

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

**Vajra Music**

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*NOTE: The five talks in this series were recorded by Rob at his home. Being preliminary practices for Soulmaking Dharma, the exercises offered in these talks can be worked with before a student engages the full scope of the Soulmaking teachings. However, some of the material presented here will only be properly comprehended and contextualised once a student already has some basis of preparatory experience and understanding of A Soulmaking Dharma.*

Before I introduce exercise five, or a fifth set of exercises, I'd like to say a bit more about exercise four, a few more things there, and add a possible variation for exercise four. Let's say a few things. Given the instructions for exercise four in the first part, with blessing, it would be quite normal, perhaps, and certainly understandable, to sort of hear that, hear those instructions, and think – even if it's not a sort of very drawn-out, discursive thinking, but something like think in the mind, “Okay, what does blessing look like? Or what does blessing sound like? What would that look like as a movement or gesture, or what would it sound like?” So there's a kind of process that's instigated by the mind, maybe by past associations with blessing, if we have any (because in our culture it's not a word that's in common currency any more, that has much currency outside of certain narrowing circles).

But maybe we think, “What does blessing look like?”, and we draw upon past associations from here or there or whatever. So perhaps putting the hands on the head – in some traditions, that's part of how one blesses. One places one's hands on someone's head, and utters a blessing, confers a blessing. Or in other traditions, one sometimes marks a cross, a crucifix, a small crucifix on the forehead of the one blessed. Or just gestures in the air, marking the crucifix. All these very beautiful gestures from other traditions. Or I might think, “What does blessing look like?”, and it occurs to me there's a bowing involved. That would be a very understandable connection to have made, association to have. Or the hands in *namaste*, in prayer pose, pressed together. Or, for instance, the hands and the palms tracing over the energy body, or even larger than the energy body of the one blessed, and sort of conveying, conferring the energy of blessing through the hands, over and into that space, penetrating the energy body, the energy field, the being, with blessing through the hands and through that tracing of that movement.

So in thinking, so to speak, if we use that word, ‘thinking,’ “This is what blessing looks like or sounds like,” out of that thinking and those associations, etc., comes the movement, the gesture, and/or the vocalization. All that's really great. And in a way, I think when we've done rituals and ceremonies on past retreats, for example, and included these kinds of instructions with blessings, etc., that this is part of what's gone on for people, and it's wonderful, and it's beautiful, and it can be very, very powerful. But it's possible, or just to open up the recognition or the possibility at times, also, of the propulsion and the instigation of the whole movement or gesture or vocalization not so much coming from an idea. Not so much an idea leading to an action, an idea of blessing, an idea of what blessing looks like, or associations, etc.

So yes, that has its place, but just to invite, to open up a space for a possibility of a slightly different way of entering into this intention, that's starting, for instance, instead, just with the intention of blessing – even if I'm not quite sure, as I said in the last talk, 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 just start moving, gesturing, vocalizing, whatever it is, depending on which part of the exercise you're doing and the instructions. So there's the intention, even if it's not quite clear what that exactly means, that word, 'blessing,' for instance. And just start moving, with the intention. Just start moving, and almost like with the incorporating the feedback, so to speak, from the movements, from the gestures, from the vocalizations that you're doing. So sensing, as you're moving/gesturing/vocalizing, sensing: does this feel soulful? If I do this, does it feel *more* soulful? If I do that, does it feel *less* soulful? So just as we do with imaginal practice and soulmaking practice, a part of one's awareness is very attentive, refined, careful mindfulness on the sense of soulfulness in the moment, and 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 a bit flat or narrow.

So it could be the sense of soulfulness. It could, again, be the sense of blessing, or both, of course. What you're really doing is you're just starting with an intention, and just starting moving with that intention. And whatever actions you're doing, whatever movements/gestures/vocalizations you're doing, you're almost receptive to, attuned to, how that feels in line with the attention. So letting the movement/gesture/vocalization shape the action in time, as it goes, playing it by ear, so to speak, or creating the pottery, whatever you're making on the potter's wheel. Creating it as you're going, through the feel of it, through the feedback you're getting, through the signals of soul and of blessedness and blessingness that are coming back to you. Slightly different than starting with an idea, and then kind of replicating that idea, and perhaps then not putting so much attention on what feels soulful, what doesn't feel soulful.

They're both good, but I just really want to open up that space for that possibility, 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: one is, what helps me be in that mode? It's quite difficult. It's actually quite difficult to dance, for example, and really be sensitive to the sense of soulmaking, in terms of the genuine, authentic imaginal, and all the elements, and all that sensitivity. It's actually quite difficult to do. So what would support it? One thing – it may or may not be; you'll have to find out – do I need to slow down? Do I need to slow the whole movements down, for instance, or pause in between movements, or what? 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. I 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 soulmaking, the sense of blessing that's there. So that's one thing that may be important.

A second 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 blessingness in the moment. By conventional behaviour 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 dyad, so there are all kinds of reasons it would be quite normal and expected for fear of judgment or self-judgment to arise: "Oh, it's silly," or whatever it is. "It looks silly. I'm not getting it. I'm not doing it very well," whatever it is. Is it possible to just let that go? Is it possible? It's a question. 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.

[10:53] But this second way of doing it, 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 this 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 blessingness, 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 more, sometimes at least, more than the other mode, which is 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 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 from the perspective of conventional understandings, and the way we conventionally understand what the voice is, etc., and how we use the voice, for example, or how we communicate. Usually, of course, we use the voice, and we think of the voice as an instrument, a vehicle, through which, by which, we 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. That's usually the way we relate to how we use the voice, and what the voice is: we're communicating something through trying to describe it, to represent it, re-present it.

And even, often, sometimes when we're doing mantra practice, or we introduce a chanting, and we kind of hear – okay, this is the mantra, we learn the melody and the syllables or whatever, and a 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 it's Avalokiteśvara. So in the chanting of

the mantra, or the reciting of the mantra or whatever, I'm invoking, I'm thinking – I'm obviously concentrating on the sound, etc., 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 have meanings. Others are kind of seed meanings as well in different mantras. But anyway, oftentimes we as Westerners will want to know, "Well, who am I invoking?", so that when I'm chanting the *Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*, and it's Avalokiteśvara or whatever, "Ah, yes, compassion. Okay." 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'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, and 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. It may be there already, coming through, and predominating 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 sounds, a landscape of vocalizations – mysterious, because not necessarily meaning anything, or at least, not *just* meaning anything.

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 the meaning there, and hopefully you're listening for the meaning, and you're understanding it, so you can apply it in the exercises, etc., and understand soulmaking and all that stuff. But there's also a music here. There's also just the sensing with soul of the sound, the mystery, the ineffable mystery of the sounds themselves, 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 other dimensions, but it opens up also 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 sounds themselves, the sensing with soul of the sounds themselves. Now, as I said, there 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, or the meaning of this and the sensing with 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.

[19:29] 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 with 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; yes, 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 really want to emphasize that second direction of opening up dimensionality, beyond meaning, just in the sensing with soul of the sounds themselves, in the mystery of that, the incantation, the invocation, the spell-making.

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. I think we demonstrated this at the beginning, if I remember, of that – I’ve forgotten what it was called now – “Voice, Movement, and the Possibilities of Soul” or something like that. Catherine and I demonstrated as a dyad, and I asked her to move. 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, let’s say, the emotions. But we’re talking now very, very subtle. If it’s a very subtle movement, it might be very subtle. Of course, it might be very, very strong. It depends on all kinds of things, of course.

But there’s no pressure for the witness for it to be this or that experience. Really I’m just noticing: what are the effects I notice in my energy body and in the field with these movements, gestures, vocalizations, pauses, silences, all the rest of it? Just noticing. It doesn’t have to be *this* or *that*. For the witness, so to speak, for that person in that role, it becomes really 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 is really quite baffled by these instructions, or it goes along okay, and then one becomes just completely stumped, or a bit at a loss of what to do, or how to move, or what to vocalize, etc. So again, it would be very understandable, very normal, and completely okay.

If that happens, one way of responding to that is just pause. Just stop, and just sense – sense the self, sense the other, sense the space that you’re in, sense the energy body, sense what’s going on emotionally, and just be with that sense. And out of that sensing in the pause, without pressure, then maybe – *allowing* yourself to pause; in other words, not feeling like, “I have to keep doing something. I have to keep producing some kind of movement or gesture or vocalization.” Allowing yourself to stop, pause, and sense, and taking the pressure off that way, but remaining attentive and connected and alive and attuned to the experience of self, other, world, energy body, and emotional body. And 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 or [vocalization].

So that would be one response. Another is kind of the opposite or complementary, which is: don't stop. Okay, so I'm baffled and stumped, and a bit at a loss what to do, but just see if you can keep moving or gesturing. And as I said before, let the material – in other words, the movement, the gesture, the voice – still be there. The material is still there. You're not taking your hands off the clay on the potter's wheel. You're not taking your hands off the piano. You keep moving them on the piano. And there's making sounds as you move them, and you're responding to the sounds that you hear, and to how they make you feel, and your sense of them.

So rather than stopping the vocalization, the gesture, or the movement, you actually just keep going. Don't stop. Don't let the bafflement or stumpedness or confusion stop you. Just keep going. But sense as you're doing so, and see if you can follow what feels in any way soulful. Again, like on the piano, as I'm bashing away, and I'm confused: "I don't know, I'm not a piano player. What am I doing? I don't know. But when I do *this*, I press these ones down there, for example, in the low register, I press them, very soft – ooh, yeah, okay." Very soft and quiet in the low register, and it's kind of dissonant. Okay, well, that creates something, and I can kind of feel a certain mood with that, and there's a little something moving in my energy body and soul.

And then it occurs to me, just out of that very sensitivity, that something, little darts of notes high up on the high end of the piano will complement that, and so I do that. I'm not a piano player. I don't know what I'm doing. I'm just responding to the feel, but I don't stop the flow of the material. In the piano analogy, I don't stop the flow of the sounds which come from the movement of my fingers hitting the keys, and in this exercise, 'the flow of the material' means I don't stop moving, gesturing, and vocalizing. But I'm just tuning in and sensing as it rolls along, as there's this flow of the material, and I follow, as best as I can, what feels in any way soulful. So like I said before, I'm letting the material shape the creation, rather than the sort of pause in the inner sense and silence, and then a sort of creation *ex nihilo* sort of thing, or this kind of preconceived notion or idea of what it looks like, whatever I'm trying to do.

As I mentioned, it would be quite normal for self-consciousness to arise for the person moving, gesturing, and vocalizing. And it might be all kinds of things, variations on that: fear of looking silly, of sounding silly, of seeming silly, of being thought of as silly; a fear of being blocked, and then being judged as blocked, or just judging oneself as being blocked. It could be all kinds of things. Again, so much depends on background and history and conditioning and upbringing and all that stuff, as well as many other things – personality and soul-style. But it might be that we even *expect* that. Just expect self-consciousness and awkwardness and a little bit of fear of judgment, etc., to come up. Maybe it's good to just expect that, and to include it. So include it as an expectation, but also include it if it comes up. And sometimes it may not need very much. We just keep going, and it's included just through mindfulness, okay? The mindfulness 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 whatever it is, or sounding silly." Can there be a bit more space in the consciousness? Because anxiety will contract the space of the awareness. Sometimes just creating a bit more space can help.

Self-consciousness can arise and, in the very nature of what we mean by ‘self-consciousness’ in that sense, it’s a kind of unskilful contraction of the attention, of the consciousness, to the self. Not a sort of skilful and careful and caring examination or inquiry or awareness of self-experience, but a kind of contraction, almost like an obsessive attention that’s out of balance and contracted. So that opening up the awareness – for instance, to more sound, to the space of the room that you’re in (especially if it’s a large room), to the sky, etc. – just that opening out of more space for the attention, for the awareness, counteracts the contraction that’s inherent, really, in self-consciousness, in that kind of afflictive self-consciousness. And that also tends to be intrinsic to states of anxiety as well. So sometimes just opening out the attention – continuing the practice, what we’re doing here, working with the dyads, but just opening out the attention. Still aware of the other, still aware of what one is doing, and movements, gestures, and the whole resonances of all of that, the vocalizations, aware of self, energy body, all of that, aware of other, but all that in a larger space. Just that movement, that opening out of the attention 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, etc., how important are the qualities of *mettā* and compassion? So as always with these kind 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. We include, either deliberately and formally – or rather, formally, we include a specific *mettā* practice. And that can be just a few seconds, or a few minutes, or longer, whatever. We can set that up at the beginning. Or, as we said – we’ve been through all this before when we talked about temenos – sometimes you’re with a person, and you can rest assured that there’s [*mettā*] there; I don’t have to re-stress it. But setting it up in the beginning, if certain exercises or situations are likely to trigger self-consciousness, self-anxiety, fear of judgment, fear of self-judgment, inner critic, all that. Taking care to actually put a little more emphasis and spend a little more time setting up the temenos at the beginning, or rather the aspects of *mettā* and compassion within the temenos, can be really, really useful.

And that *mettā* and compassion can also be something that we introduce. Just pause: “Something’s happening. It’s getting in the way. I feel blocked here. There’s a lot of judgment or a fear of judgment or whatever it is.” And just pause that, pause the exercise, and you can voice that. Then there is an actual articulation of something to the dyad partner. Or not voice it. It could be silent, and one’s just, “Okay, let’s just spend a bit of time with *mettā* and compassion,” and not necessarily telling the other what I’m 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, a field of *mettā* and compassion in which you are both sitting. So all these are possibilities if or when self-consciousness arises.

[33:29] And then, to just briefly touch on or offer a few other possibilities, it may be, too, that there’s something accessible, or 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 they can be sensed with soul. Some perception of sensing something or other with soul in all that, in all that configuration may be really helpful. So that may have perhaps started to happen, perhaps earlier in the

exercise, and you can bring it back more deliberately, or lean on it a bit more. Because when there's sensing with soul, it will tend to counter that kind of reified and contracted self-consciousness, self-obsession, because that's not really a soul-movement. It may be a kind of squeezed, impoverished reflection of what's, if you like, originally a soul-movement, but in itself, it's not. So when we sense with soul, something opens that out.

There are all kinds of possibilities, but really to expect it, to include it, this possibility of self-consciousness and the affliction of that. You don't have to fight it. You 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 sort of connected to what I just said about the sensing with soul. One can deliberately draw on or reignite a certain sensing with 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, and 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 dyadic exercise like this, and soulmaking, 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 soulmaking beckons us to open to and move towards, what can start as that ends up shrunk to an intention (again, without our realizing it, and 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 judgment, 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 rare. It's rare for that element to really be there in its fullness. We're just 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, a fundamental axiom of all soulmaking teachings is 'soul wants soulmaking.' In a way, that desire, that eros of the soul for soulmaking, is the most primary desire of the soul. It's already there, and it's a matter of just re-cognizing it, recognizing it, reminding ourselves of it, reaccessing 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, interestingly.

And just at another level, kind of less soulful, if you like, but just remind yourself, recognize the fact: 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 Saṅgha or whatever it is. It's an exercise and a practice, and that means it doesn't have to be perfect. One of my very first teachers said to me, "If everything was perfect, why would you need to practise?" It's an exercise, a practice, and an exploration. So all kinds of things are going to happen, and I'm not going to get it totally right and be amazing and dazzling all the time, or even very much of the time. It's an exercise. So all kinds of possibilities if or when self-consciousness arises in that kind of 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 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. 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. That could be a tradition *of* the imaginal, or just an imaginal tradition, some esoteric practice of sacramentalizing, making holy.

And as things become image, or *if* things become image, a reminder: none of them need to be very clear and well-defined in order to be an imaginal image with soulmaking power. I’m [not] exactly clear what my image of the tradition is, or 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 few years – it can still have tremendous soulmaking power without being clearly defined and perceived on a sensorial level. 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 – that there’s a sense of even just fragments or moments in this exercise of the blessing and the being blessed, of moving and gesturing and vocalizing in a way that’s beyond meaning, there’s a sense of 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 hierophanic 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 soulmaking there. So that’s one of the possibilities of what may happen here, in different directions.

[43:31, **variation on exercise four** begins]

Now, I said I wanted to introduce a variation for this, exercise number four. And in a way, it’s kind of 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 ‘intrapsychic’ 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: 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 just the mystery of that communication from the angel, in your imagination.

In the first of those two and its two possibilities, when it's *your* turn to move/gesture/vocalize to the angel, to the image, again, like in other exercises, it could be that that 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 just in the energy body and in the imaginal sense, in the image-sense, in the imagination. Okay? So there's a whole other variation for this one, which is in an, if you like, purely imaginal dyad.

[45:50, **variation on exercise four** ends]

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. If that's an issue, if that comes up, as it might for some people, actually just doing it on one's own, in the privacy of one's own meditation space, just with the imaginal figure, there's less chance of self-consciousness arising because we're less under, 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. 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. We're less pulled into the gross. 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 I've said many times: in imaginal practice, soulmaking 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.

Tied in, there might be a third reason for doing it this way sometimes, doing it intrapsychically, so to speak. It's that it may allow the movements, gestures, and vocalizations to be more unusual, stranger, in the sense that whatever we're doing in moving, in gesturing, in vocalizing, it no longer has to look or sound so much like praising or anything recognizable at all. It may be, at least, that some of the pressure that may be constraining movements/gestures/vocalizations, and also perceptions of sensing with soul, gets removed by removing the physically present other. It may be. For other times, or with other people, it'll work 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, it 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 intrapsychic image. It may be there are a few reasons why this helps, just doing it with an imaginal figure, not with a physically present human. A fourth reason why, I'm just going to touch on this briefly and say: it may be that the soul needs some things that are, so to speak, only between me and the angels. They're secrets. They're soul-secrets. They're 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 soulmaking and its sensing with soul in relationship with ‘material reality,’ if you like, or 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 soulmaking, 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 [an intrapsychic imaginal figure], this may be more likely – I’m not sure whether to call it a ‘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 physical human being present, in a dyad with just the angel, if it’s more likely (I’m not sure) for it to come up: remember, we’re not here seeking information. If the imaginal figure, the angel, is gesturing and moving in my imagination, or vocalizing towards me, in that communication, in that sharing (in the very broad senses of those words), I’m 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 soulmaking – 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 soulmaking, and 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 a reified self, and what this self can get, or how it can aggrandize itself in some way. And then, what we referred to before, the fullness of intention has slipped at that point, or it hasn’t been allowed to supersede that other, narrower intention for the self: “What can *I* get here?” The issues of power and, as I said, self-aggrandizement come in. When there’s the fullness of intention, those other intentions get pacified and they get hugely superseded. The fullness of intention is a much more powerful, much more primal, fundamental, beautiful, sacred intention than these other intentions that are more to do with a reified self, and power, and what it can get, etc.

Okay. So that’s exercise four, a dyad exercise with two – well, two main variations in terms of whether we do it with an actual human being, with a soulmaking 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 also the variations of which aspects of movement, gesture, and voice, of those three, which combinations of those are included and allowed at different times. So lots of variations within there, within exercise four.

[54:50, **exercise five** begins]

**(5.1)** Okay, so exercise five, again, it might be viewed as a series of exercises. I’m not really sure quite what to call it. I’m not sure it needs a name. But in a way, it’s really thinking about kind of 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, themselves or for sub-cultures, 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, “Okay, that’s a bit easier.” But the level that I want to talk about it at is perhaps a little more unusual, perhaps even a little bit stranger than some of the other stuff.

So the first one we might call – again, very tentative with names here – but something like ‘the Via Dolorosa,’ if you know that name from the Passion of Christ, when Christ had been sentenced to death by crucifixion by Pontius Pilate. Then he was beaten, etc., 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, etc., they had to still carry their crosses to the place, to Golgotha, where they were going to be crucified, going to be executed, basically. And 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 kind of contemplated and 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 amphitheatre before the lions. They know what’s coming. Maybe they can even see or hear the lions, and they’re just there, in that amphitheatre, in the moments before their execution, before their death. What’s key in this also is that they are surrounded – or Christ, or this person who is executed, or the martyrs in the amphitheatre, or someone before a firing squad – they’re 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.

This is all part; I’m describing this moment. And yet, 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 daimon, to the divine, to the images.

Now, it’s not that the horror and the suffering and the death itself, themselves, or taken alone, so to speak, that 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 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* of 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 all this becomes somehow mysteriously part of a larger, wider and more profound telos, movement of soul.

[1:01:31] And of course, it may well be, as well, that amongst all these – the sense of rightness, and the presence of the angel, and the dimensionality and all that – it may be that, it probably *would* be that, amongst all that, there can certainly be, and probably *will* be, some fear, some terror, some sense of

torment, some doubt; a sense of loss and grief, of course; a 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. There's plenty here that can be very, very rich.

It could be any of those. It could be Christ, if that works for you – Christ carrying the cross on the Via Dolorosa. 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, but also jeering. The inner environment, so to speak, or the soul-environment, has with it faith, a sense of the angel, a sense of sensing with soul, self as image, or other, 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, and they don't have to be in any order. I think there are four parts for now. We could add or change some or whatever. I'm just throwing out some examples here. But in this first one, then, one might just stand there. I'm just standing in the amphitheatre. I'm just standing before the firing squad. Or it could be the walking, walking towards the place where they put you to be executed or whatever it was, walking out to the middle of the amphitheatre. That's the image, okay? And your job is, again, to sense into what, in that whole vague description that I've given, and those possibilities – and there can be plenty of other possibilities, that kind of thing – getting a soul-sense for it, sensing it in the energy body, listening to the energy body, listening to the emotional and soul-resonances, and then just seeing what movements, gestures, voice, or vocalizations want to come. [1:04:43]

(5.2) So I'm going to give the second one, and then I'm going to say something to qualify this whole exercise. The second one is an iconic moment from the Buddhist tradition: the *bhūmisparśa mudrā*, which means the gesture (*mudrā* is a gesture), *bhūmi* is earth or ground, and *parśa* is to touch. So it's the gesture of the Buddha touching the earth. Many of you will have seen this statue, with his right hand, sitting there in meditative posture, but the Buddha's right hand touching the earth. This goes back to the mythological story: on the night of his awakening, the Buddha-to-be was sitting there meditating, practising for awakening, and Māra comes and challenges him and attacks him in all kinds of ways. One of the challenges was, "What right do you have to sit there? What right do you have to sit in that spot, striving for awakening, and to have taken that vow that you won't move from that spot until awakening? What right do you have to sit there?" And the Buddha in response gestured, touched the earth, and asked the earth to bear witness – the earth, or the earth goddess to bear witness to his right to sit there, sit in that spot, on the earth, and work for awakening. And the earth did exactly that, and obviated, countered Māra's challenge.

So this gesture of touching the earth, and calling on the earth to testify, to bear witness, to the right to sit there, to take a vow of immovability in one's quest for awakening, and to sit there, and to strive, and to be awakened. So that's the *bhūmisparśa mudrā*. It's part of Buddhist iconography, of course. It's part of Buddhist mythology. It's another iconic moment. So that would be a second example for this exercise.

Let's qualify this a little bit, because what we're not doing here is a kind of acting exercise. This refers to some of the other exercises that I've been offering over the course of these talks: we're not doing an acting exercise. It's not like, "Oh, how convincing a portrayal can I give of this or that iconic moment?", or even, "If someone didn't know what I was acting out, if I was miming something, would they guess exactly what it was?" "Oh, that's Christ on the Via Dolorosa with his cross!" We're not interested in an exercise in acting, in developing our acting skills. We're not interested, therefore, in what it looks like to an outside observer. That, what it looks like to an outside observer, is much less important than your sense of the energy body, the emotional body, and the soul-sense of what's happening, okay?

What that means in terms of the movement is that movement, gestures, and vocalizations that you make may not be decipherable to someone else. Someone looking at you may have no sense that you're feeling into and letting come through your body and voice Christ on the road to Golgotha. They may have no sense that you're this kind of person, waiting to be executed. Much more important is that, so to speak, inner sense: the energy body, the emotional sense, and the soul-sense, and just how that wants to move the body. The 'how' is I'm not moving it so that it can look like, so that someone could recognize and say, "Oh, it's *that*." It's just: here's the situation that I'm trying to sense into, the kind of moment I'm trying to sense into, and trying to feel that with my whole energy body, and all the resonances in the heart and the soul, and then, what movement or gestures want to come, that express it, that are in response to it, that just hold it, that support the soul-sense? Even there, there are slightly different intentions. And again, I'm using my sense of the soul-resonances, etc., and the energy body sense, the emotional sense, to see: what *does* help? What helps me cohere the movement, the gesture, the voice, the soul-sense, the energy body, the emotional body there?

If we go back to exercise three, I think the last part of exercise three was what I called 'the serpent.' If you remember, I was kind of careful to say, "What is that? What's the serpent?" Again, one could hear that and think, "Okay, so now I have to move my body in a way that looks like a snake." Maybe I get on the ground, and I put my arms by my side, and I sort of wriggle around or writhe around or move, find a way of moving kind of like a snake, and then, "Oh, it's a snake," or it's a worm, or something someone could tell. That's not the point. That wasn't the point in that exercise either. And it may be, also, that in these kind of exercises, whether it's the serpent or these ones that we've just talked about, it may be that there's – and of course, with the Buddha's *bhūmisparśa mudrā*, one could actually just replicate that movement. And of course, that's very easy to do: just take your hand, and you touch the earth. But what we really want is the whole kind of arena and nexus and field of heightened sensitivity and soul-sense and resonance. And 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 this exercise number five, that 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, 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. I've mentioned several times, 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 quite difficult. That'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 soulmaking 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 with soul of both, is kind of mutually enhanced and mutually woven together and implicated, that's quite hard for most people – even most people who have a practice of dance, etc., 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. Sometimes it can be better, then, to start with the idea of developing the sensitivity to subtlety, and going from there. We've said that before.

(5.3) I'm going to, like I said, 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, there are a couple of online seminars that I did some months ago, and they were filmed. They're somewhere or other on the web, I think. I think there's a set of eleven. But a couple of them have the title "Art and Dharma."<sup>1</sup> And 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: one is *The Trinity*, and one is *The Hospitality of Abraham*. It refers to an Old Testament story of Abraham in his tent in the wilderness, in the desert, and he sees three travellers walking through the desert. He runs out to meet them, and makes them at home, offers his hospitality to them, and they turn out to be angels, three angels. So he feeds them, and gives them drink, and gives them a cool place to rest, etc., in the shade. 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 "Art and Dharma" seminars, then what I'm talking about here, for the purposes of this exercise, is really the moments 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, if you like, persons of the Holy Trinity, are just there at the table, having received Abraham's hospitality. This refers, in this exercise, we're focusing on the time prior to that, on Abraham and his openness of soul, his soul-antennae, his receptivity, his hospitality to the angels and the imaginal figures.

You think, "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? As I said, at one level, some of these, and this exercise number five aren't meant quite as "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 and connecting soul, movement, gesture, voice. 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, another way of saying it, it's the soulmaking poise we referred to in some recent talks. It's the waiting in meditation for an image, making oneself available for the visitation of the angels, creating, opening, allowing and supporting a space, a psychic space that can be maybe visited by the imaginal figures, in which the imaginal figures can be created/discovered, born, can come.

So another way, if you say, "Well, I don't know the Old Testament," etc., we're really talking about the soulmaking poise, or that stance. And that involves all kinds of factors. We talked about that. But humility, reverence, there before the image has even come. There is, in relation to the potential of the image, in relation to, so to speak, the place or the 'where' or the level from which the angels come, the images come, there is, in relation to that, a humility and a reverence. The elements of the imaginal are already there. The sensitivity to the energy body, the recognition that it's created/discovered, that it's a way of looking and therefore I have some work to do, as much as it is grace. But it's definitely also a grace. All this and more is part of the soulmaking poise.

This icon of Abraham's hospitality to the angels and, if you know some of the theology of the Trinity itself, there's a kind of openness to each other, an economy. They talk about the Trinitarian economy. It's the poise in relationship to that, the soulmaking poise. And we can have, through the history of our soulmaking practice, we can get more and more of a sense, more and more familiar with not *the* soulmaking poise, because like everything else, it's not a narrowly, rigidly defined thing; it has a range, and it will be elastic and with soft edges. But we get a sense more and more of that space. We get familiar more and more with that, the range of that space, what it can be and what it involves. And then that soulmaking poise itself can become sensed with soul. It, too, can become image. This is something I talked about, I think, even in the *Path of the Imaginal*, remember. Just the very experience or occasion of sitting there in meditation, open to the possibility of images coming – that, too, can become image.

In fact, *any* element of the whole constellation of the imaginal can become image. It may be that the reverence itself, as a part of the soulmaking poise, becomes imaginal, or the humility, or whatever it is. Another way – and I touched on this the other day, just threw it out quite briefly – or another kind of iconic moment here that may help some people to find a way into this third part of this example is the preparation for the Sabbath, on the Friday of the Jewish Sabbath. The preparation for welcoming the Sabbath, and the Sabbath in its presence, its sort of visitation of the *Shekhinah*, the female aspect of God, sometimes also called the Bride of God, the Bride of the Divine. And what the Sabbath *is* is a kind of visitation into our lives, into this plane of existence, of that level of the divine, of that aspect, of that face of the divine. And so, what is *that*, to humbly and reverentially, and with sensitivity and care, open up the space, and create the space in one's house, in one's being, in the house of one's body, in the space that one's in, the physical space that one's in, and open that space for the immanent visitation, the blessing, arrival, of the bride, the Bride of God, the Sabbath Bride, the *Shekhinah*? So that would be the third one, something like that: Abraham's hospitality to the angels, the preparation for welcoming the Sabbath, the soulmaking poise itself. Again, very hard to know what's prescribed there, or what it



would look like, and it may be that not much movement or sound is involved at all. But it may be that there is a lot. You have to feel your way into these things. [1:23:48]

(5.4) Okay, the last possibility I just want to offer for now – and you can hear in the kind of thing that I’m talking about that there are many possibilities here, but the last one for now is to take the example of Rosa Parks. Many of you know the story, obviously, and what happened. It’s a significant part of – well, *human* history, actually, but also certainly civil rights history in the US, and racial justice history. So in 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, there was, at that time, basically, in effect, racist laws – all kinds of racist laws, but also on public transport, and a kind of apartheid placed there by law. And at the discretion, in this case, of the bus driver, they could ask or demand, really, African Americans, sitting – the bus was divided into two parts: a so-called ‘Negro/coloured section,’ rather, and a ‘white section,’ and there was this basically apartheid going on. And if the whites-only section got filled, then the bus driver could extend the whites-only section, and basically make the African Americans have to get up and stand, so that the white people could sit down.

So Rosa Parks, who was already an activist by that point and knew what she was about, was coming home from work one day, and this is exactly what happened: she took her seat in the so-called ‘coloured section’ early on in the trip, and then after a few stops, the whites-only section got filled, and then the bus driver told her to move – told her, and I think three or four others, to move, three or four other African Americans to move. They moved, and she did not move. She refused. And that’s the sort of iconic moment, okay?

So unlike the firing squad, the execution, the crucifixion – well, the crucifixion’s a little bit different, but – the marches in the lion’s den, it’s unclear exactly what the consequences are, what the next moments will bring or the long-term consequences are. What is clear is that it’s dangerous. What she was doing was dangerous, and it would have negative and probably harmful consequences. It was clear that it therefore took courage. She knew this. And she also knew something is *right* about what I’m doing here, and something is *wrong* about what is being enforced by the law, by racist law.

So she was actually fired from her job. She worked as a seamstress in a local store, in a department store, and she was fired because of this later. And, in fact, she received death threats for years as a result, as a consequence for this, for this immovability. [pauses] I don’t know what else to tell you about this. Yes, I think it’s in her autobiography, she said that when that white bus driver, he came back and he said that to us, and he waved his hand, ordered us up and ordered us out of our seats, she said, I quote:

I felt a determination cover my body like a quilt on a winter night.<sup>2</sup>

Already in what she’s talking about, there’s body there. It’s in the sense of her body. All these exercises we’re talking about have to do with body and soul, and the connection between soul and body. And her connection with her knowledge of what was right, and her clarity in what was a value, what was a virtue, what was right, what was wrong, that was very much connected with her bodily experience and the virtues of courage and all that. We’ve talked in other talks about how all that, we can see all that, understand all that whole arena of ethics and morality and values, virtues, etc., from the perspective of

soul. It's intimately tied up with the concerns of soul. It's central to the concerns of soul – values, virtues, ethics.

But I want to point out, in her very experience, her body was very, very central. What enabled her to do that, perhaps, was the integration of her bodily sense with the soul-sense, integrated with the ethical sense – these three, almost not separate. All through these exercises, these five exercises, this is part of what I'm wanting to almost knead together, knit together, grow into each other – body, soul, and soul-sense, and voice. In terms of her voice, as I said, she was already an activist. She was already pretty outspoken, etc., and she continued to be for the rest of her life. Another interesting thing she said was that in that moment, when she didn't move, she said, "I just thought of Emmett Till, and I just couldn't go back," you know, "where he was telling me to go," couldn't go back to the so-called 'coloured section.'<sup>3</sup>

Emmett Till, again, many of you will know, or you should know, was a 14-year-old African American boy. Something happened, but it's very unclear what, if anything, indeed happened. But he was accused of 'offending' (I'll put that word in inverted commas), or perhaps 'flirting with,' or something like that – whether even *that* happened or not, he was accused of 'offending' a white woman or a white girl in a grocery store or something one day. And he basically got lynched and murdered by four white men. There was a trial, but those four white men were acquitted of his murder. That was not that long before this happened with Rosa Parks in 1955. She said, "When that happened, that bus driver came back, I just thought of Emmett Till, and I just couldn't move." And again, it's not for me to suppose the workings of her mind and soul and heart there. But you recognize that she is also thinking of a figure, a dead figure, someone who has become very meaningful in her life because she was involved, to some extent, in the whole movement for justice there in relation to his trial. But she draws on an image, the image and the memory of Emmett Till.

That's just an interesting observation there. And again, what enabled this immovability that she had, and this conviction that she had, and this courage not to move, courage to break the law, courage to defy what she was being told to do? She also writes in her autobiography, she says:

People always say [that] I didn't give up my seat because I was tired.<sup>4</sup>

She said that's actually not true. Somehow the story got polluted a little bit, or watered down a little bit. It wasn't just that she was tired. She says:

I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. And I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was 42. [It's not old at all.] No, the only 'tired' I was was tired of giving in [tired of giving in to that racial injustice and that kind of apartheid].

And then, again, in terms of consequences, one of the beautiful consequences – this is part of what we don't know, in terms of when we really act in line with the duty of our soul and the callings of our soul, we can't always know the beauty and the fruit that comes out of that act. So one of the consequences was that the African American residents of Montgomery, Alabama, boycotted the public bus service,

and Rosa Parks's court case was actually being slowed down. They had to exercise tremendous tenacity walking to work, not taking the buses, car sharing where they had cars, whatever, really staying steady. It would have been much easier to take the buses. They boycotted the buses, putting indirectly financial pressure, then, on the bus company, because they weren't getting that business. Many buses just stood there empty in the garage because they weren't being filled, because the African American people who were boycotting the buses weren't filling the buses and paying for them. 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 and all that.

Again, these don't have to be exact; I'm just picking examples here to give you a sense of the kind of things that you might explore in these exercises. Apparently Rosa Parks, as a personality, she carried herself with a very dignified demeanour, naturally dignified. She was quite quiet, apparently, as a person, and serene, but dignified, without in any way being pompous or putting on airs or anything like that. And that, too, I think, is part of the flavour of this image that I want to communicate here. Her demeanour, her personality, was quiet and serene, dignified, but you can hear – I *hope* you can hear – you can get a sense of the soul-power there, and the soul-conviction, and how much her body is involved in that, and the soul-stretch, and all of it.

Now, okay, so here's a certain personality, a certain kind of style of expression. Certainly it's 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 or we're focusing 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, of what would it be to sense into that whole, the whole gestalt, the whole configuration of that whole moment, that whole image, that whole time, that icon, that iconic moment, and then see how that wants to be mirrored or refracted or expressed with the body movement, gesture, voice, or what wants to manifest or express in response to that or from that as a seed. As I said, you can hear three slightly different directions there, right? One is kind of embodying it. One is reflecting. One is more refracting. And one is just seeing: what happens in my soul, and from my soul or included in my soul – that's better: included in my soul – including the aspects of my soul, which are my movement, my body, my gesture, and 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.

[1:38:30] Again, these kinds of exercises may feel, at one level, very easy, but at another level – or maybe it's open-ended, and you can hear, “Hmm, there's quite a lot of subtlety here possible, and could be quite difficult.” I don't know. You'll have to find your way in, and play, and see. All these exercises are really, I'm offering them as seeds, just seeds. It's not my intention at all that these exercises become kind of canonical or rigid: “This is now what we do. This is our canon of exercises that we do in this soulmaking tradition. These are the ones, and only these, and exactly these.” That's not my intention at all. There are many more possibilities. I don't know; we'll see how time is and opportunities are, but maybe we'll add to them or change things, etc. Maybe. We'll see. So it's not my intention that they become canonical. There are many more possibilities.

As I've already mentioned, some of what I've offered, or the examples, or certain directions and emphases in what I've put out here in these exercises, some of those emphases, and even the nature of the content of the examples, are in response to different students that I've been working with, etc. A

different Saṅgha, a different set of students that would have come my way, a different situation, probably, almost certainly, would have given rise to somewhat different content, different emphases, because there are different needs there, and so they would have been either slightly or very different exercises.

But the principles of sensitivity, of developing sensitivity with the energy body, with the emotional body, developing range, the principles of developing sensitivity and depth and range with sensing with soul, the principle of, as I said, kneading together, knitting together, weaving together, stitching together to *make one* body and soul – so 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 the perception can be either, at times, a soulful perception, sensing with 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 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, as 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?

All these central principles of sensitivity, of range – energy body, emotional, and sensing with soul – and this kneading together, knitting together, this integrating of body and soul, body, voice, and soul. We talked about earlier various reasons why, in relation to practice and one's life, and soulmaking in one's life, and soul expressing and manifesting in one's life and in one's duty and all of that. All those principles apply to these exercises. That stands steady. The details, as I said, it's not really my intention for them to become canonical, to become rigid, necessarily. Much better, as always – back to 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, is, for instance, *not* to show up with that strong integration of thunderous energy, for example, in the first part of exercise number three, the ‘thunderclap,’ or ‘thunder and lightning,’ or whatever it's called. That's so much out of the habit of movement/gesture/voice that, “Yes, I did it a few times. I got it. I understood the principles of why we're doing this,” and then somehow, just my prevailing habit reasserted itself. And then I'm back to choosing, “Oh, Rob said the movements, it's not important. I don't want to get too rigid around the movements,” and then I'm back to perhaps, for instance, just like the ‘borne aloft by angels.’ It's almost like the opposite kind of movement, just very fluid and watery. And I keep gravitating towards *that* kind of movement. I've forgotten the principle. I might have understood it, the principle of why we're doing it. I might have understood it at one point, but I've forgotten it, and in not keeping the principle current, it has allowed the force of probably long-standing habit – and as I said, usually the habits here go on, have been reiterated and strengthened over decades, and some other possibilities have atrophied, some other avenues have been blocked for decades.

In the absence of really thinking, “Why am I doing this? Oh, yeah, right,” in the absence of reminding myself why, then the habit takes over, and the habit for the weaker movement, the kind of more flowy movement or whatever it is, the softer movement, the pink, fluffy angels, etc., perhaps. If I

remind myself of the principles – this is what I said about structural listening and understanding things structurally – the principle tells me. If I understand the principle, then I understand, “Oh, yeah. It’s about range. The principle is telling me it’s about 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.” And I remember that’s the principle, and so I want range there. I want them all to be open. If I just remember the principle, the range of what I’m doing will not shrink to just the ones that I’m used to doing, out of habit or indoctrination, or the cultures I’ve moved in, or whatever it is, or personal history, or trauma, whatever it is.

This is so important. We talked about this on the *jhāna* retreat. We can talk about it in emptiness, in terms of emptiness practices. Understanding the sort of meta-principles, the larger structural principles, they will help us, they will guide us, they will inform us in terms of what practice to do, and how to do this or that practice, because I understand *why*. So much is dependent on understanding why, which has to do with, as I said, the structural principles undergirding the whole thing.

This is what we want. 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 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.

[1:47:55] I can’t remember; I think it was in the *Eros Unfettered* series. I quoted a Sanskrit line from the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*.<sup>5</sup> It’s actually a line that’s quite common. It’s almost a stock phrase or stock sentence introducing some tantras. In English, it says, “Thus have I heard, on one occasion, the Bhagavān, the Blessed One, was dwelling (*vijahāra*),” it says, in *sarvatathāgatakāyavākcittaguhyahṛdayavajra*. Actually, it’s a longer compound. What you get there – okay, where is the Blessed One dwelling on one occasion? And then you get this compound, which is kind of like a jewel, 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 Bhagavān, the Blessed One, to be dwelling in that, whatever that is, this whole Sanskrit compound? Well, it means multiple things. It means many things at different levels. And even each one of the way we might kind of carve up that compound grammatically and syntactically, even that can mean many things at different levels.

*Sarvatathāgata* means, in Sanskrit, ‘all the Tathāgatas.’ Tathāgata, 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, once in a while, but mostly he called himself the Tathāgata. And Tathāgata was a word that was, I think, I’m pretty sure, around before the Buddha’s time, and he picked it up. Even *he* gave multiple possible interpretations of what that word, Tathāgata, could mean, what the name, or *a* name, he had given himself could mean. Once you came to the Mahāyāna, there were even more interpretations. Probably before him there were others. And there’s a kind of proliferation of meanings as you get into the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna. *Sarvatathāgata*, ‘all the Tathāgatas.’ “The Blessed One was dwelling in something-something of all the Tathāgatas.” Tathāgata also is an interesting word because it has, itself, also, because of the structure of the Sanskrit language and the way words are put together (they’re

called *saṃdhi*), it can mean many things. So 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’s got multiple meanings just in the word Tathāgata. ‘Gone to reality,’ ‘come from reality,’ ‘come from the truth, the realm of truth, the realm of suchness.’

“The Blessed One was dwelling in the *kāyavākcitta*,” the body, speech, and mind, *kāyavākcitta*. What kind of body, speech, mind? The body, speech, mind of all the Tathāgatas. But also qualified by some adjectives. And again, this depends on how you carve up that Sanskrit compound. *Guhya* is a word that’s sometimes there in the tantric texts, sometimes not. I’ll put it in right now. Doesn’t really matter. It’s optional. But two others that are definitely there are *hṛdaya* and *vajra*. *Vajra* is ‘diamond,’ and *hṛdaya* is something like ‘heart essence,’ and *guhya* is ‘secret.’ So the Blessed One, the Bhagavān, was dwelling (*vijahāra*) 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 Tathāgatas, 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, *sarvatathāgatakāyavākcittaguhyahṛdayavajra*. Actually, there are more even there, but I’m just taking these phrases. Is it possible that we, too, in our lives, in soulmaking, when we’re sensing with soul, with that soulmaking poise, when the elements of the imaginal are ignited, when we are sensing with 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? Remember *dharmakāya*, 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, *vijahāra*, in the diamond, the indestructible, the eternal heart essence of the body, speech, and mind of all Buddhas, all Tathāgatas, all those who go to and come from this transcendent truth, this transcendent reality, this reality that is both transcendent and immanent?

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 and cognition, which we’ve talked much more about in the balance of things in the Soulmaking Dharma, all of that can be open to, can reflect and refract the soulmaking of the *dharmakāya*, the sensing with soul of the *dharmakāya*, the soul-duty of the *dharmakāya*, 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? 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. In a way, I 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 soulmaking develops, the range, both in terms of a sort 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 practise the exercises, as the soulmaking kicks in, in relation to those preliminary exercises, and that field, that arena or domain. What starts as a preliminary becomes in itself soulmaking and gets stretched in all kinds of ways. I want to repeat that as well, here, now.

A 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 is even regarded as a master, and you ask them, say a Dzogchen master or something like that, where there's so much emphasis in Dzogchen on *not* doing, sort of the ultimate practice in that kind of language, or some Mahāmudrā 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' as in, "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." 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 practices in Tibetan Buddhism very, very seriously, and rinpoches and masters, etc.

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

How does one relate to this, all these practices, over time, as one's developing one's soulmaking practices? There are preliminaries, and there's soulmaking. Maybe it's in parallel, these two, and going back and forth, and periods of one or the other, all that. So I don't know that that's necessarily universally formulaic. One might have to see. But for right now, we can use the word 'preliminary' with that, with that caveat.

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Burbea, "Art and Dharma" [Parts 1 and 2] (18–20 Oct. 2019), <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1i4x0Nx5rGrfDuqJV6z5U8h28xAw4UCwlaVqukOZaBNM>, accessed 1 Sept. 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Donnie Williams, *The Thunder of Angels* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2006), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Library of Congress, "Rosa Parks: In Her Own Words," <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/the-bus-boycott/emmett-till-with-his-mother/>, accessed 2 Sept. 2020: "Jesse Jackson asked her why she refused to move to the back of bus. She replied, 'I thought of Emmett Till and I couldn't go back.'"

<sup>4</sup> Rosa Parks, *My Story* (New York: Dial Books, 1990), 116.

<sup>5</sup> Rob Burbea, "The World and More: Immanence, Tantra, and Transcendence (Part 2)" (12 Feb. 2017), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/40194/>, accessed 2 Sept. 2020.