

Daimon, Refracted
Four Circles, Four Parables of Stone and Light
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If one's practice and understanding of emptiness, or *śūnyatā*, goes deep enough and wide enough, radical and thorough enough, then we see – amongst other things, we see that any view or sense of self is empty. Any self-concept is empty of inherent existence. It is not an ultimate or basic truth. So in that fuller and more radical understanding of emptiness, it is *not* the case, for example, that the personality is somehow illusory but what's *really* the case or what really constitutes the self is just the process in time of the five aggregates, of physical materiality, the body, and feelings, perceptions, thoughts, intentions, consciousness, etc. It's not the case, either, if one goes that deeply into emptiness, that self is an illusion but some kind of oneness is a basic reality, etc. All these views, all views of self are seen to be empty. And where that leaves a practitioner who has seen that, who has understood that, is not, rather, with a sort of impossibility of using the language of self, or using the views of self, and a sort of “nowhere to go” situation in their life, predicament in their life regarding self (and anything else, in fact, because everything is empty), but rather, because *everything* is empty, and there is no sort of hidden, basic, building block reality or fundament that is not empty, where it leaves a person, seeing that, is it opens up any and all views of self as kind of legitimate views and concepts to play with, to entertain, to put on the way an actor would put on different costumes, etc. – although that analogy quickly breaks down if you think about it.

So through deep insight, there's the legitimization to see and conceive and perceive self in different ways at different times in the whole range of views of self. So yes, sure, I can practise at times seeing or conceiving of personality being empty, ego being empty, but all there is is this process of the aggregates in time, for instance. Yes, fine. Legitimate view. Very helpful, quite freeing, quite simplifying at times, to a certain level helpful. Or a view of just cosmic oneness of one kind or another, and again the ego or the separate self is an illusion. Yes, beautiful, lovely, liberating to a certain extent at times, etc. And many others. But it also legitimizes seeing/sensing oneself as angel, or the self of another as angel, as theophany, as having a duty to one's daimons (which we can actually use interchangeably with ‘angel,’ for now at least).

So the deep emptiness seeing, the radicality, the thoroughness, the totality of that legitimizes, opens up all kinds of possibilities – in a way, an infinite range of possibilities – rather than closing down all these possibilities. We're free, free to conceive and perceive and talk and entertain senses, any sense of self. We're free, free to move in that whole range, knowing all the time that whichever costume one puts on, whichever way of conceiving, sensing, viewing the self is empty, as empty as any other. And we said already in one of the talks – I can't remember already, but one of the talks in this series¹ – that when we talk about not just the Middle Way of emptiness in the Dharma, what Nāgārjuna calls the Middle Way, and others, has come down the tradition as the sort of secondary meaning of Middle Way, of the Buddha's Middle Way – but when we talk about the *imaginal* Middle Way, we're not talking about simply a dissolution, a melting of the self, a dissolving, a disappearing, a fading of self or other

objects of the imagination. To be an object of the imagination, it must be formed in some way. It must retain some degree of form, this form or that form. And again, there's the infinite range there.

So imaginal Middle Way, it's formed, but it's theatre. And again, as I said in the past, if you've been to good theatre, it's powerful. You know this is not real, what's happening in front of you, but it affects you, and it can effect a transformation in your being, a transformation in your life, in your heart, in your soul, in your view of things, in your aspirations, in your desires, etc. So yes, theatre; theatre needs forms. But knowing they're theatre doesn't take anything away from the power that these different, let's say, forms of self, the different senses of self, can wield.

We also mentioned already in a talk that there's this kind of dance across the range of the imaginal Middle Way. So the imaginal Middle Way might seem neither real nor not real. It can seem, just like the emptiness Middle Way, like a very narrow path, that it's a kind of razor's edge of precision in terms of reification and non-reification, etc. But actually, there may be – I think it's helpful to conceive of rather this Middle Way is kind of more of a broad boulevard, and so we have this possibility to reify less at times or more at times, across that range that still constitutes basically a sense of theatre with regard to an image or a sensing with soul. We'll come back to that, hopefully, in this talk.

I think in the last retreat that we did at Gaia House, the *Roots into the Ground of Soul*, I tried to give an analogy, a metaphor for the necessity, if you like, for soul, of the imaginal sense beginning to involve and enliven and dimensionalize, etc., the sense of self. So that oftentimes we talk about an image as other – the image feels like it's other. Not always, of course; we've touched on that. The image is other – it's an object. But it's important, in time [for the sense of self to become imaginal]. It might not happen immediately with a certain image, and again, back to the questions of pacing, etc. And with some images, or some experiences sensing with soul, etc., it doesn't always need, it's not always important that the self becomes image. It might be just fine for this other to be image and the sense of the imaginal doesn't spread to involve the self sometimes. But if one looks, over time, at one's sort of tendencies or patterns with regard to imaginal practice and sensing with soul, and one notices that, for instance, "Oh, it's the *other* that's always divine, and I don't tend to sense my own divinity, because the sense of self has not become imaginal," if one senses, if one recognizes, looking back over a stretch of time with many images and one sees, "Oh, that's really quite rare," then one might be recognizing there an imbalance.

I gave this analogy, as I was saying, on the last retreat, of a fountain. You can imagine like a fountain, a stone fountain in one of those squares, in a city or a village, in a piazza or whatever it is. If you imagine this fountain, the water shoots up out of the sort of central nozzle, and we could say, in this analogy, that's kind of psyche's creations and discoveries rising up from the central nozzle, this sort of infinite and endless outpouring of the inclination to make soul, the desire to make soul, and the raw material of soul. So the water comes up out of the central nozzle, and then, as it does with fountains, it falls back down. And that central nozzle is central in a stone tray, maybe a circular stone tray. In falling back down, if the water just falls back down on one side of the fountain and not around the whole area, around all the different sides of that circle, then if the stone's not too heavy and there's a lot of water – again, analogies get stretched, but – if it just falls on one side, that basin and the whole fountain is going to tip over. It's going to be made lopsided and eventually kind of lose its balance, fall, and maybe shatter, if it's lopsided.

If the water is falling down *equally*, or relatively equally over the different areas of the circumference of this circular basin, then there's more balance there. I've put this out there a few times now, but really stressing its importance: soul wants self, other, and world to become image. So where there's, let's say, an image that's an other, feels like an erotic object that maybe I'm sensing it as divine, etc., there's a natural tendency – and again, it might have its own, let's say, natural pace, if we can even use such terms – for the sense of the self, also, and then the world in cosmopoesis, to also become image. So the initial image might have been an image of another, and working with that, if we don't get in the way, if we allow soul to do what it wants to do (which is to make more soul), then self and world, as well as this other, will become soul. I hope that makes sense. Without that, as I said, there will be a tipping over. So there will be, for instance, very little equanimity if just this other is divine but I'm not, especially if that other is a human other whose divinity I am sensing because I am sensing them with soul, and *I* am not – I remain flat or lacking in divinity, etc.

[14:48] When we talk about self, other, world becoming image, or soul wanting self, other, and world to become image, all, then we also have to point out: it doesn't have to happen in any order. I have been sometimes sitting, for instance, teaching a retreat, and the yogis, the Saṅgha, become image for me first, and then it might spread to the world, and to me, include the imaginal sense – the self gets subsumed, involved, kneaded into the imaginal soulmaking and the creativity and discovery of that. So it can happen in any order. It might start with a cosmopoesis. It might start from some lovely sense of nature opening up, some imaginal sense, some sensing with soul, either of one object or of the totality of one's environment, and *then* move to the self. So any order is possible. But over the long-term, we want to get a sense that the waters of soul are allowed to flow all ways, all those three ways – self, other, world. The order is not important.

So that's something to check, and what I really want to talk about tonight is the self becoming image. So that's a general point in terms of contextualizing it. We could go further with that and actually delineate other aspects of being, of experience, that also will tend to become ensouled if we let the soulmaking dynamic and process do its thing, if we don't get in the way, or block it, or inhibit it in some way. So we could say also that eros will become dimensionalized, divinized. Our own eros will become an erotic-imaginal object for us. And in fact, any aspect of our being that sort of comes into the orbit of our attention will, when the soulmaking is happening, at a certain point, it will get drawn into the soulmaking dynamic and hence become imaginal. So self, other, world, other aspects too. But it's important that self also becomes imaginal at some point, or sometimes, at least, and that can happen in any order.

In a way, like I said, we could say this is just what soul will naturally do, left to its own devices, if it isn't blocked. But still, we can investigate that whole movement a little bit more, and at times we can encourage or help it, and that's quite interesting, to explore that. So I think I already mentioned but I didn't really fill it out, you know, sometimes what happens is we're dealing with something that's touching the heart, and maybe touching the heart in a difficult way, whatever this issue is, or a very lovely way, but we see that we desire something. Maybe that desire is already eros. Maybe it's desire. Maybe it's a painful kind of desire, or it's stuck in a painful place. One possibility sometimes – again, being quite deft in the touch here, and delicate in the sort of manoeuvring, rather than formulaic and yanking things around – but one possibility then is to almost like externalize the self who loves this or

that, the self who has desire for this or that, or has eros for this or that. So one's feeling it in oneself, and even getting to that point, it might be that *that* was a journey, even to recognize, "Oh, I have desire for this," or "Wrapped up in this complicated *dukkha* that I feel afflicted by right now or lost in, actually as part of the whole constellation of *dukkha*, there is desire." There will always be desire when there's *dukkha*, and that goes back to the teaching of the OCD practice, the Opening to the Current of Desire.

But often there's love too: I love this or that. It's wrapped up with desire, of course: I love this or that, I have eros for this or that, I have desire for this or that. But externalizing the self. So here's all this complex *dukkha*; I recognize that one strand of it is my love for this or that, or my desire or eros for this or that. And 'externalizing' it means let the one who loves this or that, the one who desires this or that, let that become image. She/he/they love this or that. So almost putting it in the third person and letting it constellate as an image, which then obviously has echoing and mirroring and kind of maybe feels a bit like myself but is also other. Sometimes that's a really skilful move – again, if it's deftly and delicately done, and handled without too much pressure, or clunkiness, or demand, or formulaic sort of going through the motions.

She/he/they who love this or that, she/he/they who desire or have eros for this or that, and then, being with that image, it might be that one actually recognizes, "Oh," one has eros for, there's an erotic relationship with that self that we've just externalized. So let it be other, but it becomes imaginal. It might start as just a sort of more flat image, but as one recognizes the eros, as one recognizes the beauty there, it might become image. And sometimes it's easier to have that sense of eros and beauty when it's externalized like that. We have all kinds of reasons and social taboos and cultural conditionings and whatnot, and contractions of being, and psychology – it's harder to have that, to recognize the beauty and the dimensionality, and to have an erotic relationship with oneself. So one kind of externalizes it by just making it image. Don't worry if it's not imaginal at first. It can very soon *become* imaginal, more fully imaginal, with the eros there.

So the one who desires and loves opening, the one who desires and loves to be touched, that becomes an image, and one sees, as I said, the beauty, the dimensionality, the eternality. There's eros there. There's reverence. And one recognizes the echoing, the mirroring: it's me, and it's not me. But that might have come, this imaginal sense of the one who desires and loves opening, the one who desires and loves to be touched, or as someone else said, "the one who is faithful and devoted to beauty." All these – these are actual examples from interviews, but they came out of something, they came out of a condition of being that wasn't at all clear to start with; it was just a contracted sort of tangle of lots of different painful elements, history, and psychology, and situation, and self-view, etc. But as this image was supported to come to birth and to emerge there, then it reflects back on the self. In the infinite echoing and mirroring, one recognizes something. One recognizes something about oneself, and oneself has become image, in a sense, although there's this kind of *other*, it's *other*. It doesn't matter. Some magic, some alchemy has happened in the sense of self. So it might take a little while to get there, because one has to kind of deal with the tangle of *dukkha* sometimes, or it might not be that tangled, it might not even be *dukkha* to start with. But then these steps, if you like – I don't want to make it too formulaic – then the beauty is revealed, the eros is revealed, the whole self-sense can open up.

So this is important, and there are so many possibilities, working with image, of the way the self gets pulled into the soulmaking dynamic, pulled into the imaginal sense, how the imaginal sense spreads to include the self. Someone on retreat at Gaia House was sharing with me – this was a while ago – they were in the garden, and a blackbird flew into a window of Gaia House and was wounded, fell to the ground and was wounded. And she heard the sound, saw it, found the blackbird in the sort of undergrowth, in the flowerbed or something. It was clearly wounded, and so she just sat with it, and she stayed with it in its wounded condition, in its suffering, and stayed there with compassion, with care, with concern, but also with a troubled heart. There was quite a lot of *papañca* at first with that situation. Despite the compassion, etc., there was, “What should I do?”, and the being was stirred up, partly in a not very helpful way. But then, as she sat with it, or later, actually, the whole thing became image, became imaginal. The whole scene, and the blackbird, and the wounding there became imaginal, and in our framework, we say when something becomes more imaginal a lot of the unhelpful complication and proliferation that we call *papañca* diminishes. So as the imaginal grows, the *papañca* diminishes. As the *papañca* grows, the imaginal diminishes.

[27:09] So somehow in being with it, and being with it later back in her room, the *papañca* declined, peace came, and a healing sense came, something that was healing in the soul. She went back in the morning to check on the blackbird, but it was dead. Well, actually it was gone, so either it was presumed dead or a fox got it or something. The next day, the image returned. She was reporting this in an interview, and I asked her, in the image, is the bird alone, or are you in the image, sitting with it? And she said actually the image was of her sitting with the bird, rather than the bird alone. Both would have been fine; it was more I just wanted to get a sense of what the actual image was, what it included, and what the possibilities were. But there was something, I think – a particular possibility or direction gets included if she was in the image. It’s not better or worse. It’s just a particular possibility, a direction, gets included when the image is the wounded bird *and* the self there.

Sometimes, in a kind of simple way this works, it’s almost like then implicit in that image – I didn’t actually linger on it; I kind of, I think, said very little, because I wanted to let the process work by itself, without me leading it or suggesting it too much, suggesting too much a direction or what needed to happen. But one of the sort of basic possibilities of working with image in this way is that sometimes we don’t see things about ourselves, and sometimes some aspect or quality of our being comes more clearly to be recognized. But it’s not just that. There’s more to it than that. So in this case, her natural goodness – deep, natural, almost innocent, almost childlike care for beings, something that, my sense, was very natural to her soul. It’s part of her soul. So we recognize something, recognize our own positive qualities, etc. But there’s more to it than that, because the whole thing can then become dimensionalized and divinized, which is different than just recognizing, “Oh, I’m good at this, and I have that quality,” and that sort of flatly conceived psychology of self-esteem or whatever. That may be one level, but then there’s the possibility, when things become imaginal, with the dimensionality, with the theatre, with the eternality, with the divinity and theophany, etc., that it can become more than that. Still, that basic level of recognizing certain qualities of oneself, really, through an image, is important. As I said, sometimes it’s easier when it’s external, externalized like that.

We’ll give a couple more examples. Someone a while ago came into an interview and reported two images, and was actually interested how to connect the images with the self and with the particularities

of herself, etc. So one image was a kind of dramatic image of a queen with a long robe, and the robe was trailing blood. So she's leaving this trail of blood from her long robe. I have it written down somewhere – I can't find it. Yeah, anyway. So that was the main part of the image. Who is this queen? What's her story? I can't remember if I asked that; I think I did, or she might have wondered, or she might have just offered the background story. And she was concerned, in offering this background story that, "Oh, but I thought images were not supposed to be narrative." We touched on this, I think, in a Q & A in the *Roots into the Ground of Soul* retreat.² Sometimes you get an image which is not so much a narrative image as much as it has a kind of backstory. It has a kind of imaginal background. So one understands, almost actually implicitly – not like watching a series of events, but one understands implicitly the story or the narrative, in this case, of this queen, or whatever the imaginal character is.

So in a way, it's part of the image; it's just more in the background and intuited implicitly, but it has a narrative structure, and still the whole retains a sense of eternity, of 'always already happening,' of timelessness, etc. So that's actually not a problem with images. And even if they're narrative, sometimes it's not a problem, but let's just say that for now. And getting a sense of this queen trailing blood, and her poise and strength. I can't remember – I think, again, it's almost like I might have had to ask questions to tease out the character, and the quality, and maybe a bit of the backstory of this queen. As she was sharing this image, the image became alive for me, so we were entering into it together, and I felt like I was perceiving the image just as much as she was. It became, in a way, a common object between us, which is a very lovely thing to happen, as many of you will know. I asked, "Do you notice her wisdom? This queen has a particular kind of wisdom, a shrewdness, but without any of the negative implications of that word, 'shrewd.' There's a kind of practical wisdom, a diplomatic wisdom. Do you notice her kind of attuned, appropriate, measured responses to her subjects and to the people in her court, etc.? Do you notice her dignity, her nobility?"

So all this was, to me, sort of pregnant in the image and needed a little bit of teasing out to become more palpable, to become more recognizable, and to be recognized, to be witnessed, to be made clear. Again, as a stage of practice, it's possible then to resonate with her qualities. So I see poise, strength, dignity, nobility, wisdom, attunement, appropriate response, measured response – all these individual and connected qualities, take your time in the meditation and just be with them, and witness them, and put the energy body, and the soul, and the heart, and the sensibility in touch with, just by virtue of opening to them, and witnessing them, and appreciating them. One opens one's being to those particular qualities, and the being, the soul, the energy body, the emotions start resonating with those qualities. And in so doing, we absorb those qualities. We absorb, if you like, into our life in ways that can actually then become manifest, practically manifest, really manifest, in our real, physical relationships, over time. We absorb those qualities.

Now, sometimes people practise with images and *that's* the total scope of the intention. Sometimes people even practise Vajrayāna practices to do that. It's great, you know, and it's a very powerful way of practising. Sometimes people practise *mettā* just by imagining Kuan Yin, Avalokiteśvara, or Jesus, or whatever, and their love, and just beholding that, opening the being to that, and through that, there's this resonance and this absorption, and it begins to ignite and empower those qualities and those capacities in our heart, in our life, in our relationship, etc. So that's wonderful. In *our* paradigm, we're saying yes, great intention, and wonderful that that happens, but remember the fullness of intention. So

the image is not here just to serve me; I am serving the image. And the fullness of intention means the fullness of soulmaking here, rather than just this or that quality becoming empowered. This or that quality becoming empowered in my life, and in my relationships, and in my expression, in my speech, in my action, etc., may be *part* of serving the image. It may be part of what the image *wants* from me. It may be part of doing my duty to the daimon, etc. But really helpful in our paradigm to remember the fuller scope, or the fullness of intention – actually the fullness of soulmaking. And included in that can be this absorption of qualities, this empowerment of different aspects and capabilities of our being.

And then we talked, too, about a situation back home with some voluntary work that she was doing, and the relationship with that community, and finding her voice there, and being able to speak up with strength. She saw all that was relevant, there was this echoing/mirroring, or *part*, again, part of the infinite echoing/mirroring was its relevance in the echoing and mirroring to these particular situations with regard to community and how she manifested and spoke up there.

A second image that was shared was a naked goddess who lives in a tree, resides in a tree. One particularly salient feature of this goddess was that she has her legs open, so her legs are spread. And the yogi shared, you know, “It’s actually not sexual, but she’s opening *my* legs too.” So there’s already a relationship of the self as meditator, the sense of self in relationship with this image, and this image, this naked goddess living in the tree, is very gently opening my legs. It doesn’t seem sexual. Something very delicate happening. There was a little concern from this yogi. She said, “I’m trying not to become ethereal in the image, and I’m trying to retain my particular self.” So again, her initial question with these two images was, “What’s the relationship between these somewhat puzzling images and the self?” She couldn’t seem to kind of connect them or ground them. She said, “In this image, I’m really trying not to become ethereal, and to retain my particular self.”

So you don’t have to always do that. Even if you become ethereal, it’s not a problem. It’s not a problem. To become ethereal – we’ve talked about this – how does the energy body feel, and that range from sort of insubstantiality/ethereality, to dense and substantial, and everything in between, as one of the ranges of the energy body perception. It’s all open, and to become ethereal is not a problem. It’s just what’s happening with this particular image at that time. It might be very appropriate to this particular image. I think in this case it *was*. And also to become ethereal, if my energy body becomes ethereal, it’s not the same as melting in union and losing the twoness, losing the differentiation between self and image, and with that, the eros, etc. So there will be the reflecting and the echoing in the life from the twoness; I don’t have to *become* the image. Even when there’s a sense of self and the other, there will still be this infinite reflecting and echoing, just because it’s what the imaginal is and does. It’s part of it.

And again, there was a sense here of the image being expressed, and then shared, as if I could sense it as well, I was living that image at the same time. We were living it together. But I was careful. I didn’t want to – always question my inclinations and responses and intuitions, so checking it out with her, “Is this right? Is that right?” And to me, there was a real sense of exquisiteness. So this naked goddess had a real exquisite sort of refined, very sensitive, very delicate quality. I asked her if that was the case, and she said yes. Again, it’s like, sometimes, is it not part of *your* soul, this exquisiteness that you see in her, in this goddess? Is it not part of *your* soul and *your* particular kind of gifts in this life, your particular kind of exquisiteness are being mirrored and echoed in this goddess? Or we could say, more powerfully, I think, we could say your life, your being, your personality, the way you are with

your body, your sensibility echoes and mirrors the exquisiteness, the particular kinds of exquisiteness of this goddess. There's a refraction there. They won't be exactly the same, but there's this emanation that then gets interpreted or reflected in our particular ways. And might then this sense of exquisiteness also be part of what, so to speak, the gods, the daimons, the angels ask of you?

So again, not to identify with it, and not to make a rigid, tight ego-belief and ego-view around it. This is the delicacy of the Middle Way. There's a way that can have all the power, witnessing that exquisiteness, a conceiving of it, and sensing more than conceiving, sensing of it, having the heart and soul-sense of our being and our persona and our narrative in this life being a very particular refraction or emanation of that particular exquisiteness of that image. And not to identify with it, but to feel the power of that. And with that, is this not part of what the gods, the daimons, the image, the goddess, the angels are asking of you? [45:09] So the image is brought into a very powerful relationship with the self, but it's got all the lightness – I mean, partly helped by the ethereality – but it's got all the lightness of touch of non-identification, or not *over*-identifying, put it that way, and making a rigid ego-identity around it. So there's the duty wrapped up in it, and the sense of self, and the way this image then informs and flows into the self. Again, there are different levels of the way we can sense and conceive this, but.

So there might be, with a lot of these images – again, whether they're images that are sensed as other, or the self becomes image, there's the sense of gift, but also duty, ask. And that's part of the deal. It's part of the deal of imaginal work as we conceive it, and part of the deal of the self getting embroiled, involved, or worked on in the soulmaking dynamic, in the imaginal process. You can already hear the beginnings of a different range of views of self, and conceptions of self, and psychologies about self than are maybe more sort of common or dominant in contemporary psychology, etc. Someone asked me a while ago, "I feel like" – they were talking about themselves, now – "I feel like I want to leave an impression. It's like I want to make an imprint, or leave an imprint on" – I think she was saying on *me*, but also on others. And she was very sceptical about this desire. It's like, "Why do I have this ...?" This is a person who has done a lot of practice, a lot of, let's say, mainstream Dharma practice, and Advaita, and different things, and non-dual practice, and that kind of thing. So she was very wary of this impulse and intention and desire that she noticed within herself, wanting to leave or make an imprint on others, or on a particular other, or particular others. She said, "Why?" And she was judging it. It's easy to assume, under the rubric of many psychological or spiritual conceptual frameworks, that this is ego. "Why do I have to impress people? Why do I have to try and make this imprint? Why do I have to be important that way?", etc.

So we were talking about this, and you can actually ask, "*Who* wants this?" So her tendency was to be very suspicious of it, and because she had, I suppose, practised so long in paradigms that put aside the self, move towards dissolving the self and just dissolving it in some kind of ultimate oneness, etc., there was this suspicion. So, "It can only be an ego thing." It was troubling her, really, like some kind of itch or something that she wanted to get rid of. But I said, "We can ask *who* wants this, *who* wants to make an imprint?" Maybe it's what the soul wants. Maybe it's the way it communicates with other souls, if you like, or we could say amongst its parts, if we're parts of a World Soul, if we're conceiving of the soul that way. The way it communicates amongst its parts is by making impressions on the other parts, or one soul communicates with another by making an impression. And that's what the soul *wants*.

So, you know, if I think about John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, Beethoven, Peter Maxwell Davies, James Hillman, Etty Hillesum, friends who I love deeply, these are all, for me, in my life, deep, beautiful, precious imprints on and in my soul. They *are* my soul, or they're part of it. My soul is informed, has the impression, has the stamp of these deep soul-images – Coltrane, Hendrix, this friend or that friend, etc. And I treasure that. I treasure that. I *want* to be impressed upon in that way. I want to be impressed upon. Don't we, as souls, *want* to be impressed upon by soul, and by what is soulful?

In that desire to imprint on others I think is actually the nascent sense of an imaginal self. So it's not necessarily the ego. Again, it's the soul, and soul expresses itself in images to a great extent. It's not just the ego-self that wants to make an imprint, it's the soul-self, and the image, the imaginal self, or the imaginal selves, the budding sense of that that wants to make an imprint on others, a deep soul-imprint on others. And that imaginal self, again, it's me and not me. It's neither real nor not real. But somehow it's very profoundly me. Somehow it's very profoundly me, maybe more profoundly me than anything else. The self needs to become image. It wants to become image. Soul wants to make things imaginal, to discover their imaginal dimensions. And it needs to imprint. It wants to express itself. It wants to connect with other souls. This is how soul grows. Soulmaking *is* being impressed upon. The sense of soulfulness *is* to be impressed upon.

If we don't allow the imaginal dimensions of self, etc., then that impulse to imprint stays as ego – in other words, flatly conceived self – and not eros, but craving. And the only recourse then is to try to live that out, trying to impress people from this flat level, trying to make an imprint, an impression on people, but it's all flatly conceived, and that's going to be misery for everyone, probably. Or the only other recourse, if we're inhibiting or disallowing or dismissing the possibility of this whole soul-dimension of self, is to dwell in no-self (whatever that means), and try and live one's life with this kind of ideal of no-self, whether that's "I'm just this process of aggregates," or "I'm just love," or whatever it is, or "I'm just awareness," or "I'm just cosmic consciousness" or whatever. And again, in the way *I* would understand it, that's great – those particular views of no-self are wonderful to move in and out of – but to try and live a whole life with all the complexities and demands and particularities of our ways of loving and our creativity and our duties, etc., it doesn't really work.

So without the imaginalizing, the dimensionalizing, the divinizing, the theophanizing of self, our possibilities are very limited, and they don't really work. So, in a way, this person was bumping into repeatedly the failure of a paradigm of no-self to kind of comprehensively address the totality of her being and her needs (spiritual, soulful, etc.). We're just so used to a certain idea: "This is right. This is spiritual. This is psychologically healthy," or whatever, and something else wants to happen. Partly what allows it to happen is to conceive it in a way that gives it some respect, and believes there's a treasure there, believes there's a necessity of soul there. So self, other, world, and maybe also one's desire, one's eros – there might be eros to imprint on others, this desire to imprint on others, on the soul of others: my soul desires deeply to make this impression, and there's not craving, not even just desire, but *eros* there. But self/other/world/eros need to become imaginal, need to become erotic-imaginal objects for us. Then there is unfathomability, sacredness, beauty in these, in the self, in other, in world, in desire. Not only *beyond* self or other, world, or eros, or in their fading. The unfathomability, the divinity, the beauty – it's *in* them. They are expressions of it, broadening the expressions of it.

And I think I touched on this very briefly in an earlier talk in this series, but of course, then, if we allow this and begin to sense it, or allow ourselves to sense it and conceive of it as a soul-desire – it's not ego, it's soul, or if it's allowed to do its thing, it can be soul as opposed to ego; if we can conceive of it the right way, it can be soul rather than ego – but of course there's *dukkha* there if it seems like we're *not* making an imprint. The angels want to make an imprint. They need to. Maybe one kind of conception is that it's what we're here for. It's what human beings are here for, to express the divinities, the divinity, the angels and their particular faces, the faces of the gods. We are here to express the faces of the gods, and the angels want that, and they want that from us. So that the *dukkha* of feeling like, "I'm not imprinting. There is no connection there in what I'm trying to put out or communicate of my being," the *dukkha* might not even be an ego-*dukkha*, primarily. It might be the *dukkha* of that whole sense of, "This is what the angels want, and this is what I'm here for, and it's frustrated, it's blocked. There isn't the reception there."

We could say, if we just play with this idea, that the ego's desire to impress is a kind of contraction of or a dim echo of the soul's desire to impress. So again, we could make a whole psychology of this kind of premise or maxim, "The soul wants soulmaking. The soul loves soulmaking," and that's the urge, that's the fundamental movement in life, and everything else can kind of shake down from that. And what happens sometimes if we play with this conception is that that soul's desire to impress gets shrunken, or flattened, or tightened, or contracted around, and so it becomes a contraction or, as I said, a dim echo of the soul's desire to impress, and it manifests as ego, and it feels like ego. Something's got shrunk. So that kind of conception is quite a different conception of self, and reading or interpretation, hermeneutic of what we're doing in our life, what we're trying to do, or what, if you like, the angels are trying to do *through* us – my daimons, your daimons, are trying to do through you, with you, as you.

Some of you will have heard this story from Oscar Wilde. I don't know where he was going, but he was travelling between countries, and the customs officer asked him, "Do you have anything to declare?" And he sort of said, "Only my genius." It's funny – I've shared a few quotes of Oscar Wilde before, and sometimes it seems to me he – I don't know if it's the case, but it's almost like you can hear these little witty quips that he has, and these little retorts that he has to certain situations, on two levels. At one level, it's just a funny sort of self-aggrandizement kind of thing, declaring that he's a genius in the way that we usually understand that word. But that word, 'genius,' actually originally referred to something like a daimon. So it wasn't a person *was* a genius; a person *had* a genius, a particular genius, like their angel, or their spirit, or their daimon.

So: "Do you have anything to declare? Are you bringing anything with you into this country through customs?" "Am I bringing anything with me? Only my genius. So you can see I have nothing here, and very few bags or whatever it is, but I'm bringing this invisible daimon that you can't see, like illegal goods might be hidden." He's declaring that. I don't know if that's what he meant, but as I said, a lot of times I get these kind of double-levelled interpretive possibilities, possibilities of interpretation of things he says. And then what's the relationship with that could be very different than the first interpretation of just a kind of ego thing or "I'm a genius. I'm declaring my genius. I'm a really smart guy," or whatever it is. Not ego. It could be the conception of that daimon, of that genius in the original sense: "It's him, not me." And so there's a relationship of humility with that.

But this has really gone out of fashion. If it was ever mainstream in any culture, I don't know, but it's certainly gone out of fashion. I remember in a music history class studying about Stravinsky, the famous, brilliant twentieth century composer. He wrote *Rite of Spring*, some of you will know. And he was being interviewed by his assistant, Robert Craft, and they recorded it at one point. They were talking about the composition of *The Rite of Spring* back in the early twentieth century, and this was much later. Robert Craft got him talking, etc., and at some point Stravinsky said something like, "I was the vessel through which *The Rite of Spring* was born, through which that music was born." And then a little while later, Robert Craft quoted him back as saying that, and Stravinsky said, "I never said that!" [laughs] Robert Craft said, "You did. It's on the tape recorder." It's kind of slightly taboo, because, I think, like so many other things – sexuality and all kinds of things – we have such a confused notion of what we're allowed to think and say, and how we're allowed to view self, and what's taboo, and what's regarded as ego, etc.

So in the flow of the conversation, he was expressing perhaps a certain just natural perception of that, of being in the service to something – in this case, the service of – the angel was a piece of music. Étienne Souriau, the French philosopher, sometimes talked about "the Angel of the work." So this composition, this magnificent, revolutionary twentieth century composition, *The Rite of Spring*, it was or had an angel, and that angel wanted something out of Stravinsky. But then he said, "I never said that." "Yes, you did." [laughs] So we're constrained and confused by the mixed messages we get about the self. In so many ways, we live in a very egotistical culture, but we also view that badly, and we judge ourselves or others when it *looks* like they or we are being egotistical. There's nowhere else, there are no other conceptual levels – the conception is so thin and so limited, and we're just shunting back and forth between a rock and a hard place there. Either ego, because we have no other level to think of, and so we pursue things out of a sense of ego and ego-aggrandizement, or the judgment and denigration of that in ourselves and others. There's nothing else, because the wider conceptual frameworks in the culture offer nothing else. All the dimensions have gone, all the possibilities have gone, and there's a real impoverishment there.

[1:06:04] So Corbin, of course, talked a lot about – actually I, before, talked about – "the angel out ahead." It's almost like a counterpart of ourselves, a second half of our soul, if you like, and our relationship with that through the imaginal, and the importance of that to the sense of who we are, and the direction we have in life, and our duties to that angel, etc. And just paraphrasing a passage from one of his books, *Temple and Contemplation*, I think the book's called – in this case he's calling it the "person archetype." He said, "That's not a symbol of something in *me*. Rather, it is the earthly, human person, it's me, who, by gravitating towards this spiritual person, this angelhood, I represent and typify hypostasis," meaning an existence, a being, of the angelic world.

So the usual way of seeing it is, "Oh, this image is representing some aspect of me." We've talked about this before. "It's representing some aspect of me. The image is a representation." Turning it around: "No, *I* represent and typify this angel of the angelic world." And he continues, "The human being is called upon to answer for it on earth."³ So again, there's his way of saying this sense of duty. Everything is reversed here. He's actually talking about ritual in this passage, so it's how the ritual relates to these kinds of ideas. He says, "Human gestures, human representations and imaginings, are so many methods whereby a human being can be led to typify and exemplify in themselves a celestial

existence.” By celestial existence, in our language, it’s other dimensions of being, so there’s that dimensionality node here. Again, he’s talking about ritual, but he says, “If a celestial person, if an angel, is represented by a particular gesture or word or phase of the ritual, then to observe these is already to exist in the manner of that transcendent person.”

It’s a very different, back-to-front, upside-down view of self and reality. And so, as I said, that brings dimensionality into our being – and not just the dimensionality of, let’s say, Freud’s unconscious, a sort of deep, dark well of shameful secrets and inclinations or whatever. This dimensionality, all kinds of dimensions there. And yes, divinity, sacredness, theophany. Self is dimensionalized, divinized, recognized as sacred, or allowed to flower in a sense of sacredness. Self as theophany, or as potential theophany. Eternality – so this angel out ahead, or this, what he’s calling in this case the celestial person, is eternal. Our selves are not; human selves don’t seem to be. I’m not an expert on Corbin, and his writings are sometimes very dense, and he was very prolific, but sometimes it sounds like he’s talking, when he talks about the angel out ahead, as if there’s just *one* angel out ahead, or one genius or whatever.

In the Soulmaking Dharma, there’s not necessarily just one. Going back to the beginning, we’re free. There may be many images – what Hillman calls more polytheistic psyche: images, imaginal beings, angels that sometimes are kind of in conflict with each other, or at least move, pull us, draw us, beckon us in different directions; ask of us impossibly divergent things. I mean, it may be that they all refer to some kind of more fundamental or higher dimensional archetype, if you like – I don’t know – in some of these paradigms. An archetype, if you remember when I talked about that word, I think it was in *Path of the Imaginal*, in the original meaning, it meant something without a form. It was rather the principle of forming – forming like this, or forming like that. So that which is not an image, but forms images. So it might be, if you think about it that way, that it generates many images.

Now, of course, sometimes what we encounter in or with the sense of self doesn’t feel divine at all. It doesn’t feel sacred. And if it feels eternal, it’s more just a sense of it seems to be going on forever with its afflictive sort of gestalt or constellation. So sometimes, for example, obviously people, we struggle, especially in our culture, with the inner critic. This is very, very common, partly, I think, a result of our culture – again, of the limited ways of understanding the self, limited ways of conceiving the self, but also a result of social fragmentation, individualism, all kinds of things historically. And so I’ve talked about working with the inner critic in the past. Many years ago, I think, I gave some talks on it. And I gave out a whole set of approaches or things one could do in meditation, both at the time that the inner critic is active, if you like, present, and also when it’s not active. And some of those involved working with the imagination with regard to the inner critic, in relationship with the inner critic. But that wasn’t imaginal. So it’s working with the imagination, but it’s not imaginal, in *our* sense.

But it might be that we can actually allow things to become imaginal with respect to the inner critic. Some of that might start with just a more deliberate imagination. So I’ll give just a couple of possibilities, just to start an exploration, perhaps. Sometimes, maybe, perhaps the inner critic could be seen, in a way, it’s part of the self, it’s part of the psyche, which, among other things, has taken or become the soul-locus of power. When the inner critic is badgering us and kind of taking over and hounding us, all the power, or most of the power, has gone *there*. So there is this psyche with its

complexity, this self with its complexity, this soul with its complexity, and all the power of that soul seems to be kind of gathered under the purview and domain of that inner critic, and the rest of the being feels weak, collapsed, etc., lacking in power. But it's actually *my* psyche, yeah? My self, my soul, is part of that.

So a couple of possibilities. Sometimes, or maybe, feeling one's frustration and anger at the inner critic – so we're back to this crucible thing, and the emotions, and where is the emotion, and where is the kind of point of entry that can allow things to start to become dynamic and galvanize a little bit in terms of certainly liberating process, but maybe even soulmaking process. Feeling one's frustration, and even one's anger – one can be so fed up with this inner critic. So instead of getting dragged into listening to the inner critic, actually what else is there? "I'm feeling really fed up. I'm feeling really angry at the inner critic." And that, again, the heat of that emotion, I have to sit with it in the energy body, I have to kind of tease it out of the afflictive mix that's happening at the time.

But in being with it, in holding it, in being with it in the energy body and recognizing it, and actually letting it heat up, letting that frustration and anger, recognizing there may be a treasure here in the frustration and anger which I usually would see as a defilement, as a *kilesa*, as something that's not helpful, letting it build up in the energy body, in the alchemical vessel, in the crucible, and out of that, image, an image, might arise. Out of the heat of the frustration and anger at the inner critic, an image might arise, and that may well have power in it, because frustration and anger have a lot of potential power wrapped up in them. And so another, let's say, another part of the psyche, so to speak, is empowered, and it changes the relationship with the inner critic.

Another possibility is to go ahead and deliberately imagine – so it might not be imaginal at first; don't worry; it might never [be] imaginal, and might still be liberating – go ahead and deliberately imagine, for example, destroying the inner critic violently. So whatever it is: smashing it to bits, clunking it on the head, you know, whatever. And that deliberate imagination – again, it may not be imaginal; it may be liberating without this ever becoming imaginal, or it may become imaginal – then that, going ahead and deliberately imagining destroying the inner critic violently, may actually then liberate the feeling of anger. So in the first approach, it was like, can I feel the anger first? Can I feel the frustration first, and let that constellate an image? Or it might be that I'm actually playing with the imagination, and *that* liberates the possibility of feeling that emotion. And in that anger is power. The third step there would be, can I almost filter out the sense of power in the energy body from the feeling of anger?

So those are some possibilities. And again, in that last one I illustrated there, putting those two together, again, there's non-linearity here. It's sort of a tangled ball of wool – I pull on *this*, and it might be that *this* loosens as well, this other one, this other thread. So there are those possibilities. There's also a slightly different possibility. The inner critic tends to arise more in relation to something we are deeply longing for, or that we actually have eros for. So someone was talking to me about the inner critic, and I asked her, "When does it come up? Is it just there all the time, or is it certain situations?" And it was coming up actually in relation to, or in the context of, certain situations of public speaking where she really cared about what she was communicating or teaching or whatever it was. Or for a lot of people it comes up in relation to practice, and wanting to practise well.

So this is interesting, you know. I'm not saying it's always the case; sometimes there's a more pervasive, low-grade sense of inner critic, of course. But oftentimes it's actually coming up in relation to things that we really care deeply about, or that we really long for, or that we have eros for. So rather than getting caught up with the inner critic, and what it's saying, and what it's doing, etc., again, it may be possible to let that do its thing, but can I kind of contact the eros or desire that's there? I'm judging myself for being a bad meditator or whatever, but actually can I contact the eros and the desire to meditate well and deeply, and discover and play in that way? The inner critic's still doing its thing, but I'm just honing the attention, directing it to other elements, other aspects of the tangle of what's going on. With that desire, again, as I touched on earlier, might be wrapped up the *dukkha* of the frustrated desire – you know, I *really* want this thing, and I'm just frustrated I'm not making any headway, or I really want to be able to communicate well in a teaching situation or whatever, but I feel like I'm not doing well enough. So the *dukkha* of the frustrated desire might be part of what I come into contact with when I'm kind of looking for the eros or desire underneath, underpinning or associated with this inner critic. And that's okay, because frustration also has this heat element, and it's very close to the desire and the eros.

But again, out of that crucible, out of that, I'm directing the attention to some elements of the being, the eros, the desire, or even the *dukkha* of the frustrated desire – there's heat there, and there's potential dynamism there, and out of that crucible, if I can relate to them and hold them the right way, an image might arise in relation to the self, or the self might become image, and one might have a very different sense of it all, even a different sense of the inner critic, a different sense of the self. There's healing there, etc.

What was interesting when this person raised this with me was she was taking a public speaking course to try and develop her skills as a public speaker. They were given certain exercises and things like that. But, in this case, I don't think, or it may not be, that the underlying desire, the deep longing, comes up in the context of those public speaking [exercises] – there might still be self-judgment, but the desire won't be there. But when it came to teaching or speaking in public about what she really loved, what felt really important to her, then there will be the desire. The other things were just – they were giving exercises or techniques that you can do to kind of improve as a public speaker; all really important, but it wasn't just that she wanted to be a good public speaker just for the sake of it. There were things that she wanted to communicate, that she deeply wanted to communicate and communicate well. So you have to look for the desire in the right place if this is the case.

[1:23:13] And we'll hopefully come back to this, but there's a way – and I know some of you, probably at this point maybe most of you know this – there's a way that we, as one of the nodes, loving and being loved, we can feel loved by an image or images in ways that heal so deeply. So sometimes connecting with an image and recognizing, feeling, opening to its love for us, it's so tailored and so tailored to our being and our particularities, and so attuned to us and empowered by the dimensionality and the divinity and the beauty, etc., that, in a way, that kind of love, the love that images have for us, that profound and almost mysterious, mysteriously attuned love, it can heal the inner critic and that whole painful constellation almost more powerfully, I think, than anything else.

So if we just lay out some possibilities with regard to the self becoming image, the self becoming imaginal, a soulful sense of self, soulmaking sense of self. There is, as I said at the beginning this

evening, there is the possibility of externalizing, so to speak, the self that loves this, or desires that, or feels this way or whatever, and letting that become image – letting it become other, and then that becomes imaginal. And that starts to then echo back and change our sense of self and dimensionalize it, etc., and allow it to become more imaginal, more soulmaking. Then there's also the possibility of an image that is already other, but we sense, "It's me, and it's not me. It's not me, it's other. But somehow it echoes me," and in Corbin's language, we recognize the angel out ahead. It has something profoundly to do with me and my soul. Somehow it's profoundly me, and it's not me. So that becomes, if you like, part of our sense of self, part of our soul-sense of self, part of our sense of soul.

There's another possibility that I haven't really touched on, where an image can arise and it's sort of apparently impersonal. It seems like it's not to do with self, it's not an image of self. But actually it's doing something that's allowing the self to gain dimensionality and become image. So there are images that are apparently impersonal, or that don't retain particularities. For example, I've been reading, in the last few years at different times, a little bit about what's called the ten *Sefirot*. It's a Kabbalistic teaching. They're ten – I don't know what you would call them – aspects of the Godhead, or aspects of God, or aspects of the way God emanates from the sort of unfabricated, dark mystery of the innermost being of God, emanating these ten qualities (so love, and strength, and wisdom, etc.). And there's all kinds of literature on this, and ways it's interpreted, etc. So I was meditating one day with having read about this, and then with the idea that my being contains or expresses these ten *sefirot*, these ten aspects of God – *our* beings do; everyone's being does.

So they, themselves, are part of and rooted in the divine, and are emanations, as I said, at different levels of the divine or the Buddha-nature, if you prefer that word. And again, in Dharma language, *dharmakāya* actually means the body of qualities of a Buddha. That was one of the original meanings of it. And it came to have other dimensions of meaning. So there's a similarity there between the teaching of *dharmakāya* and *Sefirot*. But then [it] was added to in my meditation with this idea that my being contains and expresses those ten *Sefirot*, those ten aspects of the divine, of the Buddha-nature. And meditating in that way, the *Sefirot*, they remain impersonal, but the self begins to be given a kind of dimensionality and divinity, and it's complexified, etc., in that way. And because of that, the self begins to become imaginal. And then, as I said right from the beginning with the fountain basin analogy, also then the world in cosmopoesis starts to become imaginal as the self became imaginal. Or it might be that the perception of the world is conceived of and sensed as self, that kind of way of looking.

So you can hear, "Well, that all sounds quite universal and impersonal, in a way. Although the self is involved, it seems to be being seen as just a universal kind of manifestation of God, of the Buddha-nature, of these ten qualities that everyone has." But there was a way of doing it where my particularities were retained. I wasn't dissolving the sense of self, or omitting the sense of self. My narrative, my struggles, my joys, all that was included in this meditation on the nature of God and the nature of human psyche, if you like, of human being and the continuity of that in terms of the *Sefirot*, the human being as emanation of the *Sefirot*, but without dissolving the particularities, without omitting me and my narrative and struggles and all that. So there's the particular, unique way these ten *Sefirot* manifest and express through me. So something that can start as an apparently impersonal image, or even sound like it, actually can be, by including the narrative and the particulars and the uniqueness,

can be rendered more unique, retain its particularities, retain its personhood and uniqueness to self. You know, there are all kinds of possibilities; I'm just throwing out a few here.

But if we linger for a moment with this particular area of images or senses of self that are apparently impersonal, it's worth mentioning (some of you may know this): in some of the Buddhist tantras, the tantric texts, the elements – for example, earth, air, fire, water, sometimes space, sometimes consciousness, either four or five or six elements – are, we could say, personified, or associated with certain divinities, certain bodhisattvas or Buddhas or goddesses. You could say, more than that, you could say that the elements are the refractions of those goddesses, for instance. So in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, for example, there are four goddesses: Māmakī, who is or is behind or emanates or symbolizes liquidity, the water element; Locanā, who symbolizes, who represents, who emanates, who is the element of earth, of solidity; Paṇḍara, who symbolizes or emanates or is the goddess of heat, fire, warmth element; and Tārā, who manifests or emanates or is the goddess of air, the air element.

So for some tantric practitioners who base themselves, for example, on the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, practising that way, that would form part of their *maṇḍala* and part of their meditation. There are different ways you can do this – some of it will be very prescribed, but there's no reason why one can't improvise with it a little bit. So sometimes, one may be meditating outside with a sense of the elements in relationship to one's body, and there's a sensing with soul of, for example, the four elements. One plays with that, one encourages it, or it just opens by itself, and one senses them as divine, maybe as goddesses, personal divinities in this case, or one's following this prescribed image. So that's all lovely, and we could include that in Soulmaking Dharma and that kind of thing in imaginal practice. There was once – maybe it was on the *Foundations of a Soulmaking Dharma* retreat; I can't remember. I think it was in a Q & A.⁴ Someone asked me, and I responded sort of categorizing the different kinds of image that can arise. There are the imaginal images in the way that we talk about them for the most part, but then there are other variations where you can kind of get this formless space that retains the essence of the particularity, of the character, of whatever imaginal figure one was meditating on, but the actual sensible apprehension of that imaginal figure has gone, and it just retains their character – an empty space with their character. It can be very beautiful, very profound. That's a possibility.

There's also a whole possibility – what often tends to happen with more prescribed images or archetypes, Kuan Yin or these four goddesses from the *Guhyasamāja*, for instance, or Tārā, where it's almost like one's working with an imaginal figure, but that imaginal figure is kind of, in a way, semi-universal. And that's fine. That's a very popular form of practice, of using the imagination or visualization, especially for Vajrayāna practitioners. And it can stay there – like this goddess, Tārā or whoever it is, doesn't really become a fully particularized character the way imaginal images, in the sense that we *mostly* are talking about them, tend to. But it's still really valid and can be really fruitful. And of course, an image may start that way, in a sort of more universal archetypal sense of this image, Tārā or this goddess or whatever it is, and then become more particularized with practice – not that it should or shouldn't; it's just a slightly different realm that one's in, a slightly different direction.

Or, again, it could be, for instance, in practising, let's say, sensing the elements with soul, the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), and letting them become divinities, goddesses like that, again, then as one meditates it may be, and one might be able to steer it this way or it might just happen this way (it's not better or worse), that they become particularized, these goddesses, or their relationship with *this*

body, *this* self, and the elements in relation to these more universal archetypes, that relationship relates to this particular self. And again, as we said in the example of practising with the ten *Sefirot*, the particulars of *this* self, and *this* body, and the way the elements *have* manifested in this body and in this life and in this narrative, and *do* manifest right now and will in the future, *that's* where the particularity is not just retained but also then involved and – what's the word? – highlighted and amplified, even, in the practice. So they remain somewhat universal, the elements and the goddesses behind them, in this example, but it starts to become more personal through the relationship, how do those elements, how have they been incorporated into my life, *this* life, *this* narrative, *this* being, *this* self, *this* body. Yes? So that's a possibility. Actually, there are a couple of possibilities there – letting it be more universal and archetypal, and it becoming less so through the particularization, the uniqueness of the self, or through the gradual particularization and uniqueness of these divine figures, they become more particular, more like proper characters.

So you can see there are all kinds of tributaries of possibilities here in this. But even if something starts apparently impersonal – I mean, it can *stay* impersonal and still be very soulmaking, very beautiful, very fruitful kinds of practice, *or* there are ways that it can be apparently impersonal and then gain more relevance to the personal self and particularity, either in oneself or in the image. So just throwing out some different possibilities here. We're talking about what can support the sense of self becoming imaginal, and the sense of then dimensionalizing the self and sensing the self as having divine roots, as being theophany, etc., as having its origins in other dimensions. I mentioned several times now ways of practising where one has a kind of panoramic view or bird's-eye view of the whole of one's life, as if from the other side of death, beyond death, after death, so to speak – seeing, almost all at once, as a tableau, the birth, the life, the narrative, and the death, sort of from the perspective of eternity. And one can just play with that. It may take a little practice, but it's just using the imagination a certain way.

In gaining that perspective on life, then, it can be that the eternality element, the node of eternality, is triggered, is ignited, and that can then allow the sensing of one's life – of one's birth, narrative, and death – from this perspective, from the eternal perspective, if you like, and the whole thing can be sensed with soul. It starts to flesh out and come alive, ensouled – one sees it, one senses oneself, one's life, one's journey, all of it with soul. So I've mentioned that a couple of times, but actually there's all kinds of possibility when we get into the domain of time and timelessness, and perceptions of time and eternality, etc. I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but sometimes in your love for someone – a human other, or beloved other, maybe an animal, even, or a tree or something – where there's love, sometimes it's possible, because of the love and because of the eros, that the perception, of course, becomes soulmaking. You actually sense them with soul at times, this beloved other. And sometimes it's a possible, I find very lovely perception, to perceive this other, this beloved other, or oneself, even, as the sort of contemporaneous totality of the temporal slices of their life.

In other words, one can see plainly, they are with them, and it's now, and they are X years old, whatever that is, but somehow I'm seeing not just that, but I'm seeing them when they were a little girl, I'm seeing them when they were a baby, I'm seeing them when they were a teenager, I'm seeing them in the full bloom of adulthood, I'm seeing them when they're an old person, I'm seeing them when they're very old, etc., and all those kind of temporal slices exist at once, all those ages, and one loves

them all, and one perceives them all at once in the being. Again, in the sensing with soul, through the eros inseminating psyche and logos, inseminating the imaginal object, the beloved other, and it complexifies, it diversifies, it presents other faces, more and more faces, more and more dimensions. So that's one very lovely way of perceiving either oneself at times or someone you love. All kinds of possibilities, though, when we get into the realm of time and the perception of time.

Another possibility – and last one for now, but – another possibility is meditating on an aspect of your being. So it could be the body, or anything, it could be the voice, etc., and meditating on it in a way, sensing it in a way that allows it to become ensouled, allows it to gain dimensions and significance for soul and the elements to come alive with respect to that aspect or area or domain of our being. And then, maybe from there, then it spreads to the whole sense of self. So, could give an example of this, but might even try it as a guided meditation, if you feel like, right now, just very briefly, to give you a sense of what the kind of possibilities are.

[1:45:24, guided meditation begins]

So if you're listening and you want to engage, put your body into a posture that's comfortable and sort of appropriate for meditation or helpful for meditation, whether it's standing or sitting upright or whatever it is. And just take some moments to actually sense the body, just in the simple way of sensation, etc., and the energy body, and expand that awareness of the energy body.

But include in your awareness, as we've touched on – it's not that this always has to be the case, but for right now, let the sense of self, which includes your narrative, narratives, let that be there too. That doesn't mean getting lost in it. It doesn't mean going off on a distracted tangent or fretting about this or that. It just means having a sense of body, how the body feels, how the energy body feels, its presence right now, its material presence, its energetic presence and feel, but also of your self. There's a self sitting here, so to speak, and that self has a narrative, and that kind of can be included, so to speak, in the larger scope or background of the awareness.

And just gently, very gently, suffuse your body, your self, your narrative with *mettā*, with loving-kindness, with unconditional well-wishing. Every part and aspect of your body, as the Buddha would say, leaving no spot untouched. Just totally permeating and saturating your body with the healing balm of friendliness, of kindness, of love, and well-wishing. And let that *mettā* include your self and your narrative, narratives. Very gentle, very light touch here. Aware of the body, aware of the energy of the body, aware of the energy of the *mettā* touching the body, permeating the body, surrounding and suffusing the body.

Then you can let the *mettā* be somewhat there as a sort of implicit background or basis of this short guided meditation. So let that kind of go into the background, but still be there, underpinning everything. And aware of the body, again, aware of certainly the energetic feel of the energy body, but also aware of the materiality of the body, the physicality of it – sinews, muscles, nerves, fibres, skin. Your body. Yes, it's not yours, but let's say it's yours right now, it's you. It's not you, and it's you.

Just checking that the *mettā* is still there sort of implicitly in the background, warmth, kindness, well-wishing. If that needs a little boosting, just give it a gentle shot. But seeing if you can dwell with the sense of body, the mystery of embodiment – *your* embodiment. The mystery of you having this

particular appearance, this kind of form, this kind of body. The miracle of that, the gift of that. And yes, all its particular quirks, and all its particular ways it doesn't work so well, may be failing in this way or that. It's still an amazing thing. It's a beautiful body. Totally a miracle. And there's no other body like it. And it's tied in to your being, your soul.

And then, within the scope of the body and the bodily functions, let's just focus in on the voice. So as far as the body is concerned, we can kind of identify maybe three or four regions or centres of voice production in the body, that are involved in vocalizing, in making sound. So there's the chest. The air in the lungs, and the whole resonant cavity of the chest. So just to be aware of that. It's part of the instrument, part of the miracle, part of what allows you to sing forth, sound forth, communicate, reach out to touch other people through your voice, to express your uniqueness, your point of view. Let yourself be aware of your chest, in the context of the gift of voice, the mystery of voice.

And there's the throat and the voice box or the larynx. Also obviously integral to the production of sound, our voicing in the world. A part of the gift. And the mouth, the malleable cavity of the mouth – can shape itself as a resonant chamber to, in all kinds of ways, all kinds of amazingly precise ways, to really shape sound very precisely, very uniquely. Then there's the tongue and the teeth, which are also included in the instrument, part of what allows, shapes, and supports, forms the voice, the sounding. So this miracle, this gift of embodiment, and part of that miracle, that gift of embodiment, is this particular set of areas, regions, centres of the body that are involved in vocalization, in voice.

[1:53:46] And as you're with your sense of the body and with the sense of these four areas or regions or centres of voice production in the body, beginning to include in the awareness, in your meditative awareness, what comes through the voice, what *can* come through – what comes through of soul, through the voice, through *your* voice, through *our* voices? What comes through as soul through these regions, these centres of the body? Kindness can come through. Love can come through. Humour, the mystery of humour. Flashes of intelligence and brilliance come through, are articulated. All these aspects of soul, *your* soul, coming through, being given life, manifestation, embodiment, through the voice, through this physical entity, through this miracle of body. *Your* perspective, the way *you* see things, the way *you* sense things.

Fire can come through. Fire in the voice, fire in the perspective, fire in what's articulated. Struggle, story – we can convey our story, our struggles, our difficulties, our pains, the sensitivity of our heart. All that manifests from and through these regions of the body, the chest, the throat, the voice box, the mouth, the tongue and teeth. Poetry can come through – either literal poetry, or just poetic speech.

One level, we can say body is soul, or we don't divide them – we can say body is the instrument of soul, the gift of body in the service of the gift of soul, to you and from you, into the world and to other souls. In the voice, there's obviously the possibility of carrying verbal communication. We communicate ideas and feelings and requests and all kinds of things, as I elucidated. There's also the sound itself, the music of speech. So often when we listen to someone speak or we speak ourselves, we're concentrating on the words and their meaning. But there's also the parallel, intertwined, ongoing music – the sounds, the syllables, the mystery of that. Somehow, this, too, is part of the communication of soul. Of course it's there when we sing, etc., but it's there when we speak. This music, right now, as I'm speaking. Can listen to the words, the meaning: "What's he talking about? Oh, I'm trying to follow these instructions." But there's also a music in the sounds of the spoken voice. And it doesn't

necessarily *mean* anything; it's music, and it has dimensionality, and it has mystery, if we can hear it in a certain way. It has beauty.

All this comes through you, comes through the gift of body, is embodied through body. And what happens right now if you just experiment in this meditative state, in this soul-sensitivity, as much as you can encourage it gently right now, with the full awareness and the sensitivity of the resonances and the ripples in the heart, in the soul, in the energy body, perhaps even in image? You just let yourself make certain sounds that are not words. Maybe certain syllables. [*makes "pah" sound*] And listen to the mystery of it. You are part of that mystery. Listen to the music of it. It doesn't *mean* anything, but it's full of *meaningfulness*. The mystery of this ability to vocalize. Doesn't matter what sound right now, what syllable. [*"ssssss", "ah," "tuh," scattering sounds, "ahh," "dsk"*] If you want to, you can press pause and, for a few minutes, just play with that. Let yourself vocalize meaningless or apparently meaningless sounds, and hear it as music, sense the mystery there. It can be in the vocalization, in the sound, in the rhythm if you string syllables together. There's music there.

What happens now if you say "I"? I. This time with the implication of the meaning of "I," the self, the mystery of that. I. What happens when you vocalize that "I"? What happens when you vocalize "you"? So really as delicately sensitive and open and alive to anything that you notice, anything in the nuance of reverberation, of resonance, of mystery, of beauty.

When you're ready, coming out of that particular meditation, whenever you're ready.

[2:02:28, guided meditation ends]

Maybe that gives you an idea. As I was saying, you could take any area or aspect of the being – voice we did, could be body or whatever – and meditate on it in a way that supports or opens the possibility of sensing that domain of your being with soul, and from there it can spread to the self and perhaps even in cosmopoiesis, etc. So like I said, these are just some possibilities. The possibilities are infinite, really, for the ways that the self can become imaginal and gain that dimensionality and divinity and all that in our sense of it. Really, we might turn it around and say, what actually gets *in the way* of that happening? What prevents us sensing the self with soul? One is, of course, as usual, a logos, an idea, a conception that disallows it. So, for example, the example I gave earlier, this wanting to make an imprint or this wanting to make an impression – I just assume that it's ego and it's not okay, and I judge it. There's a logos there that's actually limiting my sense of things and my understanding of myself and my impulses and the movements of my being. So very often, a certain logos gets in the way, and we don't even realize it.

Or, as I said I think at the beginning of the talk, you know, not noticing the possibility that in working with an imaginal other, or an imaginal object, that the self, too, can become infected, caught up, involved in the soulmaking dynamic, the self-sense can become imaginal. Either not noticing it or not allowing it for whatever reasons. Maybe I don't even know the reason; it just feels it's blocked. So that's going to get in the way, obviously. Of course, the opposite can be true, as I touched on. It could be just it's always my self that's imaginal, and I fail to allow the world or others to become imaginal, to sense them with soul. That's also a possibility and it will be a problem.

What else gets in the way? Over-identification, over-reification of the sense of self, any sense of self, even if it's a beautiful one. It feels like, "Oh, this is what we're talking about now, this is imaginal." If it's too reified, problem. If I'm too identified with it, problem. It will squeeze the soul out of it, like squeezing the juice out. Or, on the other hand, I just dismiss it: "Oh, that's crazy. That's stupid. That's not real." Over-reification or under-reification, in a way. Like I've said, I think a couple of times, we're dancing on the breadth of this boulevard of the imaginal Middle Way with respect to reification, how much, how little at different times. And sometimes, or with some people at some times, it's important that they view or that they are encouraged to view: "Do you realize you're more *really* that, you're more *really* or more *primarily* angel than you are what you appear to be in the conventional sense, in the conventional view?"

Sometimes, of course, a person's gone the other way, and they've identified *too* much with that angelic dimension or the imaginal self, need a bit less reification sometimes. But, you know, our culture doesn't really support that view of the dimensionality of the human being in our sense of the imaginal self, of the angelic refraction. So because the culture doesn't, we might need to lean on it a bit more, to relegitimize it, reinstate it and open up that possibility. But it's also very individual, and it can vary at different times and different situations. But there is the possibility of sensing the self with soul, sensing the self as a temporal emanation of what is timeless, the angel, a theophany. We hold it lightly, and in that light holding of it, as I said, it can have enormous power, bear enormous fruit, something very, very beautiful.

¹ Rob Burbea, "'Until All is Liquid' (Emptiness and Sensing with Soul)" (29 May 2019), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/58786/>, accessed 21 March 2021.

² Rob Burbea, "On Practising with Images (Q & A)" (26 March 2019), question six, <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/58613/>, accessed 22 March 2021.

³ Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation* (London: Routledge, 2013), 171.

⁴ Rob Burbea, "Sailing the Oceans of Soul (Q & A)" (27 June 2018), question one, <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/51532/>, accessed 23 March 2021.