

The Way of Non-Clinging (Part 3)

Eros Unfettered

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Okay, so in the last part, in part two of this talk, we unpacked a little bit, outlined, laid out a different way of thinking about clinging and this teaching of non-clinging so that one is actually investigating the experience of clinging, that movement of clinging, and times of more clinging, less clinging, even less clinging, becoming skillful at moving up and down on that spectrum. And opening up, through doing that, first of all what that word clinging means, seeing that it too is a spectrum of very, very gross to very, very subtle, and using it as an entry point and a tool, a key for investigation into the fabrication of perception, the fabrication of appearances, the dependent arising of appearances, and the investigation of seeming reality, the questioning of that reality through the mechanism of playing with ways of looking, fabrication, centered on the concept of clinging. And opening up in that way, very deeply, momentarily, the actual sense of existence. As opposed to trying to live without clinging, somehow live a life that's free of clinging, craving, et cetera.

And through that, we also saw that it actually in a way doesn't make sense to live without clinging, to try and live without clinging and craving, because clinging/craving are actually elements, if you like, necessary for the fabrication of perception, for any appearances to appear, for us to live in the world, experience a world. So in that sense, too, it doesn't quite make sense. But as I said, there's a second problem with this ideal of living without clinging. A second problem. And in some ways, for some people, it will be very obvious. Maybe it's hard for them to articulate it and certainly hard for them to square it and reconcile it with a more usual Dharma understanding. But the problem is obvious. For other people, interestingly, the problem and the difficulty here is not obvious at all, and that's interesting. I'll come back to that actually throughout this retreat.

But the second problem is, as I said, would we even want to live a life without clinging, without craving? And what would that look like? Have we actually thought out or explored what that would mean, what it would look like? What would such a goal, living without clinging/craving – I'm just going to use the word clinging for shorthand – what would such a goal imply and entail for the different domains or areas of our existence, areas and directions of our existence that we really care deeply about? So what would it entail, that kind of goal, and imply for, for instance, our engagement? Politically, environmentally, the world crying out for this. If I have this ideal, non-attachment, no craving, no clinging, very even keel, what might it imply for areas such as engagement? Or even our own personhood and the range of styles of, if you like, personality or persona or expression in the world? What does this rather simplistic and constrained ideal of living without clinging imply for these areas? What would it imply and entail for art and our relationship with art? Making art. I've talked about all of these in other talks, so I'm not going to dwell very long on this.

But for instance, is it even possible to create a large form, say a long piece of music or a novel or a film or something, or a painting that takes a long time, without craving, clinging, attachment, desire? Or training, the long, dedicated training it takes to develop that kind of mastery in spontaneity, if you like, of the Zen calligraphist or the Zen sword fighter or the jazz artist? What would this goal of living without attachment, without clinging, without craving, mean for the way we love our families, family members, friends, deep friendships, romantic love? What on Earth would it mean for the realm of romantic love, for our sexuality? Even for food and for the kind of care and attention to detail and loveliness that some people bring when they prepare food, cook food, and share it with others, offer it to others?

So if we have this idea, living without clinging, how then are these areas, these domains and directions of our being and our existence, our life today, how are they then related to and viewed? What

is implied about them? Certainly if I have too simplistic an idea of “just drop clinging, just let go of everything,” that kind of thing, what then is implied about all that? But also if I kind of piece together and fit together a collection of other Dharma concepts and differentiate between them – attachment, clinging, craving, *metta* and the *brahmaviharas*, this word that I used, *hitacchanda*, the sort of well-wishing but also desire for decreasing suffering, we could say, in ourselves and hopefully in the world; if we differentiate also, the Buddha outlined clinging to sense pleasures, clinging to views, clinging to customs and habits, clinging to self-view. If we bring that collection of concepts to bear on all these themes and areas and directions of our life, engagement, potential engagement of our personhood and the range of styles of personhood, art, family love, friend love, romantic love, sexual love, sexuality, sexual expression, food, all that. How is it viewed if it’s either viewed very simplistically or through this collection of sort of more traditional Dharma concepts? How would those areas be viewed?

All those domains, our endeavors, our efforts, our passions, our clings and attachments within those areas, some would say, “Yeah, all that’s delusion. All of it’s delusion. It’s deluded to be engaged and get riled up about these things. Personhood is complete delusion. And certainly anything that doesn’t look like the picture of calmness, of unruffledness. Art, waste of time, really, unless it communicates something about the end of suffering. Family, alright, granted it’s important biologically and we owe our parents and that sort of thing, but basically it’s an attachment, it’s delusion. Romantic love, off the scale as a delusion. Sexuality, just defilement. Food, too.” And some people would basically hold that. They would answer yes, it’s delusion. Some would say in response that with those other Dharma concepts that I outlined – attachment, *metta*, clinging, craving, *chanda*, *hitacchanda*, till the end of suffering, et cetera, the different kinds of clinging that Buddha outlined, and maybe throw in John Bowlby and those kind of people and the talking about healthy attachment of the infant and mother, the necessity of the sort of evolutionary programming of that kind of healthy attachment, and they would say, “Yes, that’s adequate. There’s nothing missing in that. We can explain our relationships with all these areas, if we are engaged, if we have different personalities, if we are engaged in art and family love and all that stuff, it can be explained with all those concepts. Some of it will be delusion and others can be fit into it as concepts. It’s adequate as a net of concepts.”

And others will be screaming. [laughs] Something in the being will be screaming, “No! No. It’s not adequate. No. Something is missing. Something is missing.” I’m going to come back to this, as I said, and say more about the difference of opinions and views on this, why some people hold the simplistic view adequate, why some people that net of – I don’t know – six or seven Dharma concepts will be adequate, and for others, no. This is quite interesting to me, why some people it’s very clear that it’s inadequate, and for others it’s clearly adequate. We’ll come back to that.

But of those areas that I talked about or named – engagement, personhood, art, love with family, friends, romantic love, sexuality, food, et cetera – what of those areas, and what of those directions, and what is allowed there, and what is allowed to be involved, and what is given place, given genuine place as part of the path as we’re conceiving the path? And not just in the sense of, “Oh, yes, be mindful of everything, so the path includes everything. If you’re doing art, you’re just mindful of you’re doing your art, cetera, mindful of the body, mindful of, I don’t know, if you’re painting, how does that feel, et cetera, mindful of the movements of getting too tight, clinging, desire, in that process.” But something – even if we say it’s included because mindfulness should touch everything, there’s still a constraint on the kinds and directions of desire that are allowed, there’s a constraint of the idea of what’s allowed in terms of desire, and also of fantasy and image of what awakening looks like, what kind of desires and involvements an awakened person has and therefore what we’re moving towards. So it’s constrained conceptually and by image, by fantasy.

So this is a kind of side point right now about fantasy, but as you’ll see if you stick the course, and you might have heard me say this before, that fantasy is anything but a side issue when it comes to this whole area. I’m just going to mention this now and we’ll come back to it in a much more integrated way in the rest of the course. But notice when such areas as engagement or art *are*

considered part of a Buddhist path or Dharma path – for instance in some forms of Zen, some arts are part of the whole form, they're part of the practice, or in some traditions, often Mahayana traditions, engagement is seen and considered just part of the path, for example in the Thich Nhat Hanh sangha and other sanghas – that when they *are* considered part of the path, although they're often – these areas are articulated or explained or tried to be articulated and explained as having to do or in terms of decreasing suffering, or freedom, or whatever, liberation, actually there is fantasy and mythos and a whole sensibility wrapped up in their involvement. In other words, there's a whole mythos around the Zen art. There's a whole mythos of the bodhisattva and the engaged bodhisattva who is willing to get riled and get dirty on the street, on the avenue, et cetera. There's that fantasy and mythos wrapped up.

I think Allen Ginsberg and – was it Chogyam Trunpga? I can't remember. Sitting, cross-legged, meditating on the railroad track in front of the approaching train that was carrying a nuclear warhead, I think, to its silo in – I want to say Colorado or somewhere back in the days of the Cold War. This is my practice, this is what a bodhisattva does. There's wrapped up in that actually more than one fantasy, but it's somehow connected and made a Dharma fantasy, a fantasy of what an awakening person does, what they engage in, what they look like, how they feel, what they do.

So we'll talk more about this. Fantasies are actually also involved in the fantasy or the idea of "let go of everything," that seemingly simple, pithy teaching. Actually usually there's not just a conceptual structure behind that, underpinning it, but there's also a whole image and fantasy. Could be several. Maybe it's the image "let go of everything" and we hold that as an ideal but it's also a kind of iconic image for us somewhere. Maybe the hermit, simple man, simple woman living close to nature, wandering in the mountains, in the breeze of the air, and they're being light and fluid, because they're not letting go, light and fluid as the breeze, as the mountain stream that they sit beside. There's a beautiful fantasy wrapped up in that whole image, maybe other fantasies. And as I've said plenty of times in other talks, the way I'm using that word fantasy, fantasies are not a problem. Actually they're necessary. There is the necessity of fantasy, the inevitability of fantasy when we care deeply, when we love, when we're attracted. The problem is when the fantasy is unconscious or regarded as a problem.

So conscious fantasy is very much a part of our lives – well, unconscious and conscious. But we can make them conscious and we can recognize, as I said, the necessity of that and the place of that for the psyche. I'm going to talk much more about this. But sometimes the fantasies that we have that come out of our Dharma background and Dharma set of fantasies or ideas are actually inadequate. So the idea and the fantasy of *metta*, for example, being what is adequate for romantic love...it's...I'm saying that the wrong way. When we care about and are involved in or seek romantic love, as so many practitioners do, of course, who are not monastics, and actually even some people who are monastics, when that is present, and if we try and think of it, "What's happening here? Why is this desire justifiable?" "Well, it's *metta*." "Well, it's *kalyanamitta*, it's spiritual friendship. This partnership is basically based in *metta* and it's spiritual friendship and that's what my romantic love relationship, my marriage, is." I mean, certainly I would hope, we would hope, I think we would all hope that *metta* is a basis or at least a component of romantic love and spiritual friendship. It's beautiful. But is that all of it? Does that actually suffice? Does that truly, adequately psychologically represent what's happening? And am I then going to say, "Oh, it's *metta* and *kalyanamitta*, spiritual friendship, and just clinging, basically"? Does that suffice as an explanation?

Can I have a conceptual framework, can I form, can I open to a conceptual framework and a fantasy that actually romantic love becomes part of the path and not just in those kind of simplistic terms? The concepts, if I try and stretch too small a set of concepts over the range of things that we deeply care about, the whole structure will snap. It's not adequate. It cannot support it. It cannot nourish those areas that we really care about, if we really care about them. So we can make all kinds of distinctions between desires of different kinds, et cetera, and all kinds of divisions – for instance those that are what the Buddha would call wholesome, *kusala* (in other words they lead, either in the moment or eventually, to less suffering), or unwholesome. So we can make that distinction between wholesome

desires and unwholesome desires, unwholesome ones being ones that actually lead to more suffering. That's one distinction. But actually there's all kinds of distinctions, clinging, craving, like we said. But what if we made another distinction, based on what I want to get at, and actually say there's three, if you like, directions or levels or distinctions between desires, clings, cravings, whatever?

So the first we could call, it's like, that desire for that piece of chocolate cake. I don't need it nutritionally. But I want it. [laughs] That's one level of desire, okay? Desire for sense pleasures in that context. But then, actually what we're talking about is not only desires here and cravings, levels of craving, but also levels of investigation of craving. So it's important to investigate and have some facility with letting go of that desire for that cookie, that chocolate cake, whatever it is, that cup of tea when I don't really need it, whatever. This is important, you know? That's one level and direction of desire and it's one level and direction of investigation then.

But then there's what we outlined in part two of this long preface talk, the whole use of, the idea of and the movement of – whether we call it clinging or craving or whatever it is, desire, that whole movement and exploring the subtlety of that and how that unravels for us the nature of appearances, the fabrication of perception, and what that tells us about reality, et cetera. So we're talking about really, really subtle levels of clinging and a much more broad range of what clinging means. As I said, *avijja* is clinging, this belief in the reality of something existing independently from the way of looking. It's a clinging. I need to refine my practice until I can actually play with the spectrum, actually move that clinging of delusion up and down on a spectrum and see what happens. So that would be a second level, direction of what we might call clinging for shorthand and the investigation.

And then there's a third, if you like, level or direction, what we might call – well, I'm going to call it the movement of eros. For instance, our soul passions. So obvious when it's the bigger ones – falling in love, or my passion for my art, or whatever it is, my passion for expression, my passion for engagement. So they can be huge. But this movement, what I'm going to call the movement of eros, without unfortunately in this talk explaining too much what I mean (that makes it a little bit difficult, but), there are other movements that are not just about sense pleasure and relief. Not just about either unpacking this notion of clinging so that it tells me something about the whole nature of seeming reality. The movement of eros and of soul passion can be huge, marked, deep, or really quite subtle.

So then the question becomes what is required of each of these directions or levels of investigation? What is the purpose in relation to all three? The purpose of my investigation relative to that extra slice of chocolate cake or whatever it is, it has one, it has a range of purpose. It's quite limited where it can take me, also, as we've been saying. The purpose of my investigation of that whole concept, from the most gross to the most subtle of clinging and its relationship with fabrication of perception and apparent reality and world, that has a different purpose. And what is the purpose of my investigation of what we might call the movements of eros, those things that I'm passionate about, whether it's engagement or art or expression in life or love, different kinds, whatever it is? What is the purpose? And what is the range of possibility of each, of what can be opened up and revealed and given to us, if you like, through each investigation?

Because I can look at my desires for chocolate or, you know, I'm in my walking meditation on retreat and the mind says "tea," and then it says "tea" again or whatever, and I can feel that pull, the desire, the sense desire. I don't need that tea. I can look at that until the cows come home. I can spend a life looking at that level of desire. It won't be enough to open up that radical understanding of emptiness that I was talking about in the last part of the talk. Nowhere near, nowhere near. Useful. Of course it's useful. Of course it's useful. But it won't open up that emptiness. It won't tell me anything about this deeper movement of passion, the passions that I have. It's just the wrong kind and level of desire. Investigation specific to that is important, to have some freedom – otherwise I'm just yanked around. Just because the mind says "tea," I have to go and have a cup of tea. You know, of course that's important. But neither that chocolate cake investigation or the tea investigation nor the deep investigation into dependent arising and emptiness that I explained will be enough for understanding

and opening out and giving nourishment and life and structure and vision and opening doors in the realm, in the direction, of the soul passions or the subtle movements of eros.

And, conversely, the investigation of my soul passions and my desire in relation to that and that kind of eros, whether it's really strong or much more subtle, won't be – it will actually tell me *something* about dependent origination and emptiness, something, but not enough for the full monty there, the full depth of that. So each has its own – I don't know, door, direction, avenue. All important. But not the same. Can't just lump them all together. Noticing ease when I let go of something that the mind is grasping onto or wanting, when I relax craving, is only the start. It's only the start. And as we said before, that letting go and the ease that comes from letting go of something that the mind is wanting, grasping, that is not liberation. Or rather, that would be a very limited view of what liberation is, if it's just a state of ease because the mind is not grasping onto the things of the world. And it's not, as we said, a way to live.

So can we question all this? Is it, in fact, really ease? Is that all that we really want? Is ease all that we really want? And if we're wanting something else other than this relief from the *dukkha*, are we just going to say that something else is delusion? And from another angle, is sense pleasure or happiness all we seek from our desires? Is that really what we're after? Sense pleasures and happiness? Or some kind of shoring up of the self, because the self is fragile? Or is it ease, or *metta*? Does this suffice to sort of categorize our desires and what we're actually seeking from all our desires? Certainly sometimes we're seeking sense pleasure. I'll talk about this. Certainly sometimes I'm trying to get happiness. Certainly sometimes I want *metta*. Sometimes I want ease. What else? You know, it's relatively – I mean, yeah, it's relatively easy to see that sense pleasures are not going to fulfill me. But is there something missing in the way I'm thinking about all this?

We can hear this teaching, "let go, just let go," hear it, I don't know, a million times. [laughs] And then decades later it's still not somehow taken root or worked. [laughs] Why? We can say, "Well, it's a deep habit, isn't it? Desire. It's a deep habit." And yeah, that's true. But is it also because it's not enough in terms of our understanding of desire, of the range of desires, the kinds and directions of desires and the levels of desire? The framework is not enough for us. We're trying to put it all in one basket, or several very narrowly related baskets, and actually it's not enough. We say, "Why am I not able to live without clinging? I've heard it a million times."

So what about the directions, the domains of our life where "let go" does not take us to where we deeply want to go? Letting go does not take us to where we deeply want to go. Not just within practice. Because also within practice "just let go all the time" doesn't take me where I want to go. It may not. Probably doesn't. We need lots of approaches in practice, of which letting go is just one. But in the whole of my life, what about those directions, domains, where letting go is *not* what takes me to what I most deeply want? I'm not talking here about, you know, the kinds of things we do which we can kind of acknowledge and accept as, "Well, I basically did that because of craving. I had that extra slice of chocolate cake. I overate just a little bit because someone put this really tasty thing in front of me," or, "Yeah, you know, every winter I fly to France or Switzerland or" – I don't know where they go in the States – "Colorado or wherever to go skiing. And yeah, if I'm honest, I don't really *need* that, and I can kind of see if I really look that I sort of justify it to myself because I say I work hard so I deserve a rest" and that sort of thing, but basically if I'm honest I can see craving in that case has trumped ethics in terms of the carbon output and contribution to global warming and other people's suffering in the world. If I'm really honest, I can see that's just a movement of craving. I'm not really talking about all that. I'm talking about, as I said, our deeper loves, our deep passions, our longings, the movements of our passion there, as well as – and I'll have to explain this in other talks – more subtle movements of eros. Apologies for not being able to unwrap all that now, but it's coming.

In these areas, is it ease that we're seeking? Is it just ease or sense pleasure? I mean, it might be ease that I'm seeking. But, you know, especially if I'm really struggling, if there's a lot of *dukkha*, a lot of struggle, it can seem like yeah, basically that's it, that's what I'm wanting, you know? But to varying

degrees, and again this is something we'll come back to, to varying degrees we want, human beings want, more than ease and peace. We want more than ease and peace. Certainly, probably certainly than either the kind of ease and peace that is just a matter of stress reduction or coping with pain, painful sensations. Even we want more than the ease and peace of the most profound kind, the most comprehensive kind. So look. See. Even within the Dharma, isn't it more than ease you want? Isn't it more than that that you're looking for? Yes, there's ease. There's the ease of suffering that we're after. And what? And what? If you love the Dharma, it's not just that. It's not just that.

And then, if it's something outside the Dharma, how do I integrate these two aspects and directions that I care passionately about? There's Dharma, and there's whatever else it is, art or something. How do I integrate that? Or romantic love, or this person that I'm in love with, or whatever, sexuality. If what the Dharma means to me is just stress reduction and some techniques for stress reduction, then this whole thing is not an issue. "Yeah, thank you very much. You've given me some techniques in the Dharma I use to calm down and to let go of this and that and have a bit more ease, and then the rest of my life I just can have plenty of passions and whatnot." But if we really love the Dharma, how do we reconcile, how will we reconcile, this "just let go of everything, drop desires, don't cling," et cetera, "achieve the end of craving," with the other movements of what we could call soul, our other loves and passions? How do we reconcile it? How does it fit together?

In the world of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and actually spilling over from there into the Dharma, some people talk about this concept, term, called discrepancy-based processing. So basically it means when the mind is in what they call a mode of mind, and the mind is in a mode where it notices the difference between where it wants to be and where it actually is, something it desires versus how reality actually is. So for example, very simple, there's a sensation of thirst, so there's a discrepancy – I don't want that sensation of thirst; it would be good to drink. There's a discrepancy between that idea of quenching the thirst and the reality is at the moment there is no water, therefore I go to the tap or go to the well or whatever it is, and the discrepancy-based processing, that perception of differences, directs the organism to meet its needs, if you like, based on noticing differences and trying to minimize that discrepancy.

And that discrepancy-based processing is set in contrast to, quote, "mindfulness," which is, in a certain way of teaching about it, mindfulness is just being with things as they are, accepting, paying attention to, opening to, without wanting to change, without being interested so much in that discrepancy between how I would like things to be and what is. So these two things are kind of different gears, if you like – the gear of discrepancy-based processing and the gear of mindfulness – missing out, it seems, the fact that you can be mindful of a discrepancy and of the desire, et cetera, and of the movement, et cetera. But let's leave that aside. There's an idea of mindfulness as something that's, if you like, the opposite or complementary to discrepancy-based processing.

And it's acknowledged in the way that they're regarding this discrepancy-based processing of course it's okay at times. Why? Because it's useful. It's functional. It's instrumental in that, look, if I need a toilet built, I need to first recognize there's a discrepancy between what is and what should be for hygiene purposes or whatever, or there's hunger and we notice the discrepancy between that and feeling satiated and nourished, so that leads us to cook, or again, framing it more biologically in terms of evolution as would be a lot of people's want, to do that, recognize the discrepancy there's no food, therefore we need to forage or hunt for food. So it's useful, it's regarded as useful, okay at times, as long as we don't get too tight, too excited, too agitated.

But otherwise, the so-called mode of mind – this idea of mode of mind is something a little bit related to what I'm calling ways of looking, but probably I think it's fair to say nowhere near as broad in the ranges and the diversity or the depth or subtlety of what can be involved in that. But otherwise, the mode of mind, the gear, the circuitry, if you like, should revert to a kind of more mindful stance, a kind of neutral gear, which will be more easeful of the suffering that's inherent in discrepancy-based processing.

Is that missing something? Are we missing something if we conceive that way? Is that kind of psychology adequate? How do you feel when you hear that? You know, apart from the illusion of non-doing, receiving, being, and the realism that's kind of hidden in there, as I touched on in the earlier talks, apart from all that, can you hear the language there is straight out of the language of artificial intelligence systems? The language of machines, robots. Human as very complex robot. That kind of idea, that kind of conceiving, how much soulfulness does it have? How much soulfulness does it support, nourish, allow? Where is the poetry? Does it have any poetry? And do we really want a psychology without poetry? What are the consequences of seeing ourselves that way? What are the consequences of a psychology without poetry?

Because if I just regard desires in terms of discrepancy-based processing, it's funny – I want to kiss you, it's my discrepancy-based processing. [laughs] It has nothing to say, nothing enriching to say about my wanting to kiss you. It doesn't open that up. It doesn't nourish it. It doesn't bring water to it. It doesn't fan the fire. It doesn't bring out the beauty, reveal the beauty, the dimensions there. What does it say about this music that wells up in me, that wants expression? So much that I'm willing to sit through all the toil and the frustration and the revising, et cetera, to make, to write a symphony or whatever it is.

What does it say about the gaze of eros? A gaze filled with eros, imbued with eros. It has nothing to say to address – it addresses nothing in that of real beauty or value or poetry or dimensions of our existence. Sometimes we can be oversimplistic as human beings, and especially in regard to spirituality. Sometimes, you know, what can happen is a person can, for decades, kind of abide in and with an overly simplistic view in relation to craving and desire, these ideas. And okay, they might acknowledge, as I said, that some desires are wholesome because they bring a reduction or they lead to even eventually a reduction of suffering for self and other. But other desires or movements just have no place. How could I possibly justify an abstract art painting? It has nothing to do with releasing suffering.

And then what can sometimes happen if a person actually clings indirectly (although it seems like not clinging) to an oversimplistic view of living without clinging, and a simplistic view in relation, in concept and relationship to clinging and desire? We get to a place after some years of Dharma practice where we're, you know, with craving and desire, we're kind of – we accept that it's there, and we kind of laugh at it, and we practice letting go sometimes, and sometimes on retreat we let go of a lot, et cetera, but basically we kind of fall back into a sort of, "Ah, well. The self or the mind is pretty wily, isn't it, in terms of getting its desires and what it wants, and it's a deeply ingrained habit." Or there's a kind of cognitive dissonance that doesn't quite add up. It doesn't quite fit together, this teaching of letting go of craving and then our passions and what we really care about and my love for this man, this woman, or whatever it is. Doesn't quite add up in relation to the eros in our lives.

So with all of this there can come kind of a status quo that just stays, a sort of stagnation of exploration in relationship to desire. What's happened there? Why? Why? And again we could ask, is it that – whether it's the concept of discrepancy-based processing, that kind of language and that kind of way of thinking or framing things or delineating things or other ways, what do they serve and is there something they don't serve that's necessary for us? In the language I've been using recently, does it serve soulmaking? Does this idea of discrepancy-based processing serve soulmaking? Does it satisfy the psyche, the soul, the depths in me?

And again, sorry, I'm not going to explain that term now. It's coming, or in past talks it's been explained. But just to say this. If we use these words, eros, do we need another term? And I'll explain more fully in the next few talks what I mean by that, what we mean by eros. I don't just mean sexuality, although it includes sexuality. I don't just mean it in the way that Freud – I *certainly* don't mean it in the way that Freud was meaning it as just a seeking of sense pleasure. I don't simply equate eros and love, and I don't simply equate eros with life force, "It's just life force." So very briefly, and this will beg more explanation if you haven't listened to other talks and teachings. But I hope to unfold it in the

course of this retreat. Eros, a desire, a movement of the psyche, of the being, that opens, deepens, leads to soulfulness, sacredness, soulmaking, sense of sacredness. Opens that out. A desire, a movement of the psyche, of the being, that opens out, deepens, enriches, complicates also, our sense of sacredness. A desire, a movement of the psyche that opens the being, unlike craving.

Eros always has something to do with depth and with expansion and with perceiving of dimensionality and also with beauty. Eros always has something to do with beauty. And I don't mean by beauty just what is pleasing to the senses in terms of its sensual arrangement. We'll talk more about this later. The eros always has something to do – wrapped up in the movement of eros, in these desires, these movements that open, deepen and expand the sense of soulfulness and sacredness is depth, dimensionality, beauty, meaningfulness. And again, I'm not just talking about necessarily huge passions, although I'm including that. Also very subtle. It's the subtle movement of eros, subtle movements of eros.

So we're talking here about relationships with desire, craving, clinging, eros, whatever words you want to use, understanding and relating to this whole aspect, area, these forces in our lives. I'm certainly not saying that every erotic desire, a desire of eros, the movement of eros, needs to be physically acted upon, needs to be made materially manifest. So you know that, if you've listened to some other talks. But the question is, what does this movement of psyche need? What does it need? Where does it lead? Or rather, are there ways of conceiving, conceptual frameworks, relationships and investigations that open otherwise closed doors for us? And doors that are deeply important to us, that it's deeply important to us to move through, because of what they open to, because of where they take us. So this is really what I want to go into. How can we think about the whole domain and the different kinds of desire, craving, clinging, how can we conceive of all that, what relationships and what kinds of investigations can we bring to bear that open this up for us and don't actually keep certain doors shut that are deeply important to us?

Because, and I've said this in other talks in the last few years, some conceptual understandings of Dharma, some ways we're thinking about Dharma, even if we don't think we're intellectual – “Be kind. Be present and be with what is. Let go because everything is impermanent, everything is in flow. Relax and try to live without clinging, and this will bring ease. This will decrease or even end your suffering if you can do that” – a view like that, for a lot of people, it's actually fairly common, a view like that, a conceptual framework like that, whether it's articulated intellectually, verbally, or not, it will – as helpful as it will be to a limited extent, it will also constrain our vision and our experience. Constrain our vision and experience of self, other, world, time, of desire and eros itself, for the whole cosmos, inner and outer. Will also constrain the kinds of freedom, the kinds of creativity, the kinds of beauty that are available to us.

I said elsewhere I think, we can have conceptual frameworks that actually end up constraining our sense of existence, our (what I might call) hermeneutics, the way we're actually interpreting our life, our being, this world, what comes to us in the senses. And when our, through a limited conceptual framework that isn't questioned, that isn't opened, that isn't adequate enough, rich enough, there's the constriction in the view, there's the constriction in the interpretation of what I called the hermeneutics of existence, and therefore, out of that, because of dependent arising, our experiences will also be constrained. And not just constrained because certain sufferings won't happen; constrained in all kinds of ways. We limit our experience through the ideas that we're hanging on to. Even when we think we're not intellectual and we don't have to think about all this stuff.

So what I'm asking is, can we question the conceptual frameworks that we have? Can we perhaps add to the conceptual framework that is operating for us? Can we find out what it is, for a start, question it, add to it, extend it, deepen and widen it, refine it perhaps? Then it becomes interesting: what then, if we're open to that, what should the order of practice, of the development of practice be regarding the more traditional teachings about craving and letting go, and if we're going to open up this

concept of eros (which I will do, I hope very fully in this retreat)? What order? Should I do one first and then the other? Or how does it work? How should it work?

Some people will need more practice, do need more practice, with just the simple idea of letting go of craving that I talked about in part one, gross craving, slightly more subtle craving in their life, so that one is less chained to pleasant and unpleasant *vedana*, being led or dragged around by the craving that comes towards or away from pleasant or unpleasant *vedana*, sensation. And some people listening, you've already done a lot of that. And yet, you feel no particular need, no calling, no stirring in the soul to explore, open up to other kinds of desire, dimensions of desire, or this thing called eros. And that's fine. Or maybe it's fine. And some of you listening have already done a lot of what we could call the more prevalent or even classical teachings about *tanha*, craving, and *vedana*, et cetera, clinging, and yet you now feel, you're now at a place where you feel there is more. And there is a calling, the soul is called, if you like. There is a deep calling to explore desire more fully, more richly, more carefully, more subtly and sensitively. Not just in the direction of emptiness, but in the direction of what we're calling eros.

And yet others – there's another group: people who feel called, something hears this and says yes, yes, but there is not yet much discernment, much proficiency, much freedom in relation to the classical teachings of pleasant sensation and desire and hanging onto views and opinions and all of that. And yet, they can't postpone the soul calling to include an exploration of eros fully, richly, deeply on the path. Can't postpone it. Not yet got all that more straight-ahead stuff figured out, but I can't postpone it either. Is that just the pull of delusion? The impatience of delusion? Not necessarily. There are some who actually don't do things in the order that a neat way of framing things might prefer. So be it. And if that's you, then somehow you'll have to figure it out on the way. You'll have to learn how to discern and differentiate between these different movements and kinds of desire and letting go and dropping something, et cetera. And that might be more messy, if you're doing that at the same time as you're investigating and allowing eros and fire and passion. And it might not look so neat. Sometimes things are not so neat.

As I was saying with imaginal practice and *papanca*, some need to explore the teachings about letting go of *papanca* and complication and fantasy and simplify, simplify the mind, simplify the attention, and this teaching, illusory as it is, of bare attention, because it will be helpful, it's helpful for them, they need that, before they can explore what we mean by, in a way, good fantasy or imaginal practice. And some have explored all that and they feel ready for something new, this other dimension of imaginal practice. And again, there are some who can't wait. They have to include and learn as they go along, through different ways of looking, different practices, trial and error, with the help hopefully of the teachers, but to discern between these different movements – what's *papanca*, what's imaginal practice. It's possible. It's absolutely possible. But in a way, parallel tracks are running concurrently.

Okay. So just to conclude this sort of long preface, if you like. Yes, yes, it's important to learn to let go of cravings, of desires, of clings in life. That's really important. But so much more is possible than that. It's possible, as I said, to take up this notion of clinging and actually explore the whole range of subtlety of what that means and play with it and learn to modulate it and see what happens to the dependent fabrication of the perception of self, other, world, time, et cetera, and unpack through that, or have revealed through that, the dependent arising, the insight into the dependent arising of self, other, world, et cetera. Deep level of understanding of dependent arising. Deep level. Not just those examples of the cigarette craving and the woman whose number I'd ask for, her phone number. Much deeper level. Talking about the whole fabrication of this very sense of any reality at all, any experience at all. Deep understanding of emptiness. Deep opening of the being into states of less and less fabrication and eventually the Unfabricated. What that tells me, what that gives me in terms of this beautiful, radical and extraordinary understanding of the emptiness of all things.

So there's that possibility as we outlined. And there's also this possibility of something we're going to be calling eros that is a movement that brings soulmaking (again, we're going to unpack that,

if you're not familiar with these terms). Something that's important for the soul, and it's important not to let go of. And actually we don't completely let go of it. It's operating already. We want to understand that, explore it, develop conceptual frameworks and an understanding of Dharma that can allow us to open to that, have its place, have the richnesses that it brings. So as I said, it's already there. Eros is already there. And I'm not just meaning by that this *chanda*, this intentionality or desire for reducing suffering, for what is wholesome. That might be one manifestation of eros. I'm not just talking about that, though.

We need, the psyche needs, to bring attention to bear so that it recognizes this movement, recognizes eros, delineates it, perhaps, has a way of conceiving and thinking that's actually supportive to the eros, supportive then to the totality, the integrated totality of what we conceive of as practice. Because that investigation and that movement of eros also, just like the deep exploration of fabrication through playing with the spectrum of clinging, this deep and wide exploration, subtle exploration of eros also, but in a different way, opens up our sense of the world radically, widely, beautifully. Opens up the whole sense of existence.

But, you know, you decide what you want. You decide. Some people – and for very different reasons – don't want much depth or much soulmaking, much soulfulness. And for different reasons – we'll actually go into these different reasons as part of the retreat because it's also quite interesting what's happening there. But some people, and this needs to be respected, that's not what they want. They want some techniques of what we could call kind of self-help really, and they want some ease, and they want a reduction in *dukkha*, and that's great, that's important. Others, though, this opening of the sense of existence, this radical and remarkable openings that are possible in the whole sense of existence, not just of self but of the whole of one's sense of existence, the deep understanding of emptiness and the deep and wide and eventually all-pervasive movement of eros and soulmaking, these, for others, are the most important things, the things they care most deeply and most passionately about.

But it's not for me, I don't think – I don't think it's for me, I don't think it's for anyone – to tell another person what to want. So, as I said, you decide what you want. But still, we can investigate this whole question of desire and eros and making delineations and distinctions, and see where that leads, and then decide whether we want to go where it leads or not. We can still investigate. It's always up to us where we want to go. This is a little bit what I want to go into on this retreat, a little bit of an introduction, and what we want to really fill out and expand and explore in the course.