

Heat and the Material
Four Circles, Four Parables of Stone and Light
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This evening, I'd like to speak a little bit about emotions, and the relationship with emotions, and the conception of emotions, and skill with emotions, mostly in the context of imaginal practice and soulmaking, and say a few things about that. One really general thing I'd like to say right from the start, and actually emphasize (I think it's quite important), is maybe when we talk about *anything* at all, but certainly when we talk about emotions and we're being perhaps a little bit prescriptive in the sense of, "Try and do this with the emotions," or "This is what's good with the emotions," or "This is what's healthy," or "This is what a healthy psychology is" – as I said, maybe when we're talking about *anything*, but certainly when we talk about our views about emotions and psychology, I think two things are really important to say about that. I've said this before. I can't remember when, maybe some years ago in another retreat. I don't think human beings will ever come to the end, reach some final understanding, of emotionality, and emotional life, and everything that's involved there. It's one of those rich, endlessly rich, endlessly fertile mysteries of human existence and of the soul.

So that puts us in a relationship of necessary humility, inquiry, experimentation, open-endedness with regards to emotion and also psychologies. That's not to say that we then throw out any exploration, or throw out any conceptions, or ideas, or conceptual frameworks, or approaches. Not that at all. But that we hold them in an awareness of an ongoing exploration that I don't think we'll ever finally figure out. And hooray for that, I say. So that's one thing. The second thing, and it's related, is that, again, maybe when we talk about *anything* at all, but certainly when we talk about emotions and human psychology, and someone puts forth certain kinds of ideals, or divides what's a healthy kind of emotional life or approach to the emotions from unhealthy and that kind of thing, to really be aware that those kinds of views are enormously culturally, historically situated, and therefore conditioned.

So it's easy for us to read a contemporary psychology book that says something about emotions and psychology, and how it works, and what they are, and where they come from, and what they need to be, and what a healthy emotional life looks like, and all that, or whatever it is, and kind of assume, "Oh, that's right," and perhaps other periods in history or other cultures are engaged in repression, or hysteria, or whatever it is. I think there's an arrogance in that, and we, all of us, including myself, need to be careful about that kind of thing. You only need to look around in contemporary cultures, cultures that exist in the world, and even sub-cultures, like this particular Dharma culture or that particular culture, this religious culture or that secular culture, or whatever it is, this group/that group, let alone nationalities and ethnic heritages and all that kind of stuff, to see what a huge range there is of what's regarded as healthy, appropriate, a helpful, normal relationship with and conception with and attitude to emotions.

So I'm going to say some stuff. I'm going to say some things to reflect on, to consider, to work with, perhaps, with regard to our soulmaking paradigm, but the whole thing has, if you like, a huge caveat that we could all remember about the cultural, historical situatedness, and therefore contingency, of views and psychologies around areas like emotion.

Okay. So actually related to that, it's interesting who – how to say? – it might be, given, perhaps, certain contemporary views about, again, healthy psychology, healthy emotional life, that some of the people who are attracted to the Soulmaking Dharma and this kind of paradigm are people who, let's say, tend to be quite passionate, tend to love deeply. There was that psychology book – was it from the eighties? *Women Who Love Too Much* or something? I never read it. I actually don't know what it said. It might be that such people, other people might assume that their style of loving is hysterical; there's something unhealthy, out of balance there, just a bit off, or too much, or whatever. Or it might be assumed that, "This person is that way," they tend to be overly passionate, or love too much (whatever that means), or too deeply, or whatever, "because of some early lack, rooted in their upbringing, in their childhood, probably their family, etc., the mother, the father," whatever it is, and that's a reason, and what's really driving this (quote) "loving too much," or being so passionate, is some kind of neediness, some kind of clinging, a tendency to *papañca*, etc., some kind of hysteria.

But to some of those people, the Soulmaking Dharma will be very attractive, and make sense. Yes, for some people, the way passion moves in them, the way emotion moves in them, the way love moves in them, it may move them to certain manifestations, like we said, of clinging, *papañca*, or a kind of craving that becomes a neediness, etc. But it may not always be because of some cause in their personal history. It may not just be a defilement that's driving them, a *kilesa*. But it may be, actually, for that person, that there is already a lot of eros, and tendency to image, in their soul. That's the soul that they are, the soul that they were given, that they were gifted with. And it's a lot to learn how to handle such a soul, that has a lot of eros, that has a tendency to image. It's like being given a gift of a powerful horse, and you actually have to learn how to ride that horse, and that takes some time. It's very different if someone gives you a gift of a little pony or something.

So this person, some people may have such souls, such rich, deep, fiery souls, lots of eros, lots of tendency towards image, or inclination towards image, ease with image, but very little help or guidance in the culture in being able to ride that, ride that soul, relate skilfully to it, so that this tremendous gift can actually become quite difficult, and get thrown out of the saddle, etc., trampled on, starts galloping away in this or that direction, completely out of one's control. Very little help or guidance in the culture to allow that soul to make soul, to engage in soulmaking, the fertility and the dynamism of soulmaking, for the eros-psyche-logos dynamic to expand, enrich, and deepen in the ways that we've talked about. And in the absence of that help, and that guidance, and that ability to learn that, that support in learning that, it *does* go towards craving. The eros *does* become craving. What could have become imaginal *does* become *papañca* and fixated image, etc.

So for some people with that kind of style of persona of soul, it may be that that's partly what's going on, and partly they're attracted – they recognize something in the soulmaking teachings, and it's not just a cheap kind of legitimization of their quirky foibles or pathologies. There's something deep there. But we need to learn how to relate to this, how to ride and befriend that horse, so there really can be a gift, a powerful gift. And of course, not everyone that's attracted to the Soulmaking Dharma is of that kind of soul-style or psychology. Plenty – there's a big range, and some tend to much more apparent equanimity or calmness and steadiness, etc. Some, of course, have a range. I don't want to restrict it to that style, but just in terms of cultural views around emotion and around, again, what's healthy psychology, etc.

Following on from this a little bit, I said recently in, I think it was the *Roots into the Ground of Soul* retreat, at some point in there, that for a large portion of imaginal practice and soulmaking practice, especially in relation to our *dukkha*, we have to realize that our relationship to the emotions needs to fall within a certain range in order that they can ferment the soulmaking process, so they can fertilize and give rise to images, etc. And I think I used the analogy earlier on this series of talks of a crucible, an alchemical vessel or crucible. And if that crucible does not do its job of containing the material and tolerating the heat, etc., allowing the contents, the material, to ferment, to undergo the soulmaking dynamic, then images won't arise. For *some* people – and again, I so much want to say: there's so much, as I said before, that really needs to be individually tailored in the teachings of this. For *some* people, part of the reason that, for instance, "I don't get images. I don't get intrapsychic images. I can sense a sacredness in the environment of a certain kind, but I don't tend to get any images, or very, very few," for some of those people, it may be that there are certain habits of ways of relating to their emotional life and emotions that come that are actually – those habits mean that the crucible is broken in a not very helpful way, or it doesn't conduct heat, or however we want to stretch the analogy, the alchemical analogy.

So, in alchemy, you know, sometimes what the alchemical material, the raw material needs, is heat, and that's part of the process. The vessel is, like you put something in a pan or a pot, like a vessel or a crucible, and you heat it, and that allows something to happen. Sometimes the material itself, of course, is generating heat, like compost material or fermenting material is generating heat. But there's a way that, if we talk about heat as in the emotional life, there's a relationship there. Not always; I'll come back to that. For some people, again, without them really realizing it, the crucible around the emotions is not built well; it's not serving a purpose for imaginal practice. It might serve all kinds of *other* purposes in their life.

So it might be the case, sometimes, that some people are kind of habituated to not actually register or not even allow certain emotions and certain emotional intensity, and that they don't even realize that pattern. And sometimes that kind of pattern is actually then sanctioned by role models that these people may come into contact with, or by the Dharma itself that's kind of preaching this sort of even equanimity. *Sometimes* that's the reason. I'm not saying it's always the reason, but sometimes that's a reason or part of a set of conditions that are preventing the birth, the arising, of certainly intrapsychic images. And it might look, in such cases, it might look from the outside like, "This person is a good practitioner. They're a good Buddhist. They're calm. They're reasonable. They're even-keeled. They're certainly warm and friendly," etc., but the way they are with the emotions, or certain emotions, at least, doesn't allow the kind of heating up or galvanizing of the whole soulmaking dynamic, in terms of generating images.

There's another way where someone actually *does* have a lot of emotions, but again, for different reasons – either just a lack of training – that's why we call this skill with emotions, and the art of being with emotions, and working in different ways with the emotions, and having that range, different approaches in different situations, and also for different ends with regard to the emotion. But someone else either may not have that training, it just wasn't really given, or again, may have a tendency to have a lot of emotions, they *do* tend to feel anger or jealousy or judgmentalism or all kinds of things – again, we're talking now about the more difficult emotions – or huge passion, or whatever it is, but actually

don't have the training and the skill there for the art of working well with those emotions to create a kind of crucible, to allow that heat, if we follow that limited analogy, to build up. Or again, they have a kind of indoctrination, an unquestioned indoctrination, from Dharma teaching that, "I know I'm feeling this," whatever it is, jealousy, anger, etc., "but I also know from Dharma teachings that I've heard and read that it's really not good. It's not helpful. It's a defilement," etc., so that the way they relate to it is sort of caught between a rock and a hard place: it's going on, I'm sort of entangled in it, it's kind of *got* me a little bit, and at the same time, I'm just trying to dismiss it, and push it away, and kind of get beyond it, or get over it, or whatever. So it's not that they're not arising, that this person isn't allowing that. It *is* arising, and they're sort of judging themselves for having it, or trying to get rid of it, or predeciding that it's a non-helpful thing.

Now, of course, for some people, and for any person at any time, images don't just arise out of the heat of emotions. They certainly don't just arise out of *dukkha*. They can come out of the deep cool of equanimity, the coolness – the Buddha often talks about the coolness of equanimity – the depths of that equanimity, because equanimity is very related to unfabricating. [21:17] In the coolness, in the equanimity, in the unfabricating, there's this liquefying that I talk about sometimes, the liquefying of things, and out of that coolness can come very beautiful sensing with soul and other images, etc. So we can talk, if we talk about heat, meaning emotion, and the material, it's not *always* the case that we need a lot of heat, or even *any* apparent heat. Sometimes it will come from coolness, etc.

So again, you can hear how I say something, and there's a caveat, or there's an "in this case," "in that case," "on the other hand, it could be ...", etc. When you listen, please regard these as things to consider, and really to ask yourself, because oftentimes I see these kinds of things are going on for people and they're just not aware that they're going on. They're just not aware that that's a pattern that they're in. Of course, eros is a form of fire and heat, and I think I used that analogy in one of the talks on another course. So we can include that. When we talk about 'heat,' we might mean the whole range: coolness, eros, the whole range of emotions, etc., seemingly pathological emotions, seemingly beautiful emotions, joy, etc., love, all that. But this is important, this factor that it may be the case with some people that the way of, or a certain range of ways of relating to the emotions are just not accessible to that person, and so a kind of opening up, a self-awareness and an opening up, and a training, and an extension of one's habits needs to happen.

All this is complicated, and very individual, I think. I'm making general points, but it's very individual. Some people – I remember talking with someone not too long ago, actually feels a lot of different emotions, but not anger, this person. Didn't feel anger. And I think she was on the retreat where we did a little bit of movement and sort of careful – some were quite extravagant and energized movements, almost violent movements and soundings, and some were much more subtle. But she was on that retreat, and when we did certain movements that involved stomping and roaring and stuff like that, she just said, "It just didn't resonate at all." There was just nothing in her that felt any need for that, or any place for that, slightly puzzling. And I think a few people had different kinds of reactions, because it was quite intense, but anyway, talking about *this* person now. So lots of emotions were there to feel, but not anger.

But this person also has a history of depression. And what's becoming clear is that, in certain situations, when something feels unjust, or she feels there's something that's angering her in what a

person's doing, or what a group is doing, or some dynamic or something, that actually the anger doesn't even register. It completely bypasses the anger and instead it goes into depression – in this case, a very vicious depression, very self-destructive, etc. I've seen that before, both in some friends and other practitioners. And again, it might be – I don't think it was in *this* case – but it might be sometimes a shadow of Dharma teaching that automatically puts anger in the category of defilement, *kilesa*, etc., and something to be shunned and not allowed. But in this case, there was a beginning to notice that link: "Okay, I go into this depression when I feel somehow silenced or shut up." Now, it may be partly the external situation that was silencing her to a certain extent, but a lot of the silencing was just internal. There was some mechanism operating, below the radar of consciousness, that just didn't allow the anger to be registered, or felt, or validated, and the anger was turned on the self, in a very deep and destructive way, and very, very painful, paralytically painful.

So this pattern began to become clear, and it might be then that a stage of practice for that person is actually to realize that, and perhaps replay a scenario that one – "Now I feel shut down. Now I feel depressed. Let's go back to that situation where it seems linked somehow," and actually replay the scenario in one's imagination, and slow it down a little bit. "There. How do I feel about being shut up? How do I feel? The frustration, the pent-up energy in that. How do I feel about what these people are saying, or what they're trying to do, or how they're manipulating – or how it *seems* they're manipulating the situation?"

And not worry so much – so it's a practice; it's in a safe space; it's internal, or with a friend or with a teacher in an interview, whatever it is – and actually slow it down, not worry about, "Is this right? Is it wrong? Was it *really* the perception that they were manipulating, or am I just projecting that?" Don't worry about that. Don't worry, "Am I going to then bite this person's head off?" Don't worry. You just practise actually slowing the thing down and just, "There. What's that feeling right there?" It might start as frustration. It might start as just a feeling in the energy body. But we want to feel that energy in the energy body and have it be okay. If we recognize it's anger, "I want to fucking kill that person," it's like, okay. Feel that. And really have that be okay. It doesn't mean you're going to kill the person. You may or you may not even say anything to that person. That comes later. But to actually feel and give it some degree of respect. Feel it in the energy body, and give it some degree of respect. And that's a huge step, and hugely important.

So if we talk about – again, with all the caveats I said right at the beginning about cultural conditioning, and views, and being historically situated and contingent that way – it might be, speaking now in this culture and from the point of view of our paradigm and what we're elaborating in terms of soul-psychology and all that, it might be that that ability and willingness to actually recognize anger, feel it, contain it in the energy body, and give it some degree of validation – in the sense of not just immediately dismissing it, at least that – that may be what we call a foundational element of soulmaking practice and Dharma. It may be one of the foundations. It may well be, again, given all the caveats I said about culture and history, it may be also one of the foundations just of a psychological health, and it may be one of the foundations of healthy relationship, human relationship.

But more than that, it may be one of the building blocks, one of the foundations of imaginal practice and Soulmaking Dharma. This person could have lots of images, but maybe certain directions or certain possibilities of images never could arise there. Such a foundation, if it is a foundation of

soulmaking practice, might be, in the longer term, an example of a foundation that becomes a root, that then becomes something that itself is living, and growing, and nourishing. So this ability to feel anger, to tolerate it, to feel it in the body, to recognize it, to not dismiss it. Yes, good part of emotional awareness, skill, health, etc.; yes, a part of what can then allow images to come. But it might be, at a certain point, that that becomes a root in the sense of the anger itself (to follow this example) becomes imaginal. The anger itself becomes an erotic object. Does that mean I'm going to become hysterical and go out and buy a gun? No, of course not. We've talked about all this, about reification and literalization and the non-danger of that, if one is really listening and following the teachings.

So there's one thing just to have a crucible that can hold material, that can then ferment to create images. It's another step, perhaps, that that material itself becomes imaginal, that anger itself becomes erotic. It starts to have other dimensions. It starts to have divinity. It starts to have even eternity. It starts to have theatre. It starts to have the fullness of intention wrapped in it. Grace, even. The grace of anger. Participation in divine anger. All kinds of possibilities. So there may seem to be an obvious progression here: okay, first you develop just the human psychological skill as a foundation. That allows certain directions and openings of images that might not have been otherwise available. And then, maybe in time, that kind of emotion or these kinds of emotions also become roots, in the sense they become, like I said, alive, vital, nourishing, part of the actual structure of the soulmaking, as opposed to just something on which soulmaking is built.

But – and again, lots of caveats, because there's so much individual variation – sometimes things don't happen in the sort of obvious, linear order of progression, of gradual progression: first this, the easy step, then the intermediate step, then the advanced step. Sometimes the advanced step, or what is apparently the advanced step, happens first, and everything happens in the reverse order. Sometimes divine anger opens up as an image, and that image itself then allows, drawing on the image, being supported by the image, nourished by the image, bringing that image back kind of as a tincture into human situations – either meditating on it beforehand, or in this almost like homeopathic background way, while one's in relationship – that the image itself then allows healthy human relationships at the normal, kind of conventional level, etc. And it may change the relationship with the energy body, and allow other possibilities in terms of opening up the energy in the energy body, etc.

So yes, we can talk about, “Well, generally this is easier, and that builds on this, and that builds on the second bit,” etc., but sometimes things happen in very different orders – an image is given, and everything kind of shakes down or is informed by that image, top-down, so to speak, from the divine to the human, if we use such language. So there's something in here – notice I said, “not dismissing it,” “a certain amount of validation.” There's something similar, maybe some of you can recognize already, with a step in what we call the OCD practice, or the Opening to the Current of Desire – a step of which is just to suspend the value judgment, the negative value judgment, about what we're desiring, and just entertain the idea, even just for a limited time in practice, entertain the idea that there might be treasure here. Possibly there's treasure in this thing that I've been taught is a *kilesa*, that looks like a defilement, that's certainly difficult, that I'm a little bit wary of because heaven knows what might come out of my mouth or what I might say and do. But there's something similar in terms of, let's just suspend that judgment, and can I just drop in a grain of trust, maybe for a limited amount of time, [that] maybe there's a treasure here in this difficult emotion?

So there's a lot here. There's a lot about just healthy internal psychology, about human relationships, and certainly about working with images and the receiving or generating of images. And there's so much more to say. Then there's a whole step in learning how (this is an aside now) do I express that anger in a way that's helpful and skilful. The Buddha talks about, we could talk, we could give a whole series of talks just about that, about skill in communicating the difficult, etc. And that usually takes time, I have to say. That usually really takes time, to learn how to do that. But again, there are always exceptions.

As I said, some people may need to work more with their emotions. In some instances, there's a lot of apparent skill with certain emotions. A person says, "Oh, I'm good with this kind of emotion, and that kind of emotion." It looks like they're working on it and being with it. But other emotions are just out of bounds. So, again, there's a lot of individual variation here. But it might be that a person needs to allow, or feel more, or get into, or sit in particularly the difficult emotions. I mean, sometimes also positive emotions are hard to tolerate – a lot of joy, or a lot of love. Again, they're not culturally normal, and we're not used to that. Sometimes a person needs to actually be in that more, and more inclusively – not refusing, not ignoring, not veering away from the emotions that they habitually or dogmatically don't like, or don't approve of, don't trust, etc., so that the psychic energy in the emotion can, as I said, form a kind of crucible and give birth to, ferment an image that is powerfully soulmaking.

So we said that. Again, a caveat: is that a universal truth? I don't think so. There are all kinds of other factors, as I mentioned earlier. This is just one factor, but it's really worth looking inside, over a period of time, reflecting, asking questions – maybe even asking a good friend what they think, because sometimes we can't see ourselves that clearly, or a teacher who knows you well. So is it universal truth? I don't think so. It may be that some people, or some cultures – we're talking now about what is it that might inhibit the transubstantiation of psychic material into an image, give birth to images and the imaginal, and it's not just emotions. It may be that some people, or some cultures, actually need a lot less of the galvanizing that happens from the emotions, a lot less of the heat there, in order to give rise to images. And that may be for different reasons.

It may be that such a person is more accustomed to and more okay with a logos, a conceptual framework, that supports the imaginal, so that their kind of, let's say default logos, or they can happily and fairly easily spend time entertaining a conceptual framework that's actually much more supportive to the imaginal. Someone else may be okay with their emotions, but there are certain concepts or conceptual frameworks that are just kind of locked into place – again, maybe conscious, maybe unconscious – and *that's* the reason. Whereas the other person, as I said, they're comfortable with a certain logos, and that logos is well-oiled – it's not like an unfamiliar, clunky, or rusty piece of machinery. It's like it's quite smooth. It's quite ready. It's quite accessible. So it may be that's a factor.

It may be, too, just what arises from a meditation habit, that one person might have much less of a habit of dismissing images in practice. They're so trained, as I was for many years, in dismissing any kind of image, just through the sort of usual instructions of mindfulness – you might note something, and then put it aside; or you're concentrating on your breath, so it's all kind of irrelevant, images or whatever it is. And that might be trained over months, years, decades in some cases like my own, and that actually means, again, that certain pathways have to get unrusted, have to get oiled, have to get

smoothed, have to be opened up, because there's such a habit of immediately dismissing any image that comes: "Oh, it's just a daydream. It's not what meditation is about," and that can become a habit.

It may be, as well, and as I mentioned earlier, it may be that there's just a different, and I think there is just a different natural propensity in different souls to have more or less images, to have that more accessible. And then, of course, there's a whole cultural situatedness. There may be, for some, a kind of cultural affirmation and reinforcement of images, certainly deep images. So maybe in certain, more religious cultures, or a person who has had that background, where deep – by 'deep,' I mean not necessarily imaginal in *our* sense, with the imaginal Middle Way and all that, but 'deep' in the sense of they touch the soul, and they're designed to touch the soul. So not just an image of whatever it is, an advert for an SUV car or whatever like that. Which, interestingly, *try* to touch something in us of our longing for freedom, mystery, beauty, autonomy, the image of the self – a lot of car ads are really about the image of the self. Anyway. But in certain cultures where there's an affirmation, and a reinforcement, and normality for deep images, and those deep images are public, they're shared, they're talked about, they're respected, they're venerated even – so all that is also going to shape and support the arising of images for an individual person. Someone else who's in a culture that dismisses or denigrates images, or they just don't have any place except at the most superficial level of adverts and whatever it is ...

Again, we're talking now about what is it that allows images to arise, more or less easily. It may be for some people the emptiness practices and understandings have gone deep enough to liquefy and divinize all perception. I outlined this in my book, *Seeing That Frees*. Emptiness goes deep, deep, deep into the Unfabricated, and then, if you like, out the other end, where one realizes that sacredness is everywhere, not just in the Unfabricated as opposed to the fabricated. So it may be for some people, and for myself – I've shared this before, I think: that was my path to the imaginal. It opened up through pursuing emptiness deeply. But not for everyone. Yet, for some people, that will be a very significant factor, that there's often and often enough accessibility to that kind of liquefied and divinized perception of everything.

It may be that the energy body awareness is just more readily and wholly available. So again, we're talking about what are the elements that need to be there. And we've talked so much in the past few years about how just opening up the energy body can help, will help, support the movement towards even the *reception* of images, but then the images becoming more imaginal. So there are lots of factors here. But this business about emotions, as I said, is really worth considering, and really worth – wherever one's at with it – developing one's skill there.

You know, I've mentioned in the past, when I talk about the breaking of the vessels, and the Kabbalistic term *Shevirat ha-Kelim*, that kind of thing. We could say something more general. We've heard this before. The soulmaking dynamic, or soulmaking *over time*, let's say – so not *necessarily* from any individual image (though it could be), but soulmaking certainly over time involves and catalyses a stretching, a stretching of our being, of our soul, of our mind, of our heart, of our ideas, of our energy body range, etc. Maybe a shattering, this breaking of the vessels. A certain kind of tension. With all that, often, some territories of unsureness, complication. In the very dynamic itself, we talk about how the eros-psyche-logos dynamic complexifies itself, so that the image becomes more complex. The ideas, the available ideas that are implicit as conceptions within perception become more

complicated, or as seeds for perception and reflection become more complicated. One's relationships may become more complicated. Over time, stretch, shattering, tension, unsureness, complication, fertility, an ask or several asks, challenge, duty – meaning, by 'ask,' duty. In other words, yes, tremendous beauty in the soulmaking process, in the soulmaking dynamic, but also difficulty, as well, challenge and difficulty.

I sometimes feel, when people *only*, over time, report a sort of loveliness from the whole imaginal and soulmaking practices, that it may be that they're missing something. Again, there's lots of individuality here, but it may be that a whole sort of wing, if you like, is not being allowed, not explored so much. I think I talked about that in that talk called "The Spreading of Five Wings," that short talk there, as a reminder of what may need opening to and including, and extending, what ranges may need extending as we grow in the soulmaking.¹ And again, given the caveat that souls are different, you know, therefore the ranges are different; people have different ranges, maybe, we could say, almost intrinsically, *and* it can be trained.

But the point is that generally soulmaking – not necessarily an individual image – but generally, over time, involves difficulty and challenge and stretch and the discomfort of that, as well as the beauty and the ease and the liberation, etc. Let's go back to that passage from Genesis that I mentioned the other day, Jacob wrestling with angel. The wound and the blessing came together in that case. There's something, again, reading that story through the poetic lens of the Soulmaking Dharma and the conception and the imaginal sensibilities, blessing and the wound go together. No blessing, no wound. And so this is often the case with soulmaking and the soulmaking dynamic, certainly over time.

This is interesting. Let me try and explain this. [49:54] So, it might be, having said what we just said – again, I want to talk about why it is sometimes, or why it *may* be, what might be the case for some people who feel like, "Mm, I don't get many images, certainly not intrapsychic ones." It may be, for some people, that this is relevant. So imaginal images, if they're really allowed to galvanize the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, as we just said, there will be an opening, a stretching, potentially a breaking – either a gradual stretching or a breaking of vessels as part of the soulmaking dynamic sometimes. Now, here's what I want to add to this. So many things in the domains of psychology, spiritually, soul-work, all that, Dharma, where there's a dependency one way – in other words, this stretching, this sometimes uncomfortable breaking of vessels and stretching, etc., with everything, all the difficulties, potential difficulties that I just outlined – where that's dependent on, in this case, the soulmaking dynamic, the dependency often runs both ways.

So when you see a dependency *one* way – "Ah, dependent on the soulmaking dynamic getting going, there can be, sometimes, with the gift, there can also be the challenge, the stretching, the breaking, etc." – where there's a dependency *one* way like that, we can usually expect, it's usually really worth looking for, the reverse dependency. Dependency is usually mutual, mutual dependent origination: *this* depends on *that*, but *that* also depends on *this*. In other words, when we are opened up, mind, heart, sometimes body, when we're stretched, when we're broken sometimes, or there's a breaking of vessels (whether that feels like internal mental vessels and containers and compartments and understandings or whatever it is, whether it's relational, whether it's philosophical or emotional or whatever it is), when there's *that* in the reverse dependency, that very opening, stretching, breaking and the challenge of that can give rise to images and to eros, okay?

So when we're in love [laughs], something is really opening and being stretched in us, in our whole perception – not just of the beloved, but also of the self and the world. Something is really being stretched there. And with all the craziness of falling in love. So it's not necessarily always just, you know, a stroll in the park, being in love. When we're in, sense a moral crisis, that kind of stretch – and I'm going to come back, as I said in the introductory talk, I'm hoping that I will have time and capacity to come back and talk about morality and ethics. But one of the things is, in a way, it's hard to be a sensitive human being these days and not feel some degree of moral crisis, with the complexity of the world and the difficulty of what's going on globally, etc. But certainly when we're in moral crisis, that's also an opening, a stretching, a tearing of the fabric of the view, of the heart, of the inclinations, of the desires, of the will. Or when there's a moral stretch, that we feel called to take a stand, to speak, to act in a certain way that may require all kinds of courage, stepping out of our comfort zones, it stretches us in some way morally. Or a heart stretch, or our ideas of this or that, our conceptual frameworks – even maybe a map of the path, or an idea of who we are, or what the world is, or what healthy psychology is, or whatever. When those ideas are broken, all these are kind of examples of being opened, stretched, broken, vessels breaking or being expanded.

When we're stretched in those kinds of ways, then, again, because of the mutual dependent arising, these are particularly fertile times for images to arise, and images that can be deep guides for our soul – they have everything to do with the angel out ahead; they have everything to do with what we feel called to, what we want to move to, eros, etc. So by 'stretched,' listen to the kinds of stretch I'm talking about. I'm not just talking about, "Oh, I'm so busy." I'm not just talking about being busy. Most people nowadays are too busy. We're all too busy and stretched that way. Neither am I talking about just an ego-concern: "Oh, I have to give a presentation and I'm worried what they think of me." I'm talking about *soul* concerns. The *soul* is stretched. The soul is stretched by soulmaking, yeah? So this organ of soul that we talked about that senses in a certain way and wants to sense in a certain way is grown. We make soul. We add to it. It becomes a bigger, more complex, more multifaceted organ. And when we're stretched, when the soul is stretched by soul-concerns, things that are of deep concern to the soul, then that's a particularly fertile soil for image to arise.

So one of the reasons that some people may not get intrapsychic images – again, I don't want to put this out as a universal rule, but it's really worth some honest, deep reflection, perhaps, in some cases – one of the reasons some people may not get intrapsychic images, or very few, is actually that they avoid moral stretches and crises. They may be busy doing good things in the world, but there's no really deep risk there. There's very little breaking out of moulds. There's not really a sort of courageous taking a stand, extending one's courage, going beyond what may have become routine, ordinary, or comfortable. And so, because that person is actually living in a constrained way – again, they might not even really realize it, because they feel like, "I'm engaged in good work. I'm a Dharma teacher," or "I'm a psychologist," or whatever it is; could be anything. But their soul is not being stretched in certain ways. They're not putting themselves in those situations that would stretch themselves, that would make things a bit shaky, that risk a kind of stretch and perhaps even a break, a crisis.

This is something to consider. I remember when I was first giving – over a year or two, I can't remember – giving talks on soulmaking and the imaginal, and how it felt to me. I think I shared this in the last retreat. It felt to me, "Wow, there's really a stretch for me here," because even though some

people were quite hostile to emptiness teachings for lots of different reasons, the level of hostility and sort of anger, etc., from some people in relation to the soulmaking teachings and imaginal teachings was really quite remarkable, I felt. So that I would feel, going places and giving talks, or even at Gaia House in some situations, it's like, "Wow, this is a stretch," you know? Not just the material. The material, by its nature, was a stretch, of course, because it's really stretching the Dharma paradigm, if you like, and, you could say, breaking it, depending on your point of view. But certainly in terms of putting myself in those situations where one could sense the hostility, or people would write notes, or speak to me, or whatever, with quite a lot of hostility.

So that stretch, itself, and knowing that I was going into those situations, and wanting to offer this material, that was a stretch. It needed courage. I was, in a way, taking a stand for something that felt deeply important to my soul, to soul in general, to the Dharma, to our culture, etc. And that was enormously fertile in terms of giving rise to images that echoed and mirrored and were in relationship with that very situation, that very difficulty. And very helpful images, really fertile images. I'll come back to that. Certainly having cancer and probably dying soon, that's also a stretch, you know? So that whole strand of my life in the last few years, there's a kind of breaking there – breaking of the body, breaking of life, breaking of one's continuities, etc., relationships. That also is a kind of – I don't know if 'moral' is the right word – but a stretch of the soul and the being. There are deep soul-concerns there.

The unfolding, as I alluded to earlier, tragedies of climate change and ecological degradation, mass species extinction – those tragedies also, one can feel that as something that's really breaking something in the heart, in the being, in the fabric of our civilizations. It's in the fabric of the only home we know in the universe, the fabric of nature which we're so embedded in, all of that stuff. I'm going to return to this, hopefully, in later talks. Anger, and especially the kind of righteous indignation or righteous anger that we can feel in response to either certain moral issues or, for example, with regard to climate change and species extinction and the insufficient response, so far, of humanity to them, and insufficient care – you know, that anger, it's a deep soul-concern; it can also be ripping at fabrics and stretching things. It might be also just being touched in our soul by a teaching, or a teacher, or a tradition. It might not even be our main tradition. But all these are examples of things that stretch the soul and open things up, and maybe break things in us, break vessels in us, and *that* can give rise to images. Very fertile.

So there's this, as I said, mutual dependent origination between a soul-stretch and soulmaking, as part of what's going on in the soulmaking: stretch the soul by what we're opening to, or opening ourselves to, or the situations we're putting ourselves in in life; stretch the soul in life, and there's soulmaking that happens through that, very probably with lots of imaginal images being part of that process of soulmaking. And where there's soulmaking, over time, there will be a stretch. So the dependency is mutual. It runs both ways. I hope that makes sense.

I remember, I think it was in the opening talk of this course, and I said, well, we could make a categorization into three. **(1)** There's what we might call fixated images and *papañca* as one mode of the imagination. **(2)** There's a sort of mindful awareness or deconstruction of images as a second. **(3)** And the third is allowing the images or supporting the images to become imaginal and soulmaking. Three categories there. Wrapped up in those three, we can also trace a corollary tripartite division of the relationship with emotions. So in the case of *papañca* and fixated image, the emotions are usually

unskilful. They're not helpful. They've kind of got us in their grip. We're being ... sent through the spinner? I've forgotten the phrase. But anyway, they've got us, and they're unskilful emotions. Even if there's love, etc., there's a lot of graspy clinging in it or whatever.

Let's just delineate a few factors. Put it this way. When we're mindful of what's going on, like there's some tendency to *papañca* or there's a certain image, and when we're just mindful of that, it tends to quiet, to pacify the emotions. It tends to. That movement is actually part of a larger movement of lessening fabrication, so also the emotion itself is fabricated less, and we go towards a coolness, a calming, a kind of emotional neutrality. And mindfulness, as I've pointed out several times, the way we commonly view mindfulness is just – we could regard it rather as just it's a certain degree of less fabrication. So we're fabricating less story, less self, less image, less emotion, etc. – in contrast with when we're on the imaginal track; then we form this crucible for the emotions, so that the emotions can be integral and part of and nourish the whole giving birth to the imaginal. And then they might still be intense, so they're not necessarily pacified. They might be intense, but they're transformed, or given other dimensions, or other roots, and they tend to be liberated in the best sense there.

Again, if we just follow this, just linger on this for a second, this tripartite division. There are ways of being with emotions – so, for example, in typical mindfulness instructions, they say let go of the story, let go of the self, etc., and what that does is there's a little less fabrication. That pacifies the emotions, and in so doing, it doesn't become soulmaking. There's just a pacification. It doesn't become imaginal. There's just a pacification. That set of instructions I gave – I think they were called “Working with the Emotional Body,” from 2011, which is where I may have also made the point about we'll never get to the bottom of emotions as a species, our understanding of them. There I gave these seven guided meditations, if I remember, instructions.² They also will tend to pacify. They're skilful ways of working with the emotions. So we're not throwing these out, for good and all. We're not throwing them out once and for all. We want to keep that kind of way of relating to emotions – just a simple mindfulness, a simple lessening of the fabrication, and within that, there's a range of ways, like there were these, for instance, seven modes of paying attention and working with emotions – all of them kinds of mindfulness, kinds of stances of mindfulness, that would pacify the emotion, and with that, the self, etc., and the fabrication, etc. But like I said, if we want the imaginal to come from the emotion, then we need a kind of crucible. We need to let the emotions heat up in certain ways in that alchemical vessel.

So in this tripartite division, we could make a distinction between what goes in each division – what kind of image, what kind of desire, what kind of emotion, and what kind of fabrication. **(1)** With what we're calling *papañca* or fixated image – well, that's the kind of image: it's fixated, it's reified, it's *papañca*. What kind of desire? Craving. The contraction of craving and the *dukkha* of craving. What kind of emotion? Unskilful emotion. It's got us, it's tangled us, it's taking us for a ride, we're caught up in it – all that. What kind of fabrication? Unskilful fabrication. The self, other, and the situation, the world, are all fabricated in ways that are bringing *dukkha*, that are not helpful, that are reified, etc. I see myself this way, clinging to that view; that's how I am. I see that person that way because they looked at me this way or whatever, they didn't speak to me or they did speak to me, or whatever it was, and I'm fabricating the perception of them in a very literalized, very reified way, and usually not in a way

that eases suffering – and also the situation, the world, maybe it spreads to the the whole [world]; I see everything a certain way.

So image, kind of desire, kind of emotion, and kind of fabrication. Fixated image, craving, unskilful emotion, unskilful fabrication of self, other, world. **(2)** When we practise one of the skilful kinds of mindful attention that are sort of more standardly taught, that I and lots of other teachers have probably put out, then, again, we can go through: what's the kind of image? What's the kind of desire? What's the kind of emotion? What's the kind of fabrication? There's a quietening, a pacification of the images, and actually of perception in general. There's a pacification of desire, eros and craving, through the simple sort of standard mindfulness and the deconstruction that that does. Pacification of images, pacification of perception, pacification of desire, to some degree or other, depending on exactly what practice one is engaging. There's a pacification of emotion, as I said earlier – if that's the kind of emotion, this torrent of probably unskilful emotion or whatever was pacified. And there's pacification of fabrication. So we're somewhere there on the spectrum of unfabricating of self, other, world. There's not *no* self. In standard mindfulness, there's less story, there's less personality, but there's not *no* self; there's just less self. Less self is being fabricated, etc.

(3) When we consider these categories or these elements in the imaginal category, then we have an imaginal kind of image. The kind of desire becomes eros (with everything that that means, and the pregnancy of that, and the impregnating faculty of eros). The relationship with the emotions is one of a crucible that allows the generation and the reception of images, but also allows the transformation of everything, including emotion sometimes. Sometimes the emotion becomes another emotion – it's transformed through the alchemical process. Sometimes the emotion stays difficult. We've talked about this when we talk about *dukkha* and soulmaking. It stays grief, or it stays whatever it is, anger, but it has other dimensions to it that make it much more liberating – much, much more liberating; much more space is opened up in the emotion because, if you like, the territory of the dimensions, of the beyonds, is opened up. There's more vertical space, so to speak, in the emotions. And also it being sensed as rooted in the divine, if it does – we have then a healthy respect, reverence even, humility in relationship to the emotions, trust, all that. That's all part of what is allowed because the crucible is there.

So imaginal image, desire becomes eros rather than craving. An emotional crucible is formed and forged and allows all kinds of possibilities with regard to the emotion and the image. And there's skilful fabrication in this. There's soulful fabrication, soulmaking fabrication, of self – the self can become imaginal; it's not just me in the flat-view way of regarding me, and my psychology, and my history – self, other, and world. But included in that is the self can become imaginal.

So what might be involved, or what are some of the elements that might be involved in a more potentially soulmaking relationship with the emotions, in this range of skills that we're talking about for being with the emotions? There are a few things we could point to. Actually there are many. But I'll throw out just a few right now. [1:15:28] You know, a result of – as I wrapped up in what I just said – skilful imaginal involvement with the emotions, or imaginal images coming from the right relationship with emotions, is that the emotion then feels as if it's not just mine in the flatly conceived sense, but in a way, it's bigger than me; it's rooted in divinity. So again, the mutual dependent origination. If the imaginal can open up that sense of the emotion, then, if I can view the emotion that way, it might open up the image. Yeah? So again, we're playing with conception, with logos, with perception. So I may be

able to just see an emotion a certain way, and that seeing it a certain way changes my relationship with it, and in that shift, something in the jammed-ness of things shifts, like tectonic plates shifting, and something can move, and an image can arise.

Often in psychotherapeutic settings – not always, but quite commonly – and certainly in Dharma settings, we’re taught that either *we*, the self, in a psychological setting, the self is larger than this emotion – “You’re bigger than this feeling” – and to kind of have that view, and encourage that view, and make accessible and available that view over time as a helpful way of relating to the emotions, so that we’re not overwhelmed or run by an emotion. Also in the Dharma, we don’t say so much the *self* is bigger; we might say something like, “The awareness is bigger than the emotion,” or “Mindfulness can be bigger than the emotion.” Certainly I’ve taught that way. It’s very, very important as a view. “Can we make the mindfulness bigger than the emotion? Can we have a sense of the awareness being bigger than the emotion?”

In imaginal practice, Soulmaking Dharma, on the other hand – so these kinds of ways of looking, we or the mindfulness or the awareness are regarded as, encouraged to be regarded as, bigger, larger than the emotion. Those kind of ways of looking always remain available as modes we can move into at any time. But in addition to that, the emotion may be sensed and conceived as *more than me*: “Actually, this thing that I’m feeling is bigger than I am. It’s bigger than certainly my history or whatever.” Why? Because it has a divine root. It’s conceived or felt or sensed as having a divine root. It belongs to or it originates in the angel, something more than me. So that view, it doesn’t lead to an out-of-controlness, where the emotion is bigger in the sense that it’s completely tossing us this way and that, and putting us through the ringer or whatever, and we’re out of control and driven by something in a really unhelpful way. It doesn’t lead to that ‘out of control.’ It doesn’t lead to anything unethical, or inconsiderate behaviour, etc. But there is a flip in the view there.

And again, with the mutual dependent arising, it may arise as a result of image, different view of the emotion; sometimes I can just try and gently encourage a different view of the emotion that allows image to arise. But there are other factors, as I said, we could point to. Actually, I’ll just amplify a point, because I mentioned it already. I’ll amplify a point. In some of the ways of mindfully, with a kind of skilful mindfulness of paying attention to emotion, what’s really happening is we’re kind of atomizing the emotions to, sometimes, for instance, the sensations. So this, whatever the emotion is, it’s looked at with a kind of high-resolution lens in the mindfulness, and instead of getting caught up in the story, we’re kind of going underneath the story. The story is a gross level of resolution. We’re going underneath that: “What is the sensation? How closely, how finely can I look at the sensation? Oh, it’s just pulsing, or it’s just heat. This anger, I experience it as heat,” for example, or whatever it is, or pressure. And in that sense, what was a complex, rich phenomenon – the emotion itself, and then the emotion in the way that it tied into my self and my narrative and stories, etc. – we’re kind of atomizing that through the intensity and the sort of high-definition resolution of our attention, if that makes sense.

So that will prevent images arising. It’s really skilful at times – really, really skilful. Again, this is part of the whole art of navigation: when this, when that approach, and when another approach? But certainly if we atomize our emotional experience through the kinds of ways we’re paying attention, that won’t give rise to image. So there are other ways of being with it that, for instance, we need to include. Like I said, we need to include some self-sense. Maybe I need to include a narrative. I might need to

hold it a bit more lightly, a bit more spaciouly, that self-sense and narrative. But it needs to be included in the kind of aura or nebula around what we consider the emotion, rather than we're diving in and atomizing it. And again, we can talk about the whole energy body and getting that involved, rather than zeroing in on sensations in one location at a very atomistic level.

I need to make sure that I'm not reducing this emotion to one cause. So, "I'm feeling this emotion because of *this*," "because that person said *that*," or "because this can't happen," or "because that happened when I was young," or "I was treated this way," or whatever it is. That may be *part* of the reason. Or rather, in order for the soulmaking dynamic to include the emotion, that reason, "because my mum said this," or "because my dad didn't give me that," or "because that person said this," or because whatever it is, may be regarded as *one* cause, but there are *more* causes, even if we don't know what they are. We're just opening up the conception of causes. This is one of the elements, that we're not reduced to one meaning or cause or causal explanation. It's one of the twenty-eight elements, not reducing to one causal explanation or meaning.

But again, it might be that in the mix of qualities that need to be there, I need to let myself be moved, you know? That's the other – which we've touched on, actually, being moved, being touched. That is an element of soulmaking, as we said before. It's an element of the breaking of the vessels, of the soulmaking dynamic, that things are shifting, that we're touched, that we're moved, that it's meaningful, all that. So we need to let that be the case. If we shut that down in relation to the emotion, or we limit what it can mean in relation to the emotion, then it's not so fertile for the images – and the eros as well. It may be that we're not allowing eros, if we talk about eros. It's more than emotion, but can be included in that territory. And again, trust, which I've alluded to earlier – just a grain of trust here. Not narrowing down the values. And again, values are one of the elements of the imaginal. If I've, in a predetermined, preconceived way, narrowed down my range of what are acceptable values or what is valuable, then that, too, can limit the trust and limit the possibility with regard to emotions, as we touched on earlier.

Sometimes, an emotion is going on, and actually we don't see, perhaps at the edges or underneath or around it, there is love there. We're somehow feeling loved, or there's love for something or other, or love for ourselves in allowing ourselves to feel this, or love for our sensitivity, or whatever it is, and maybe beauty. Sometimes we don't see those elements. And in seeing them in relationship to what I'm feeling right now, difficult as what I'm feeling right now might be, that also can allow more possibility, more fermenting of the material in the alchemical vessel. Of course, seeing, sensing the beauty and the love, it may be easier if the emotion becomes the emotion of an imaginal other, okay? So I'll touch on that in a sec. Let's come back to that in a sec.

So there are different factors. We could probably name some more. But these are some of the threads to consider in terms of what kind of, as I said, range – it's not really exactly this *one* relationship with emotions that's going to give rise to images, but it's a certain range, and in that range, there are lots of possibilities, there are lots of strands to follow. If it's a ball of tangled wool, well, there are lots of threads that we can pick up and just start following and see if it untangles or creates something more helpful, more beautiful, more soulmaking there with regard to the emotion and also in regards to generating images.

So one of the strands there was this not reducing. Not reducing, again, either consciously or unconsciously – so much happens unconsciously, that we’re not aware of, that can actually limit the soulmaking process. So it’s really good to shine the light on, “Actually, am I doing this? How am I regarding X or Y?” We just touched on not reducing the explanation of this emotion to one, to just one cause, okay? Because if I do, that will block, it will tend to block the image – especially if that cause is a kind of flatly conceived cause, without the dimensionality, etc. Let’s just say something about that as well. You know, of course, again, to highlight this thing about unconsciousness – sometimes we don’t think: “Well, I’m not thinking about a causal explanation here,” but actually at some level of our mind, we *are*. The mind has already kind of locked down on a certain explanation, a certain view of why I’m feeling this, “because this happened,” or “because I’m this way,” or “because I’m just no good at ...” whatever it is. So it’s really worth, as I said, shining the light, and to unearth, to uncover, to discover how we’re viewing things in ways that sometimes we’re not aware of.

But if we linger on this one about not reducing to one causal explanation. [1:28:59] If we always or too often see interactions, relationships, certain effects of the past, of family, my mum or dad or whatever, if we’re too often or always seeing certain effects, or certain interactions, or certain relationships, or difficulties, or emotions, or whatever through the lens of “this past cause,” “my family, my history, my this or that event,” whatever, it may, many times, miss – or such a way of viewing may, many times, miss or obliterate what, we could say, are more ‘primary’ reasons, in inverted commas, and motivations for some affect, some emotion being there, for some response arising in us, for some relational choice or movement. “I’ve decided it’s because of *this*,” and there may be something, from a certain paradigm, that’s actually *more* primary, more fundamental.

For example, someone not wanting commitment in a certain relationship, or not even wanting intimacy in a certain relationship, or at a certain time, or more widely – just seem to avoid that. So easily, a certain explanation comes: “Oh, you’re afraid of intimacy,” or whatever it is, and there’s a whole psychological paradigm that gets dragged in there. But it may be because of an attractive pull, a calling to the angel of purity, for example. Someone is called to a kind of purity that may involve, for instance, more celibacy for a period. Or it may be the pull of the angel towards certain kind of creativity or manifesting certain creative work. Could be many things. In other words, it’s not coming from an inhibition or a fear that’s based on my past; there’s a telistic, a telos operating here. We’re actually called to something else. Yes, it has a cost – in this case, whatever, I’m not open to intimacy, I’m not open to pursuing this relationship or making this commitment to this person, or that, whatever it is, other situation or project at work or whatever. “Oh, you’re not pulling your weight. You’re a slacker.” I may not be a slacker. I may not be lazy. I might be pulled to something else. I might be called to something else. I might not be afraid of intimacy. I might not be afraid of commitment. I just have a commitment to something else. I feel called by some other angel.

So some duty or calling other than intimacy in the usual, human, commonly conceived of, psychotherapeutically correct (so-called) sense. A duty other than, a calling other than, to family or to relationship, commitment, whatever, beckons. It’s not from the past. It’s from, so to speak, the future, the angel out ahead, calling us to something. But again, if we’re not open, at least, to the range of these possibilities and ideas and sensing, and seeing, “What’s actually going on with me, and my soul, and my life, and my choices, and my inclinations?”, sometimes we lock things down. Everything gets

jammed up and inhibited in the sense of certain possibilities that may be really rich, and really soulmaking, are not possible.

Again, if we just linger with this question of what might be among the strands, the helpful strands of ways of relating to emotion that allow images to arise, that are fertile, that are potentially imaginal. Sometimes – to add to our strands there – a slight regard of the emotion as *anattā*, as not-self – it's not me, and not mine, this emotion. If I lean *too much* on that regard for the emotion, that's a very, very powerful unfabricating practice. If I really linger with it, then the emotion will fade. It will go into deep equanimity. And if I just keep going, with the *anattā*, with the equanimity, even that will fade and it will go beyond, towards the Unfabricated, etc. But certainly with skill and development with emptiness practices, but even before that, it might be just it's possible – don't underestimate what's possible even without certain trainings sometimes. It might be possible, just a sort of slightly loosening the self's appropriation, or normal appropriation of the emotion, normal regard for the emotion as being me or mine. "Of course it's my emotion," we assume or we feel, naturally we feel. "Of course it's maybe who I am, or certainly mine," you know? It's just the default, normal way – again, not even conscious, often. Not even conscious of viewing emotions [as me/mine]. Sometimes it's possible, can I just see it as not me, not mine? And that loosening, that slight loosening, again, it's like loosening the jammed elements, the jammed hardware, loosening the tectonic plates so something, waters, the waters of soul can start to flow, etc., of soulmaking can start to flow, and images can be born from those waters.

Sometimes – I think I alluded to this a few minutes ago, as well – say I'm feeling an emotion, and it's a difficult emotion, let's say, grief, or anger, or heartbreak, or sadness. Could be anything. Frustration. And sometimes it's possible, rather than just a slight loosening with the *anattā*, "not me, not mine," actually going a step further and just creating, generating – or, let's say, *inviting* – an image of an other. In other words, an imaginal object who is feeling that emotion. So who is it who's feeling that emotion? We tend to think, "It's me." But what if we just allow it to constellate, to form, as if we were witnessing some imaginal other who feels that emotion? Then there's a twoness. The self who is meditating, practising, and watching – of course, the self will still feel some of that emotion. But allowing it to become other, actually, again, it opens something up, and then we might be able to have a slightly different regard for that other than we do to ourself.

Maybe, for instance, I don't immediately get locked down into judgment for that. I see, "Oh, there's a kind of nobility in them experiencing that emotion or bearing that emotion. There's a kind of deep sensitivity," and I start to see, "Wow, how beautiful is that, the sensitivity of the soul of this imaginal other, that they feel in that way, and that they're impacted in that way" – back to the vulnerability as being maybe a necessary element. They're able to be impacted. They're open to being sensitive and perhaps to being wounded. But making it other just creates a bit more space sometimes, and that can allow a different relationship with the emotion. And it's already become image to a certain extent, and then that image can start becoming more imaginal, more complex, etc., more rich, more deep, reveal what it reveals to us, teach us in the way that it teaches, draw us on in the way that it draws us on.

Related to that, again, it's so worth repeating: the sort of non-linearity and non-formulaic nature, necessarily, *I* feel, of soulmaking work, sensing with soul, imaginal practice. So especially when we were talking about the *dukkha* and soulmaking, those talks, and Catherine and I talked about that, and we really stressed – and I'm stressing today, as well – the importance of really feeling the emotions.

And not just feeling them, but feeling them within a certain range, or with these different strands, and feeling them in a way that's supportive. But actually feeling them, being with them, allowing them, recognizing them, etc. And then, out of that, as one supportive ingredient or factor or condition in the alchemical process, then an image arises.

But again, the absence of formula – or my suspicion with regard to sort of formulaic solutions and “It's always like this,” “There's always an order you do it in, like this, first the emotion and then the image.” Sometimes, as I've just alluded to a couple of times, an image comes, or we generate an image, and it *leads* to an emotion, or it liberates an emotion – an emotion that was stuck, or felt like it's definitely there, it's an emotion, but it's all a bit compacted, or I'm just looping with it in a certain way. The image itself, of course, again, because of the dependent arising, because of the multi-aspected, multi-elemented nature of the imaginal, the image can give rise to emotion, can liberate an emotion, or can transform an emotion. Something can move to the opposite emotion, or move to the same emotion, as I said before, but it's got dimensions now, and it's got space, and there's something beautiful and liberating about it, and we wouldn't want to trade it for anything, despite the *dukkha* that might still be in it. There's something sacred and precious, and feels really right, and feels really necessary for the soul.

So, yes, very often, emotion first. Make sure – am I allowing it? Am I recognizing it? Am I feeling it? Am I relating to it in ways that are not blocking the soulmaking process and the birth of images? Emotion first, then the possibility of image arises. Sometimes the other way around – the presence of an image, or the deliberate instigation of an image, or the recall of an image that has been helpful before actually either gives rise to a certain emotion, or liberates an emotion, or ensouls an emotion, or transforms it, all of that.

Sometimes what happens is, as I said, we don't actually realize an emotion is present, and things are a bit jammed up, but again, the way of being with the emotion can liberate an image that's helpful then in the whole process, or an image comes and it helps the emotion. So I'll give you one example. A person came for an interview, and they were a bit stuck with a situation in their life. Actually, they were quite stuck, really. Or I'd say more *unsure* than *stuck*. They were really unsure. And it had to do with their invitation to join a collaborative creative project, a writing project. And they also presented this image. The image was of a mule, resisting with all its strength and determination, resisting the pull of a rope on it. She couldn't see in the image – what's the rope attached to? And who's pulling it? And why, etc.? It was just this mule with a rope pulling it one way, but, you know the way mules and horses and such can do sometimes, they just stand in this way that they're actually kind of unbudgeable. So all its strength and determination are resisting the pull of this rope.

She was baffled by the image, but it felt important. Actually my initial response was, “Well, I have no idea.” Which is often the case – sometimes people describe images or dreams, and I'm initially just baffled and sort of a bit daunted by it. But we were talking about it. She felt that there was some connection between the invitation to collaborate on this writing project and the image. But we can be, as I've said before – we have to be careful with literalizing and also the scope of our intention. So the fullness of intention, that node, that element, means I don't want to just rush into, working with this image, “What does it mean? What does it imply? What does it tell me to do? Give me guidance.” We can recognize such an intention, because guidance may well be part of what's going on in an image.

Specific guidance in relation to a specific choice or whatever may be part of what's there in the imaginal. But if I, again, reduce it to, "That's what the image means, and I'm relating to this image for the sake of personal guidance in my life," then that tends to shrink things and not allow the full blossoming of the imaginal and the soulmaking.

So here's this image, and I guided her gently to enter into, "Is it possible to enter into the bodily experience of the mule?" Here's this mule standing there, its feet planted and resisting with all its strength and determination. "Can you meditate on the image, and in this moment, with your energy body, with your bodily sensibility, can you feel the mule's bodily experience?" And in doing that, she began to feel, the yogi began to feel the kind of strength and determination and alignment there, by almost putting herself or feeling into, sensing into, the mule's body. So what happened was strength, determination, a sense of the strength, determination, and alignment came in her. I also sensed, at that point, something of the heart is involved here – and it's not immediately obvious yet, but something of the heart.

So it was like, "Okay, very gently, can you include the energy body experience, and the emotional experience, the heart there?" So we're back to the emotions. "What's the heart feeling?" And she said, "Power. Power." And *I* could feel it. This is why it helped me sort of guide the questions here. "There's tremendous power here. Don't rush, don't rush. Linger there. Let it fill. Let that feeling of power fill you, fill the energy body, fill the heart and the being." Very often – again, we're back to where I started with – feelings of power, it's not common for people to actually *feel* power. And I don't mean power over another, or bad power. Just power in the being, power in the energy body, power in the soul, power as the ability to do, power as a sort of gathering and harmonizing of one's energies. It's actually quite rare, and maybe sometimes even more rare, in some Dharma cultures where power is too close to the possibility of abusive power, or anger, or that kind of thing, so that very often people are *not* accustomed to allowing it, to letting it come into the being, to recognizing it – certainly not to lingering with it, and feeling it, and letting it coalesce, and letting it shape the whole experience of body and self.

That was actually what I asked her next. "Does the self become involved, or become image?" So from the energy body sense, or via the energy body sense, ignited by this energy body sense of power, this unfamiliar energy body sense of power, an image of self comes up, or is allowed. So instead of, again, the usual range of how one feels and senses and conceives of oneself, because there's a different experience here, the experience that originally was not seen as mine, because it was in the mule – it seems like other – and then feeling into that, feeling it first in the energy body, lingering, slowing down, including the heart, including the body, letting it fill, letting it fill the energy body, the feet planted on the ground, and the fullness of that, the beauty of that power, really. And then it's allowed. It's allowed then to ferment, to spawn an imaginal sense of self, as, in this case, powerful, strong, and the words "with so much integrity." So integrity has a lot to do with power as well. When we're split, when we're not honest to ourselves, not aligned with ourselves, we lose our power. Power and alignment, harmonization, integrity, all these things go together. So much integrity.

So again, this was, in some respects, in some domains, a new experience of self. To me, it looked very beautiful. There was a beauty in this. Again, in a way, *I* pointed that out at that point – and that's not to praise myself; it's more to make the point of how so often we're so unaccustomed to all this that we don't see the beauty, and specifically the beauty of ourselves, our own beauty, the beauty of this

imaginal sense of self, the beauty of this new experience of self. And love there, love of this self. And again, for so many, it's such a struggle to really love the self deeply, and know deeply one's deep beauty, for the self to become a beloved erotic object for oneself. How rare, how very rare in our culture.

So just gently pointing out, "Can you actually see how, feel how beautiful this sense of self is, this imaginal self, your self, and the love of this self?" There's multidimensionality there, there's mystery. All that's wrapped up in it. And again, we're back to pacing – the necessity with these kinds of openings to really linger and go slowly, and particularly, in this case, with the elements that are new, especially the love, the self-love, and the beauty, sensing the beauty of self. Even in the process, one can fall out of that: "Oh, the energy body awareness shrunk," "Oh, the feet planted on the floor," etc., and that connection. But there's a kind of mist or a constellation of all these beauties and all these qualities that coalesces there, that condenses there, and one's sort of in that mist, that holy cloud, mystical cloud of all these elements of the imaginal. One's sitting in it; one is it. They're part of the fabric of one's being at that point.

And then, maybe – again, taking care with the pacing – what happens then if we introduce the notion of reflection and mirroring, the infinite echoing, infinite mirroring, and we introduce, put together, this self-image, this imaginal self, with the narrative of your life, past and future? Because, at that point, it's just me right now with this different sense of self, and it's not really connecting to the story and the narrative of years and decades, perhaps years and decades of difficulty and choices, or feeling strange because of this or that, or alienated, or whatever it is. What happens is, just very gently, we put – I don't know how to say it – it's like we put in neighbourhood of each other, in the vicinity of each other, just gently, this self-image, this imaginal self-sense, and the whole narrative of one's life, past and future. And of course, the future is unknown, but just the sense of a narrative moving into the future.

So that's a real possibility. Again, the importance of including the narrative sense in a lot of imaginal work – not as a reified, fixated thing, but as something, again, that can be opened up, stretched, dimensionalized, divinized, even, through the alchemical process of the sensing with soul. Then, you know, maybe, we might introduce the idea or the possibility of this particular creative project into relationship with this imaginal constellation, energetic constellation, state of the soul, perspective on the soul – introduce into the vicinity of that, with the energy body sense, with the self-image. And from that came a different relationship, and a kind of freedom in relationship to this invitation to collaborate. Freedom not to participate, but also recognizing the beauty of it, the importance of it, the love of it, the duty, perhaps. But it's coming from a very different place now, with a different self-sense, and the power, and the integrity. There's freedom not to do it, to be involved in that project, not to be pulled in an unhealthy, unconscious way, in a limited way, not to need to prove myself or to seem important because I'm part of such a project.

So there's an important navigational principle in that. The image allowing a certain emotion, or opening up the possibility for a certain emotional sense, certain self-sense and all that. There's another one which I'd like to point out, regarding to navigate, the art of navigating within, with an image, or in the territory of the imaginal or sensing with soul. And it's the importance of going via the energy body (which we always emphasize), but here in particular – here's this puzzling image, and it looks like a

very limited image. Where's the dynamic element in the image? Where's the power in the image? So at first, you could say, well, nothing's happening in the image; it's just static. It's stuck. It doesn't even seem to have a context, etc. But how does the mule's body feel, in all its strength and all its determination? The dynamism was locked there. The power was locked there. I think what's more important here is the dynamic element. Something that looks very static and very stuck – this mule just resisting a pull from an anonymous rope-puller – actually had a lot of potential dynamism, and 'dynamism' meaning 'that which can move things on.' Going in that way, sensing where's the [dynamism] – and again, it's not formulaic; it was just an intuition in the moment, but we might raise it as something to consider. Where's the dynamic? If we say, where's the soulmaking element, where's the immediately soulful element, *that* may not always be obvious, but it might be that there's something that holds a kind of dynamism, and it may be locked. It may not be obvious or apparent at first.

There's a potentially dynamic element, and then going into it, and feeling it, entering into it, lingering and allowing it, allowing the alchemical process to do its work, with the appropriate sort of sensitive, responsive pacing, then actually that locked dynamism became dynamic and put into dynamic motion the whole soulmaking/imaginal process, so then things could move, and the whole self-sense, etc., as I've described. So that's different than asking, "What does this mule *mean*? What does this image *mean*? How can it guide me?" I'm actually going by what's alive in the image – and again, in this case, what had a lot of dynamism but wasn't apparent. It's different than asking, "What is this image telling me to do in this situation? What's the guidance here? What does this mule mean?"

Okay. So, as I said, these are things to consider, maybe to practise with, maybe to reflect on, to inquire into. Different pieces will be relevant for different people at different times, as always.

¹ Rob Burbea, "The Spreading of Five Wings" (28 June 2018), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/51534/>, accessed 19 March 2021.

² Rob Burbea, "Working with the Emotional Body" [Parts 1–7] (30 July–5 Aug. 2011), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/?search=working+with+the+emotional+body+day>, accessed 20 March 2021.