, energy body and emotional body.

Then perhaps out of that—out of that sensitivity and attunement in the pause—comes the instigation, the seed of the next movement or gesture.

Another approach is almost the opposite, or complementary: don't stop. So I'm baffled and stumped and somewhat at a loss for what to do, but see if you can simply keep moving or gesturing. As I said before, let the material—the movement, the gesture, the voice—continue flowing. The material is still there. You're not taking your hands off the clay on the potter's wheel. You're not removing your hands from the piano. You keep them moving on the piano, making sounds as you move them, and you're responding to the sounds you hear, to how they make you feel, to your sense of them.

Rather than stopping the vocalization and gesture and movement, you actually just keep going. Don't stop. Don't let the bafflement or confusion halt the flow. You continue, but sense as you're doing so and see if you can follow what feels in any way soulful.

Again, like with the piano. I'm fumbling around, confused. I don't know what I'm doing—I'm not a piano player. But when I press these keys in the low register very softly... oh, yes, okay. Very soft and quiet in the low register, somewhat dissonant perhaps. That creates something. I can feel a certain mood with that, something stirring in my energy body and soul. Then it occurs to me, from this very sensitivity, that delicate darts of notes high up on the piano might complement that. So I do that. I'm not a piano player. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm simply responding to the feel, but I don't stop the flow of material—the flow of sounds that come from my fingers striking the keys.

In this exercise, I don't stop the flow of material. I don't stop moving, gesturing and vocalizing, but I'm tuning in and sensing as it unfolds, as there's this flow of material, and I follow what feels, as best as I can, what feels in any way soulful.

As I said before, I'm letting the material shape the creation rather than pausing in innocence and silence, then creating ex nihilo, or working from some preconceived notion or idea of what it should look like.

As I mentioned, it would be quite normal for self-consciousness to arise for the person moving, gesturing, vocalizing. It might manifest in all kinds of ways—variations on fear of looking silly, sounding silly, seeming silly, being thought of as silly; fear of being blocked and then judged as blocked, or simply judging oneself as blocked.

It could be all kinds of things. So much depends on background and history and conditioning and upbringing, as well as many other factors—personality and soul style.

We might even expect this to arise. It could be good to just expect self-consciousness and awkwardness and a little fear of judgment to come up. We can include this as an expectation, and also include it when it actually arises. Sometimes it may not need very much—we just keep going, and it's included through mindfulness. The mindfulness simply expands to include that: "Oh, okay, there's self-consciousness going on as well, there's a bit of anxiety, or even a lot of anxiety about looking silly or sounding silly."

Can there be a bit more space in the consciousness? Anxiety will contract the space of awareness, and sometimes just creating a bit more space can help.

Self-consciousness arises, and in the very nature of what we mean by self-consciousness in that sense, it's a kind of unskillful contraction of attention and consciousness to the self—not a skillful, careful, and caring examination or inquiry or awareness, but contraction, almost like an obsessive attention that's out of balance and contracted. So opening up the awareness—for instance, of the sky—just that opening out of more space for the attention, for the awareness, counteracts the contraction that's inherent in self-consciousness, in that kind of afflictive self-consciousness.

What we're doing here, working with the dyads, involves opening out the attentions—still aware of the other, still aware of what one is doing, the movements, gestures, and the whole resonances of all of that, the vocalizations, aware of self, energy body, all of that, aware of other, but also all that in a larger space. Just that movement, that opening out of the attentions to include more, to cover a broader space, to encompass and open to a broader space can be really helpful as one continues with the practice.

And of course, again, the fear of judgment from others or self-judgment—how important are the qualities of mettā and compassion? As always with these kinds of dyad exercises, we've talked about this before, but to stress it again: it can be so helpful as part of setting up the space, the field, setting up the dyad, setting up the temenos, to include either deliberately and formally, or rather informally, specific mettā practice. It can be just a few seconds, or a few minutes, or longer—whatever we need. We can set that up

at the beginning.

Or, as we've discussed before regarding temenos, sometimes we're just with a person and we can rest assured that there's temenos there—we don't have to actually re-establish it. But if certain exercises or situations are likely to trigger self-consciousness, self-anxiety, fear of judgment, fear of self-judgment, inner critic—all of that—then taking care to actually put a little more emphasis and spend a little more time setting up the temenos at the beginning, particularly the aspects of mettā and compassion within the temenos, can be really, really useful.

This mettā and compassion can also be something we introduce by just pausing. Something's happening, it's getting in the way, I feel blocked here, there's a lot of judgment or fear of judgment or whatever it is. We can just pause and pause the exercise. We can voice that and actually articulate something to the dyad partner, or not voice it—it could be silent. We're just saying, "Okay, let's just spend a bit of time with mettā and compassion," not necessarily telling the other what we're doing right then, but just in that pause, however long it is, moving into a mettā and compassion practice.

I would suggest mettā and compassion for oneself, certainly, because that's where the affliction is, but also for the other. And maybe even again, a sense of a larger space—the space that you're in imbued with mettā and compassion in which you are both sitting. So all these are possibilities if or when self-consciousness arises.

It may be too that there's something accessible—a sense accessible, a perception accessible—in the dyad at that time of oneself, of the other, of the space that you're in, of the whole environment, the world, that can be sensed with soul. Some perception of sensing something or other with soul in all that configuration may be really helpful. This may have perhaps started to happen earlier in the exercise, and you can bring it back, bring it back a bit more deliberately, or lean on it a bit more.

When we're sensing with soul, it will tend to counter that kind of rarefied and contracted self-consciousness, self-obsession, because that's not really a soul movement. It's maybe a kind of squeezed, impoverished reflection of what's originally, if you like, a soul movement, but in itself it's not. So when we sense with soul, something opens that out.

There are actually all kinds of possibilities, but really to expect it, to include it—this possibility of self-consciousness and the affliction of that. We don't have to fight it. We can also, as I said, allow it, but also place it humbly, so to speak, in the sight of the angels, in the purview, in the holding of the angels.

What does that mean? Well, it's an open statement—what that means to your soul, what that means in that situation. Of course, it's connected to what we've said about sensing with soul. We can deliberately draw on or reignite a certain sensing of soul, a certain image or imaginal sense of what's happening that places this very self-consciousness and the problem of that in the sight of the angels, in the holding of the angels, in the lap of the angels. See what that does.

One can also, for instance, just recognize one's fullness of intention or reignite one's fullness of intention as one of the elements of the imaginal. Why am I doing this? What's the primary intention? Is it to look good, to impress? Is it just simply to avoid being judged or to avoid looking silly or whatever?

Of course, no one's going to start an exercise like this, a dyad exercise like this in soul-making, with that limited intention. But very easily and without our recognizing it, our intention can slip in a fraction of a moment, or just gradually it can slip so that what started perhaps as a fullness of intention toward everything that soul-making beckons us to open to and move toward—what can start as that ends up shrunken to an intention, again without our realizing it quite easily, of just trying to get through the exercise, just trying to get through the time, make it through the time with a minimum of looking silly or being judged.

So again, it's not to judge that slipping from a fullness of intention.

Fullness of intention is, as I've said many times, quite a rare phenomenon. It's rare for that element to really be there in its fullness. So we're simply reminding ourselves and recognizing that capacity of the soul, that inclination of the soul—in fact, that eros of the soul that wants to have a fullness of intention. It's already there as a soul desire.

Remember, the fundamental action of all soul-making teachings is that soul wants soul-making. In a way, that desire, that eros of the soul for soul-making, is the most primary desire of the soul. So it's already there. It's a matter of recognizing it, reminding ourselves of it, re-accessing it, as opposed to judging that it's not there at that moment. It's a difficult one, but it's also the most fundamental one. Interesting.

On another level, kind of less soulful if you like, simply remind yourself or recognize the fact that this is an exercise, an exercise and a practice. It's not a performance. I'm not performing for the other, I'm not performing for myself or the teacher or the sangha or whatever it is. It's an exercise and a practice, and that means it doesn't have to be perfect. My very first teacher said to me, "If everything was perfect, why would you need to practice?" It's an exercise, a practice, an exploration. So all kinds of things are going to happen. I'm not going to get it totally right and be dazzling all the time. Very much of the time it's an exercise. So all kinds of possibilities if or when self-consciousness arises in that afflictive way.

What can happen as we do this exercise number four, or many of these exercises with movement, gesture, voice, is that something in the larger constellation, the larger configuration of what is present, what is unfolding—something in that larger constellation may at some point ignite and become image.

So it could be a kind of general sense of divinity, that divinity is present in all of it or in some elements of it, shining through it, being refracted through some or more or all of the components, the constituents of what's happening at any time. It may be that the movement, the gesture, the voice themselves become imaginal. We sense them with soul. It may be the sense of self. It may be the sense of even something like tradition.

And you might feel like, "Well, what tradition is this? I've never done anything like this. Sort of nonsense syllables and improvised movements that don't have any meaning, that look potentially very silly probably to most people. What tradition is that?" Well, I don't know, but it doesn't matter. There may still be an imaginal sense of tapping into and being in the stream of some kind of imaginal tradition. And that could be a tradition of the imaginal, or just an imaginal tradition, some esoteric practice of sacramentalizing, making holy.

As things become image, or if things become image, here's a reminder: none of them need to be very clear and well-defined in order to be an imaginal image with soul-making power. I don't need to be exactly clear what my image of the tradition is, or what exactly the image—if I had to describe the image of the self, maybe it's hard to describe, maybe it's not so vivid, not so well-defined. But it can still—I've said this so many times in talks over the last years—it can still have tremendous soul-making power without being clearly defined and perceived on a sensorial level. So it can be fully authentically imaginal; it can be a fully imaginal image without being necessarily clear or well-defined.

It could be an image of the other. It could be an image of the space we're in. Where are we when we're doing this, when this is happening? Or if you like, the time that we're in. There's a sense of even just fragments or moments in this exercise of the blessing and being blessed, of moving and gesturing and vocalizing—there's a sense that even moments of that could be reflecting something that is always already happening. We are playing something out. We are analogues of an image that is always already happening in hierophantic time.

And as always, when something ignites, some constituent of the larger constellation configuration becomes image—just like with the elements of the imaginal, when one of them ignites—then it's possible that the whole then ignites, and the whole thing is then perceived at a whole other level of sensing with soul, with a whole other level of soulfulness, sense of soulfulness and soul-making there. So that's part of one of the possibilities of what may happen here in different directions.

Now I said I wanted to introduce a variation for this exercise number four. And in a way it's related to what I've just said, but it's a deliberate move rather than something that might just occur spontaneously. That variation, that possibility, is that it still remains a dyadic exercise, an exercise in a dyad, but your dyad partner is actually a so-called intra-psychic image. In other words, you're not doing this with another actual physical human being. You're doing this in dyadic relationship with an image. Same thing though.

So you take your turn to move the body and make gestures and vocalize to the angel, to your angel who is your dyad partner, to the image there, to the imaginal figure.

And then you receive in your imagination the movements, the gestures, the vocalizations, the blessing and the mystery of that communication from the angel in your imagination.

In the first of those two possibilities, when it's your turn to move, gesture, and vocalize to the angel, to the

image, again, like in other exercises, it could be that this is physically concretized. In other words, someone else looking on, a third person looking on could see you move, see your physical body move and gesture and hear you. Or it could be, again, just in the energy body and in the imaginal sense, in the image sense, in the imagination.

So there's a whole other variation for this one, which is in a purely imaginal dyad. Why? Well, there are a few reasons for opening up that variation or suggesting that variation at times.

One is, in relation to what we said before, that it may be that doing it on our own, especially if we're on our own in a room somewhere, that we're actually less self-conscious because we're not being... So if that's an issue, if that comes up, as it might for some people, that actually just doing it on one's own in the privacy of one's own meditation space, just with the imaginal figure, that there's less chance of self-consciousness arising because we're less under the, or we feel ourselves less under the scrutiny of another human being.

But secondly, there's also a possibility—not necessary, but a possibility—that in doing it with an imaginal figure as your dyad partner, that the whole thing can actually become more subtle. The whole thing has to be, it's almost like because perhaps we're in relationship with a more subtle entity, an imaginal figure, our movements, gestures and vocalizations can be allowed to become correspondingly subtle. They have to, we're less pulled into the gross.

And there's a related reason, a third reason, related to that opening up the possibility of allowing the movements, gestures, vocalizations to become more subtle. Which, as I've said many times, in imaginal practice, soul-making practice, but also in other practices, oftentimes the movement into depth is a movement into more subtlety. So we really want to keep that range of things, the more subtle range, open and keep exploring it. Not at the exclusion of the grosser, but just a reminder that sometimes the more subtle is actually the more powerful and the more fertile and the more profound.

Let's say tied in, there might be a third reason, which is for doing it this way sometimes, doing it within, intra-psychically, so to speak, is that we may, it may allow the movements, gestures and vocalizations to be more unusual, stranger. And in the sense that whatever we're doing in moving and gesturing and vocalizing, it no longer has to look or sound so much like praising or anything recognizable at all. It may be, at least, that maybe some of the pressure that may be constraining movements, gestures, vocalizations, and also perceptions of sensing the soul, gets removed by removing the physically present other. It may be.

For other times or with other people, it works the other way. The actual presence of a physical human being with all their dimensions allows something, allows what comes through me, and what I allow myself to do allows that to have more range, both in subtlety and in the unusualness of what I'm doing. But do it both ways, play both ways, with an actual human being, a physically present human being, and with an intra-psychic image.

So maybe there are a few reasons why this helps with just doing it with an imaginal figure and not with a physically present human. Fourth reason why is, I'm just going to touch on this briefly and just say, it may be that the soul needs some things that are, so to speak, only between me and the angels. Their secrets, their soul secrets, their treasures and precious confidences between me and the angels and only between me and the angels, only between you and your angels.

And it might be, as much as the soul needs to realize its soul-making and its sensing the soul in relationship with physical beings, actual human beings, and again the whole range and dimensionality of what that means—materiality and nature and human beings—as much as that's the case as a support and a foundation and the field for a lot of soul-making, it may still be that the soul still at times needs some things that are only between me and the angels, only between you and the angels.

So there's a variation there of this exercise number four.

And remember, if you are doing it, particularly if you're doing it with—and it's maybe more likely, a sort of near enemy or far enemy, but certainly a deviation, a perversion a little bit from the intention of the practice, whether it's more likely to come up if we're doing it without a physically present—a physical human being present in a dyad with just the angel. It's more likely, I'm not sure, for it to come up.

Remember, we're not here seeking information. So if the imaginal figure, the angel, is gesturing and moving in my imagination or vocalizing towards me, I'm not in that communication, in that sharing, in the very broad senses of those words. I am not seeking information. That is not my primary intention by far.

That kind of thing may occur at times, but it's not equivalent to soul-making. Knowing the future or this or that happens or something psychic or whatever like that. It may occur at times, sure, it may occur, but it's not the same thing as soul-making, it's not the primary intention.

Usually when the intention goes into that kind of thing, that's when I'm seeking information. Usually that information is for the sake of the reified self and what this self can get, or how it can aggrandize itself in some way. And then what we refer to for the fullness of intention has slipped at that point, or it hasn't been allowed to supersede that other narrow intention for the self. What can I get here? Issues of power and self-aggrandizement.

When there's the fullness of intention, that those other intentions get pacified and they get hugely superseded. The fullness of intention is much more powerful, much more primal, fundamental, beautiful, sacred intention than these other intentions that are more to do with the reified self and power and what it can get, and so forth.

So that's exercise four, the diet exercise, with two main variations in terms of whether we do it with an actual human being, with a soul-making partner, or with an imaginal figure, an angel. And also the variations to do with whether it's intentionally blessing or just moving completely beyond communicating

any meaning, and the variations of which aspects of movement, gesture, and voice—which combinations of those are included and allowed at different times. So there are many variations within exercise four.

Exercise five might be viewed as a series of exercises. I'm not sure quite what to call it—I'm not sure it needs a name—but in a way it's really about iconic moments, iconic movements and gestures, and entering into them. Movements, gestures, moments that can become iconic for us, that can themselves become image or have for a culture at different times, or for subcultures, become iconic.

The exercise is to take one of these moments and embody it. Feel into the soul sense of that moment and then let your body and your voice and your gesture and movement embody it. Let the energy body and the soul sense really get a sense, and then see what comes. In a way, this might sound easier, but the level I want to talk about it at is perhaps a little more unusual, and perhaps even a little stranger than some of the other practices.

The first one we might call something like the Via Dolorosa—you know that name from the Passion of Christ, when Christ had been sentenced to death by crucifixion by Pontius Pilate. He was beaten and then was given this cross, this heavy cross. Those who were going to be crucified had to carry their own crosses, weakened and injured from torture and mistreatment and imprisonment, and then had to still carry their crosses to the place, to Golgotha, where they were going to be crucified, going to be executed. If you know from the Catholic tradition, there's the Stations of the Cross that they do every year, and there are certain moments on that whole path that get contemplated, meditated upon in that meditation on the Stations of the Cross. But that whole journey towards one's execution—that's the iconic movement or moment.

So Christ carrying his cross, it could be on the Via Dolorosa. It doesn't have to be Christ. It could be someone anywhere about to be executed. It could be, again borrowing from the Christian tradition, the martyrs about to be thrown to the lions or walking out into the amphitheater before the lions, so they know what's coming. Maybe they can even see or hear the lions, and they're just there in that amphitheater in the moments before their execution, before their death.

What's key in this is that they are surrounded—or Christ, or this person who's to be executed, or the martyrs in the amphitheater, or someone before a firing squad—surrounded by those who are certainly willing one's death, but even more than that, they're mocking and jeering. It may or may not be everyone in the crowd, but certainly a good portion, and maybe everyone, is mocking and jeering the victim of execution.

And yet, and this is all part of describing this moment, the one about to be executed has faith. What does that mean? Faith in what? Has a sense of the angel somehow. Has perhaps even a sense of themselves as image, or even the whole scene as image, and the whole event as image, and the whole transpiring of their execution and death and the mockery and the loneliness. Has a sense of somehow, in this horrific and tragic death, execution, brutality, there is somehow my telos here. This is somehow part of what I've been

called towards. Somehow this is part of my fulfilling my duty to the angels, to the daemon, to the divine, to the images.

It's not that the horror and the suffering and the death itself, or taken alone, so to speak, form the telos, that constitute the telos, but rather they are somehow part of a piece of a much larger soul movement and soul duty because of how the soul is moving through the whole thing, how the soul is relating to it. It's that together with the suffering. And also because of what and who the soul, whom the soul is standing with. Because of what and whom the soul is standing with and standing for. It's this standing with and standing for and the how—the ways in which the soul is moving through that dukkha, that suffering, and seeing it, and sensing it with soul, and relating to it—that this becomes, all this becomes somehow, mysteriously part of a larger, wider and more profound telos, movement of soul.

And of course, it may well be that amongst all this sense of rightness and the presence of the angel and the dimensionality, it may be that, probably would be that, amongst all that, there can certainly be, probably will be, some fear, some terror, some sense of torment, some doubt, sense of loss and grief. Of course, the sense of the soul being stretched to its limits by what it's being asked to go through, almost perhaps to breaking point, whatever that might mean. So that kind of complex of emotional and soul reactions can be there too. So there is plenty here that can be very, very rich.

So it could be any of those. It could be Christ carrying the cross on the Via Dolorosa, if that works for you. It could be the Christian martyrs to the lions. It could be just someone somewhere at some time before a firing squad being executed. Perhaps they're a political prisoner and they're being executed for speaking the truth, speaking out against power. The outer environment of that whole image has with it this jeering and this incredible cruelty. The inner environment, so to speak, or the soul environment, has with it faith, a sense of the angel, a sense of sensing the soul, self as image, others, maybe the whole scene as image, a sense of one's telos, one's duty.

Again, it could be really quite specific or really not very specific. And the exercise here—this is the first part of exercise five—they don't have to be in any order. I think there are four parts for now; we could add or change some. I'm just throwing out some examples here.

But that's not what I was talking about. The serpent was more a certain quality of energy, a certain quality of aliveness, a certain quality of movement that has perhaps a sinuous quality, perhaps a sensual quality, perhaps something that's emerging from the earth energies or connected with the earth energies. It may not look like a snake at all to an outside observer.

Similarly here, with these iconic moments, we're not trying to create a recognizable performance or mime. We're sensing into the soul dimension of these profound moments and allowing that to inform our embodiment. The gesture of touching the earth, for instance—it's not about perfectly replicating the mudra as carved in stone. It's about sensing into that moment of calling upon the earth as witness, that profound gesture of claiming one's right to seek awakening, that quality of invoking the support of the

whole cosmos in one's spiritual endeavor.

So in both of these examples—the figure facing execution or the Buddha touching the earth—what we're interested in is the soul resonance, the archetypal quality, the depth dimension that lives in these images. And then allowing that soul sense to move through the energy body in whatever way feels authentic and supportive of that inner resonance.

The third example I want to offer is completely different from the first two. This one comes from the realm of what we might call sacred ceremony or ritual. Imagine the moment of offering incense at an altar, or making an offering to the sacred, or perhaps the gesture of blessing.

This could be quite specific—maybe you're a priest or priestess in some ancient temple, lifting your hands in blessing over the community. Or it could be more general—simply the archetypal gesture of offering something precious to the divine, or invoking blessing and protection.

Again, the outer circumstances might vary widely, but there's something about that quality of the sacred offering, of blessing, of connecting the human realm with the divine realm through gesture and intention.

The fourth possibility is the gesture or moment of deep listening—perhaps the moment when the oracle receives the divine word, or when the sage sits in profound receptivity to wisdom. It's that quality of being so open, so receptive, that wisdom or guidance can come through.

These are just examples to give you a sense of the range of what we might work with in this exercise. The key is to find something that has soul resonance for you, something that touches that deeper archetypal dimension, and then to sense into it with the whole energy body.

So maybe I get on the ground and put my arms by my side and sort of wriggle around or writhe around, finding a way of moving kind of like a snake, and then someone could tell it's a snake, or a worm, or something. That's not the point. That wasn't the point in that exercise either.

And it may be, also, that in these kinds of exercises—whether it's Serpent, or these ones we've just talked about—it may be that there's not much movement at all. Of course, with the Buddha's Bhumi Sparsha Mudra, one could actually just replicate that movement. And of course that's very easy to do, just take your hand and touch the earth. But what we really want is the whole arena and nexus and field of heightened sensitivity and soul sense and resonance. Then one's open to all kinds of other movements, gestures and vocalizations as well.

But it may be that actually in this exercise with the serpent, or one of these from exercise number five, there's actually not much movement or sound at all. I'm just standing in front of the firing squad, but everything else that's endemic to that image—in the larger sense of the image, the sense of duty, the sense of angel, the sense of calling and telos, and also the mystery of that, as well as the sorrow, as well as the fear, the beauty of that, the sense of faith, the sense of knowing one is doing the right thing, all of that, the

nobility—all that is there. And it may or may not transfer to much movement or sound at all, but that's the key thing.

So one goes from that, so to speak, inner imaginal sense, the energy body sense. This sensitivity is more important. And in a lot of these exercises, you know, the emphasis on the sensitivity even more than a sort of clarity of an image.

We've mentioned several times that it's actually quite hard to, let's say, dance and at the same time have a genuinely imaginal image, a fully authentically imaginal image at the same time as one is dancing. It's actually quite difficult. It's not to say that one might not feel a kind of soulfulness in dancing or really enjoy it or it's wonderful in all kinds of ways or it's soul-making in some ways, but actually to hold a fully authentic imaginal image and be in relation to that image and dance at the same time in a way that both the dancing and the image, the soulfulness of both and the sensing the soul of both is kind of mutually enhanced and mutually woven together and implicated—that's actually quite hard for most people. Even most people who have a practice of dance, and of the imaginal, to really knead them together, stitch them together, is actually quite difficult.

So more important, I think, in a lot of these exercises, is the sensitivity. More important than, say, the clarity of an image, or even the presence of an image in some cases. And sometimes it can be better then to start with the idea of developing the sensitivity to subtlety and going from there. So we've said that before.

Okay, so like I said, I'll throw out four possibilities for this fifth exercise of iconic moments. And the third, again, I don't quite know what to call it—perhaps "waiting for the angels," or "the hospitality to the angels."

Some of you may have come across a couple of online seminars that I did some months ago. They were filmed, and so they're somewhere on the web. There's a set of eleven, but a couple of them have the title something like "Dharma and Art" or "Arts and Dharma." One of the things, one of the illustrations I used for something I was trying to communicate was an icon by Rublev. It's quite a famous icon in the Orthodox Church. It has two names: "The Trinity" and "The Hospitality of Abraham."

It refers to an Old Testament story of Abraham in his tent in the wilderness, in the desert. He sees three travelers walking through the desert and he runs out to meet them and makes them at home, offers his hospitality to them. They turn out to be angels—three angels. So he feeds them and gives them drink and gives them a cool place to rest in the shade.

So that fragment of a story from the Old Testament, from Genesis—Abraham's hospitality to the angels. If you have come across, or if you do in the future come across those arts and dharma seminars, what I'm talking about here for the purpose of this exercise is really the moment or the time prior to the scene in the icon. Because the scene in the icon is actually just the three angels. Abraham is no longer there, and

the three angels, or the three persons of the Holy Trinity, are just there at the table having received Abraham's hospitality.

So this refers, in this exercise, to the time prior to that—to Abraham and his openness of soul, his soul antenna, his receptivity, his hospitality to the angels and the imaginal figures.

Well, what exactly is prescribed as a movement or a gesture or a vocalization there? I don't know. But what would it be just to take that? And it's quite, as I said, at one level some of these, this exercise number five, I'm just acting something. But when it's not even obvious what movement goes with it, and I'm not even that interested in it looking like that scene, then it becomes an exercise at a whole other level—to do with sensitivity and attunement and openness and just seeing, connecting soul, movement, gesture, voice.

So it's not at all obvious. What's the kind of prescribed movement, gesture, voice there? Can I feel my way in? And how do I feel my way into that? Maybe I don't even know the story. I'm not familiar with the Old Testament or even Abraham and the rest of it.

Well, Abraham's hospitality to the angels offers another way of understanding this - it represents the soul-making poise we've explored in recent talks. It's the waiting in meditation for an image, making oneself available for the visitation of angels, creating, opening, allowing and supporting a space - a psychic space that can be visited by imaginal figures, in which the imaginal figures can be created, discovered, born, can come.

When we speak of the Old Testament story, we're really talking about the soul-making poise, that stance which involves many factors we've discussed. There's humility, reverence - present even before the image has come, there in relation to the potential of the image, in relation to the place or the level from which the angels come, from which images arise. In relation to that source, there is humility and reverence.

The elements of the imaginal are already present: the sensitivity of the energy body, the recognition that images are both created and discovered, that they emerge through a way of looking requiring our participation as much as they arrive through grace. All this and more forms part of the soul-making poise.

This icon of Abraham's hospitality to the angels connects with theology itself - the Trinity understood as a kind of openness to each other, an economy, what they call the Trinitarian economy. It embodies the poise in relationship to the soul-making stance.

Through the history of our soul-making practice, we develop an increasingly familiar sense of this poise. Not that it becomes narrowly or rigidly defined - like everything else, it maintains a range, remaining elastic with soft edges. But we grow familiar with that space, with the range of possibilities it encompasses, what it can be and what it involves.

The soul-making poise itself can become sensed with soul. It too can become image. As I mentioned, perhaps in *The Path of the Imaginal*, even the experience of sitting in meditation, open to the possibility of

images coming, can itself become image. Any element of the whole constellation of the imaginal can become image. The reverence itself, as part of the soul-making poise, may become imaginal, or the humility, or whatever aspect emerges.

Another iconic moment that may help some find their way into this third part of our example is the preparation for the Sabbath - the Friday preparation for welcoming the Jewish Sabbath. The Sabbath represents the visitation of the Shekhinah, the female aspect of God, sometimes called the bride of God, the bride of the divine. The Sabbath is a kind of visitation into our lives, into this plane of existence, of that level of the divine, that aspect or face of the divine.

What does it mean to humbly and reverentially, with sensitivity and care, open up space and create space in one's house, in one's being, in the house of one's body, in the physical space one occupies? To open that space for the imminent visitation, the blessing, the arrival of the bride - the bride of God, the Sabbath bride, the Shekhinah?

So these are the third possibilities: Abraham's hospitality to the angels, the preparation for welcoming the Sabbath, the soul-making poise itself. Again, it's very difficult to know what's prescribed or what such practices might look like. Perhaps not much movement or sound is involved at all, or perhaps there's a great deal. You must feel your way into these territories.

The last possibility I want to offer for now - and you can hear in what I'm describing that many possibilities exist - is the example of Rosa Parks. Many know this story and its significance in human history, particularly in civil rights and racial justice history in the United States.

In 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, racist laws enforced segregation on public transport, creating an apartheid system. The bus driver had discretionary power to extend the whites-only section when it became full, forcing African Americans to surrender their seats and stand so white passengers could sit.

Rosa Parks, already an activist who understood her purpose, was returning from work when exactly this situation arose. She had taken her seat in the so-called colored section early in the journey. After several stops, the whites-only section filled, and the bus driver ordered her and three or four other African Americans to move. The others complied; she refused. That refusal represents the iconic moment.

Unlike the firing squad or Daniel in the lion's den, where consequences remain unclear, Rosa Parks's situation held obvious danger. What she was doing was dangerous and would bring negative, probably harmful consequences. This was clear, and therefore her action required courage. She knew this, and she also knew something was right about what she was doing and something was wrong about what racist law was enforcing.

So she was actually fired from her job. She worked as a seamstress in a local department store, and she was fired because of this act. In fact, she received death threats for years as a consequence of this immovability.

In her autobiography, she describes that moment when the white bus driver came back and ordered them out of their seats. "I felt a determination cover my body like a quilt on a winter night," she wrote. Already in what she's describing, there's the body—her bodily experience was central to this act of courage.

All these exercises we're exploring have to do with body and soul, and the connection between them. Her knowledge of what was right, her clarity about values and virtue, was intimately connected with her bodily experience. We've discussed in other talks how the whole arena of ethics, morality, values, and virtues can be understood from the perspective of soul. These concerns are central to soul—values, virtues, ethics are not separate from soul's deepest concerns.

But I want to emphasize how, in her very experience, the body was central. What enabled her to act as she did was perhaps the integration of her bodily sense with soul sense, integrated with ethical sense—these three aspects not separate but unified. Through all five of these exercises, this is what I'm wanting to knead together, knit together, help grow into each other: body, soul, soul sense, and voice.

In terms of her voice, she was already an activist, already outspoken, and she continued to be for the rest of her life. Another powerful thing she said was that in that moment when she didn't move, "I just thought of Emmett Till and I just couldn't go back—couldn't go back to where he was telling me to go."

Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old African-American boy who was accused—though it's very unclear what, if anything, actually happened—of offending or perhaps flirting with a white woman in a grocery store. He was basically lynched and murdered by four white men. There was a trial, but those four white men were acquitted of his murder. This happened not long before Rosa Parks' act in 1955.

She said when that bus driver came back, "I just thought of Emmett Till and I just couldn't move." Again, it's not for me to suppose the workings of her mind and soul and heart, but you can recognize that she drew on an image, the image and memory of Emmett Till—someone who had become deeply meaningful in her life because of her involvement in the movement for justice.

What enabled this immovability, this conviction, this courage not to move, this courage to break the law and defy what she was being told to do? She writes in her autobiography: "People always say I didn't give up my seat because I was tired. That's not true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was was tired of giving in—tired of giving in to racial injustice."

One of the beautiful consequences—and this is part of what we don't know when we act in line with the duty of our soul and the callings of our soul—is that we can't always foresee the beauty and fruit that comes from such acts. The African-American residents of Montgomery boycotted the public bus service. While Rosa Parks' court case was being delayed, they had to exercise tremendous tenacity—walking to work, car sharing where they had cars, staying steady when it would have been much easier to take the buses.

They boycotted the buses, putting financial pressure on the bus company. Many buses stood empty in the garages because the African-American people weren't filling them, weren't paying the fares that kept the system running.

So eventually the city retracted, repealed the law requiring segregation on public buses. Of course, there's a larger story there with the whole civil rights movement and the US Supreme Court, but this is the essence of what I'm drawing on here. These don't have to be exact—I'm just picking examples to give you a sense of the kind of things you might explore in these exercises.

Apparently Rosa Parks, as a personality, carried herself with a naturally dignified demeanor. She was quite quiet as a person, and serene, but dignified without in any way being pompous or putting on airs. And that too is part of the flavor of this image I want to communicate here. Her demeanor, her personality was quiet and serene, dignified, but you can hear—I hope you can get a sense of—the soul power there and the soul conviction and how much her body was involved in that, the soul stretch and all of it.

Now, this represents a certain personality, a certain kind of style of expression. It's not to say, certainly not to imply, that the only way to stand firm is in a quiet and serene way—I don't want to imply that at all. But if this is the kind of iconic moment we're drawing on for this part of this exercise, then that's actually part of the image: that it is quiet and serene.

So maybe you can get a sense of that whole gestalt, the whole configuration of that moment, that image, that time, that iconic moment. Then see how that wants to be mirrored or refracted or expressed with body gesture, movement gesture, voice, or what wants to manifest or express in response to that or from that as a seed.

You can hear three slightly different directions there. One is embodying it. One is reflecting it, one is more refracting. And one is just seeing what happens in my soul, from my soul—or better, included in my soul, including the aspects of my soul which are my movement, my body, my gesture, my voice. Including those aspects of the soul, what wants to manifest? Either because it's refracting it, reflecting it, or thirdly, just in response to it or from it.

These kinds of exercises may feel at one level very easy, but at another level—or perhaps they're just open-ended and you can hear there's quite a lot of subtlety here possible—could be quite difficult. I don't know. You'll have to find your way in and play and see.

So all these exercises are really offerings as seeds. It's not my intention at all that these exercises become canonical or rigid—"this is now what we do, this is our canon of exercises in this soul-making tradition." That's not my intention at all. There are many more possibilities. We'll see how time and opportunities unfold, but maybe we'll add to them or change things.

Some of what I've offered, the examples of certain directions and emphases in these exercises, are in response to different students I've been working with. A different sangha, a different set of students, a

different situation would almost certainly have given rise to somewhat different content, different emphases—different needs would have emerged. And so there would have been either slightly or very different exercises.

But the principles remain: developing sensitivity with the energy body, with the emotional body, developing range. The principles of developing sensitivity and depth and range with sensing the soul. The principle of kneading together, knitting together, weaving together, stitching together to make one movement, to make one body and soul.

It's not like there is the soul and there is the body, but actually making the body just a part of the soul, not as something other. Just as perception can be either at times a soulful perception, sensing the soul, or at other times not, or more or less so—so also the body, so also the movements, the gestures, the voice. It's not really like they're two things.

Take away my sensing, take away my thinking, my imagining—where is the soul then? Similar to taking away the movement, voice, gesture. These are aspects of soul. And it's like either the blood can get there, or not. Actually, there's always a spectrum. How much can the blood flow? How much can the blood of the soul, the waters of the soul, the fires of the soul—whatever analogy you want to use—how much can that reach those aspects of our being? How much does it reach? Or is it blocked? Are they integrated or are they divorced?

So all these central principles of sensitivity, of range, of energy, of body, emotional and sensing the soul, and this kneading together, this knitting together, this integrating of body and soul—body, voice and soul—all of this applies to these exercises. And as we talked about earlier, these principles relate to practice and one's life, to soul-making in one's life, to soul-expressing and manifesting in one's life and in one's duty. All of that remains steady.

As I said, it's not really my intention for the details to become canonical, to become rigid necessarily. It's much better, as always, to understand through this structural listening—what's the real main point here? But be a little bit careful, because sometimes people think, "Oh yeah, I understand the main point." And then the habit of soul, or the habit of the psychology, reasserts itself.

For instance, in the first part of exercise number three—the thunderclap, or thunder and lightning—there's this quality of showing up with strong integration of thunderous energy. But this is so much out of the habit of movement, gesture, voice that someone might do it a few times, get it, understand the principles of why we're doing this, and then somehow their prevailing habit reasserts itself. They think, "Rob said the movements aren't important. He doesn't want us to get too rigid around the movements." And then they're back to choosing, perhaps, something like Born Aloft by Angels, or some opposite kind of movement—just very fluid and watery. They keep gravitating towards that kind of movement.

They've forgotten the principle. They might have understood it at one point, but they've forgotten it. In not keeping the principle current, they've allowed the force of probably long-standing habit to take over. As I said, usually the habits here have been reiterated and strengthened over decades—decades. Some other possibilities have atrophied; some other avenues have been blocked for decades.

So in the absence of really thinking, "Why am I doing this? Oh yeah, right—because of the principle," in the absence of reminding myself why, then the habit takes over. The habit might be for the weaker movement, the more flowy movement, the softer movement, the pink fluffy angels. Perhaps.

But if I remind myself of the principle—this is what I meant about structural listening and understanding things structurally—the principle tells me something important. If I understand the principle, then I'll say, "Oh yeah, it's about range. It's about having range of movement, gesture, voice, of having those avenues and pathways be fully open, fully available for the influx of soul and the efflux of soul and the manifestation of soul in life." Remember, that's the principle.

So I want range there. I want all of these to be open. If I just remember the principle, then the range of what I'm doing will not shrink to just the ones I'm used to doing out of habit, or indoctrination, or the cultures I've moved in, or personal history, or trauma, whatever it is.

This is so important—whether we're talking about jhāna retreat or emptiness practice. Understanding the meta-principles, the larger structural principles, will help us, will guide us, will inform us in terms of what practice to do and how to do this or that practice. Everything depends so much on understanding why, which has to do with the structural principles undergirding the whole thing.

So this is what we want: the body and the soul integrated together. We want the possibility of soul to manifest, express, flow through and flow from all aspects of the being—including the body movement, the body sense, the gesturing, the voice, the language, all of it. We want that soul to be able to come through there as soul wants to come through there, so that we can follow our telos. We can discharge our duty. We can carry that out. We can have a fuller sense of ourselves—sense ourselves with soul, sense our life with soul, our work, our duty.

Our relationships. Our being. The aspects of our being. This is what we want.

I think it was in the Eros Unfettered series where I quoted a Sanskrit line from the Guhyasamaja Tantra. It's actually a line that's quite common—almost a stock phrase or stock sentence introducing some tantras. In English it says, "Thus have I heard: on one occasion, the Bhagavan, the Blessed One, was dwelling..."—and then it gives a long compound describing where he was dwelling.

So where is the Blessed One dwelling on this occasion? You get this compound, which is like a jewel, a multifaceted jewel that, because of the structure of the Sanskrit language, can yield so many different permutations of meaning. What does it exactly mean for the Bhagavan, the Blessed One, to be dwelling in that—whatever that is, this whole Sanskrit compound? It means multiple things. It means many things at

different levels. Even each way we might carve up that compound, grammatically and syntactically, can mean many things at different levels.

Sarva Tathagata means in Sanskrit "all the Tathagatas." Tathagata, some of you will know, is an epithet that the Buddha used to refer to himself. He didn't call himself the Buddha—I mean, he did once in a while, but mostly he called himself the Tathagata. And Tathagata was a word that was, I think, around before the Buddha's time. He picked it up. Even he gave multiple possible interpretations of what that word Tathagata could mean—what the name he had given himself could mean. Once you came to the Mahayana, there were even more interpretations, probably before him there were others. There's a kind of proliferation of meanings as you get into the Mahayana and the Vajrayana.

Sarva Tathagata—all the Tathagatas. So the Blessed One was dwelling in something, something of all the Tathagatas. Tathagata is also an interesting word because, due to the structure of the Sanskrit language and the way words are put together—called sandhi—it can mean many things. It can mean the one who has gone to the truth, or gone to suchness, gone to reality. But it can also mean the one who has come from the truth, come from reality. So it has multiple meanings just in the word Tathagata: gone to reality, come from reality, come from the truth, the realm of truth, the realm of suchness.

So the Blessed One was dwelling in the kayavakchitta, the body, speech, and mind. What kind of body, speech, mind? The body, speech, mind of all the Tathagatas, but also qualified by some adjectives. And again, this depends on how you carve out that Sanskrit compound.

Guhya is a word that's sometimes there in the tantric texts, sometimes not. I'll put it in right now—it doesn't really matter. It's optional. But two others that are definitely there are hridaya and vajra. Vajra is diamond, and hridaya is something like heart essence, and guhya is secret. So the Blessed One, the Bhagavan was dwelling in the diamond—which also means indestructible, eternal. He was dwelling in the indestructible, the diamond heart essence, or the diamond secret heart essence, or the diamond heart essence of the secret—you can carve it many ways—of the body, speech and mind of all Tathagatas, of all Buddhas, of all those who are gone to and come from the truth.

There are so many directions of meaning, so many ways the light can reflect from and refract through this multifaceted jewel of this phrase, of this Sanskrit compound. Actually, there's even more there. I'm just taking these phrases.

Is it possible that we too, in our lives, in soul-making, when we're sensing the soul with that soul-making poise, when the elements of the imaginal are ignited, when we are sensing the soul, that we too have opened up the body, the avenues of the body, of the voice, of movement, the gesture, the range, the possibility, the depth, the sensitivity, the beauty? So that they too, like a multifaceted diamond, have that range of directionality—all the attributes of Buddhahood, all that dharmakaya, the body of the attributes of the Buddha, of the transcendent Buddha, the primordial Buddha. Can we exercise and open up the...

channels of our being, the movements we make, the body, the sense of the body, the sense of the emotions, the gestures, the voice, so that at times at least we too are dwelling—vidyaharas—in the diamond, the indestructible, the eternal heart essence of the body, speech and mind of all Buddhas, all Tathagatas, all those who go to and come from this transcendent truth, this transcendent reality, this reality that is both transcendent and immanent.

So I want, if I can, to actually talk a bit more about Buddha nature and this kind of thing. I just want to tie it to what we've just done. That movement, gesture, voice, body and speech, as well as mind—sensing and thinking, cognition, which we've talked much more about in The Balance of Things, in the Soul Making Dharma. All of that can be open to, can reflect and refract the soul making of the dharmakaya, the sensing of the soul of the dharmakaya, the soul duty of the dharmakaya, which is my soul duty, the one that soul wants to come through me.

So have I opened up those channels? Have I exercised them? Have I pushed them out and stretched them from any kind of habitual collapse or block that might have accrued there, as I said, over years or decades for all kinds of reasons, so that more and more of my being, more and more of the aspects of my being are available, are open for soul to come through, to be soul and to make soul. So this is part of the why we're doing all this.

Just to say one last thing for now in regard to these exercises and this notion of preliminaries. And, you know, I've said part of it before, which is that we can have a preliminary exercise or a sort of foundation exercise. And as we develop that and as the soul-making develops, the range, both in terms of lateral scope, breadth, and depth, and dimensionality, and the sensitivity, and the subtlety, and all the rest of it, of that practice really starts to expand as we practice the exercises, as the soul-making kicks in, in relation to those preliminary exercises, and that field, that arena, or domain. What started as a preliminary becomes in itself soul-making and gets stretched in all kinds of ways. So I want to repeat that as well here now.

The second thing, and very related, is if you ask, say, a Tibetan Rinpoche or someone with a lot of practice in the Tibetan tradition, or who's even regarded as a master, and you ask them, let's say a Dzogchen master or something like that, where there's so much emphasis on Dzogchen or not doing, the ultimate practice and that kind of language or some language or traditions etc and you actually ask them or they report what they spend most of their formal practice time doing, they still, even after many years, spend perhaps most of their time doing what are basically preliminary exercises. Ngöndro is the Tibetan, some of you will know.

So yes, preliminary, this needs to come first, this is what precedes. But it doesn't necessarily mean that then, okay, now I've done that, and then I stop. First we do this, then I stop doing that because I've done it, and I've accomplished what I want to accomplish, and I can just do my sort of more advanced practice. So there's that whole relationship with this notion of preliminaries that's very much the kind of dominant one, actually, in people who take their practice in Tibetan Buddhism very, very seriously and Rinpoches

and masters, etc.

And I'm not really sure about this word preliminary. I'm partly picking it and using it because there are preliminaries, as we've tried to explain, to certain areas, directions, domains of our being and our lives opening up with soul. So in some ways they are preliminaries, but they're also, as we've explained, they can be expanded, stretched, developed, they can become soul-making in themselves—extraordinary and not basic at all. So there's a whole range, and I think you will get that sense with all this.

So how does one relate to all these practices over time as one's developing one's soul-making practices? There's preliminaries and then soul-making, maybe there's a parallel, these two and going back and forth, and the periods of one or the other, all that. So I don't know that that's necessarily universally formulaic. But for right now we can use the word preliminary with that caveat.

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