

## Eros Unfettered (Part 5 – Otherness and the Art of Disappearing)

### Eros Unfettered Retreat

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Let's pick up a couple of threads we've already touched on and take them a little further, elaborate them a little more, weave them together a little more, regarding this whole soulmaking dynamic. So one of the things we said quite early on was that the way we are defining eros – and these definitions are not about who's right and who's wrong or whatever – but the way we are defining eros is not the way some people have defined it historically and some people still do, which I think comes from the Neoplatonic tradition. We are not defining it as or saying that it is a drive or force to unification, to union. Rather, or in contrast to that, we have been saying that eros, in the way that we're using that word, eros as we define it, preserves and creates or discovers twoness.

So it's not an inclination, a movement to oneness, to melting, to unification. Rather, if we pay attention to this thing, this aspect of our experience, of a phenomenological movement that we can observe that we're calling eros, we can see that eros preserves and creates or discovers twoness. Why? Because eros is in the service of and is part of the soulmaking movement, the soulmaking dynamic, the dynamic of eros-psyche-logos. And soulmaking, as we've also said and explained, as we can observe in our experience, soulmaking brings an increase of otherness, an increase of the other. The other swells, it gets extended, expanded in breadth, in depth, in dimensionality, starts to become more complicated and reveal more facets, more manifold facets. Distinctions are made in the erotic movement or through the erotic soulmaking movement. Distinctions are made of perception and of conception, of psyche and logos, within, if you like, the other, or of others.

So we can see then and understand how eros does indeed preserve and create and discover twoness and otherness, the twoness meaning the two of self and other. But we might wonder, then, well, what about the desire for oneness? What about this desire that we have, or many human beings have, for oneness? So that avenue of oneness, of dissolving, of merging into union, unions of different kind, that, I want to say, that's important. And I think for many people interested in meditation that is an important pull, call in the soul. But at the same time, the avenue of twoness is important. So both these avenues, of oneness and of twoness, if we say this erotic avenue preserving the twoness, they're both important. I want to say we can have both. We can have both. We can know both.

But let's go into this a little more. Because if we actually examine personally the desire for oneness, and sometimes it's even a longing for oneness, what actually is it? I would say, on inspection, it's actually a desire to know oneness of some kind, a oneness of love or of beingness or awareness or whatever, or a desire to know the Unfabricated, which is another kind of oneness, we could say. So desire to know. It's not so much a desire to become one with that oneness or the Unfabricated or to dissolve into a permanent union. So it's a desire to know something, not to dissolve permanently into some union. This is interesting. In the classic Pali Canon texts, as well as other spiritual contemplative traditions, religious traditions from around that time and before and afterwards, the kind of ultimate goal of the path could be construed as exactly that – some kind of permanent dissolution or union, ending of the rebirth, of a separate existence, and either permanent union with Brahman or whatever, or, so to speak, dissolution into the Unfabricated, something like that.

So classically it's there, stated as a goal. But nowadays, or even then, as a sort of permanent, "this is the ending of all rebirth, permanently dissolved or unified," or however exactly one would phrase it, something like that, I would wonder, was that desire, is that desire, there because it's taught to be the goal, or because it's really desired, or because it's actually a movement of aversion, of subtle aversion (something we'll come back to later on the retreat), *vibhava-tanha*, desire, lust for

nonexistence, for erasing everything, turning existence and the world and self off, turning it all off, turning experience off.

In actual meditation, actual practice, actual spiritual practice, what is possible is all kinds of dissolution, if you like, to relative degrees. All kinds of unions, unifications. All kinds of experiences of melting into oneness, whether it's different levels of *jhanas*, of the eight *jhanas*, or different experiences of the *brahmaviharas*, dissolving into love. All kinds are possible. And even what's called an experience of the cessation of perception in an experience of the Unfabricated. These are all available as temporary meditative experiences. One learns how to do that, develops that art, skill, at whatever level of *jhana* or in whatever direction, to the Unfabricated or whatever, and, so to speak, dips into the dissolution temporarily and then hopefully – and sometimes it's a gradual process – one then emerges from that and knows a level of essential union, unity, if you like, an essential oneness with whatever it is, an infinite love or infinite consciousness or something like that, or even somehow the Unfabricated.

So one moves in a world experiencing twoness but actually knowing oneness. So one can, meditatively, with practice, practicing the right way, finding out how, developing that art, one can dissolve in different ways to different degrees and into different kinds of oneness, if you like, and emerge. And emerging, hopefully, in time, and with some reflective insight, we know something. We know an essential oneness. You could say something like that. But knowing implies already some kind of duality or polarity, at least, of knower and known. Knowing, if you like, already implies or is already a state of some degree of twoness, knower and known. There is the knower and there's what is known. There is the consciousness that knows and there is that which is known. Some degree, different ways, different kinds, and to different degrees.

So what does the spiritual seeker want in wanting oneness, in longing for oneness? He/she wants to know that she is one essentially with God, with universal love, universal awareness, universal beingness, with the *dharmakaya*, whatever, at different levels of understanding and perception of oneness. But she wants to know that essentially she is one. And that's different than a desire to dissolve and have that union as a sort of permanent thing. Similarly, you know, in tantra, and we talked I think in the last retreat, the *Re-enchanting the Cosmos* retreat, about becoming the deity, becoming the imaginal figure as a kind of option in imaginal practice, and also as a kind of direction or instruction in tantric practice. But that becoming the deity, becoming the imaginal figure, first of all it's never total. It's never a complete union, dissolving all sense of distinction. And secondly, it's only temporary. Realistically, it's only temporary.

This is important to actually scrutinize a little bit this desire for oneness and what's actually happening in the spiritual and meditative openings, perceptual openings of experiences of oneness and union, dissolution, merging and all that, or in life, with a lover or whatever it is, or the flow of life in doing a sport or whatever. We'll return to this later in the retreat, this desire for oneness, for transcendence, for the Unfabricated. There's quite a lot involved in that, and what's the place of that on our path, that desire for oneness, transcendence, and for the Unfabricated, et cetera. But for now, let's say eros will retain and engender, or works to both retain and actually engender twoness. And it will move towards doing that even at the same time or while it knows oneness, or onenesses, because there are many varieties and many, as I said, levels of oneness.

So the kind of general, overall movement of soulmaking and the thrust that comes from eros will work to essentially, overall, retain and engender twoness, but also unfold oneness, and eventually there's experiences, it becomes quite possible, the perception is a sense of twoness, of erotically-charged twoness and otherness at the same time as one knows and can sense a oneness, or many onenesses of different levels, different varieties. And again, eventually it's quite possible to modulate the emphasis in the way of looking or in the meditation or in the experience that one's involved with, to actually modulate it towards the melting, towards the unfabricating – we've touched on this – or

towards retaining the twoness, what am I drawing out of perception, how am I inclining the unfolding of the experience. This is all very possible with the development of just the art of meditation.

But eros keeps an erotic tension in the relationship, whether it's with a person or something in nature or an intrapsychic image or whatever. The erotic tension is maintained. And that erotic tension is not just the wanting to act, "Oh, I really want to kiss you," or whatever it is. It's not just wanting sexual consummation, either. Or it's not the tension of the buildup of, say, sexual energy in the body, or just psychic energy, or desire, or, as we talked about, the tension of craving. It's not just the tension of energy accumulating in the body or the psychic vessel. That's not the only facet of the erotic tension. And that might not even be a big aspect of it at all. The erotic tension can be subtle. So it's not just wanting to act, it's not just wanting sexual consummation, it's not just the tension of energy, it's not just the tension for desiring union. Erotic tension that is kind of, we could say, intrinsic to the soulmaking erotic movement is this desire for the other, desire to know and experience, touch the other, that is always *more*, there's always more of that desire.

So there's a tension because there's always more. It's inherent in the pothos of the eros, that goes with the eros. And also because the object is always becoming more through the insemination, impregnation that eros gives to the whole eros-psyche-logos dynamic process, soulmaking process. So the object always becomes more, there's always more to desire, more to know, more to experience. Doesn't collapse into oneness. So there's an erotic tension just because there's always this desire for more and there's always the two.

So eros creates otherness, or we could say it creates othernesses, because it creates also different aspects or whole kind of ranges of othernesses within one object, even. Creates and discovers otherness. We could say eros needs otherness. The erotically-charged object is an other for eros. And wrapped up in that and the experience, again just phenomenologically observing the whole experience of eros, of soulmaking, there's a fascination with the other. There's the sense, the perception of the beauty of the other. The other is, as we've been saying, an image, fantasy. So they need to be imaginally alive for us. The other is an image and a fantasy, and image and fantasy are needed as part of the eros, as we've been saying. And this kind of space, if you like, of mystery or not yet or unknown yet, the space in which the whole process, the whole thrust or opening of eros can discover or create more of the object. So both the image, replete with its different facets and its beauty and the fascination with that, and also the fascination, the attraction of the space of mystery, the not-as-yet in which we can discover and create more of the object. All this is part of the experience of eros and soulmaking eros.

So in relation to the opening to levels of oneness in meditation and mystical experience, what that means then, what we've just said is that on the way to, or aspiring to, or practicing towards, in the process of learning to open to or discovering a level of oneness, eros is there. There's fascination. I want to know cosmic consciousness, let's say. I want to open to it and discover it. There's fascination. There's the beauty, perhaps, of hearing about it or sensing it vaguely but not quite yet. It exists for us as an image. There's all kinds of fantasy involved in that. And there's the space to move into it because it has mystery yet, I don't quite know it, it has depth and potential there, it's unknown. So all those aspects are there. That oneness, whatever level of oneness we're talking about, or it's the Unfabricated or whatever, is an erotic object then for the soul, if you like.

But eros needs the polarity and it constellates an erotic tension. Something else is interesting in the experience of eros, and you can see this sometimes more easily in actual relationship with another person where there's a sustained eros and the beauty of soulmaking in the relationship – but maybe with imaginal figures, too, or imaginal objects, like even this oneness somehow – that this twoness, this sense of otherness, can exist in the larger sort of experience of eros, in the soulmaking field, the twoness and otherness can be experienced, and the erotic tension, and the polarity of all that, can be experienced alongside – let's say alongside, rather than within, but maybe within – alongside or within a third. If you like, there's the us, or the we. So there's the self and the other and the eros between them and the aliveness of each as image and erotic object, and then sometimes what happens is the

soulmaking process, when it gets rich enough, constellates a third. One of the things, that third can be the us. So there's the you and the me, and then there's the us, almost as if it's a third soul that gets constellated, gets discovered or created. What's the soul of we, the soul of us that is constellated by the eros-psyche-logos dynamic expanding, enriching, finding, creating, discovering, revealing more?

So this we then, this us, is not so much a merging into union but an integrated constellation of the two. The very us, the two, makes another kind of one that's made up of the two, if you like. There's the soul of me and you in relationship. We come together. It's not that we merge into one. I feel me, and I feel you, and both of those are alive as erotic objects, myself also, which we'll return to, but also there seems to be a third born, we. You and I make a kind of larger soul together. But it's not a collapsing into union. And/or there's some kind of birth – so that could be regarded as a birth; there's the birth of the soul of us, of we, and the experience of that. I'm not going to go too much into it right now. Or there's the actual birth of a child. Sometimes that's where the eros and the soulmaking goes or is supported by the birth of a child, or it could be a birth of a work project that the two are involved in, or something both parties, if you like, can love or invest in. So out of the eros between the two, some kind of third is born or emerges. Could be the third of the we, the us; could be the third of an actual child; could be the third of a creative project. And that becomes a new erotic object, if you like, or a further erotic object, becomes a channel for the eros and the soulmaking.

So all these facets can kind of coexist at the same time as different dimensions or aspects, facets, of the whole soulmaking process. They kind of emerge. One recognizes them as the whole movement of soulmaking deepens, widens, and expands, and refines. And I would say because of this kind of comprehensive movement of the soulmaking dynamic to sort of flow in every possible direction, fill everything out, impregnate everything, eros also will lead to recognizing essential oneness with the other, or all kinds of different oneness as we said before. The very erotic movement, if it's allowed to unfold, part of what it will do is it will lead us to eventually recognize onenesses of different kinds. It will open those mystical experiences.

But in the actual experience of eros with another person or imaginal figure, it's not that oneness that's predominantly emphasized, or for the most part. Actually it's not even necessary to have that knowledge or sense of oneness. It's not necessary to eros. It's just that eros, as I said, in fertilizing the soulmaking dynamic, eros-psyche-logos, eventually that soulmaking dynamic will uncover, reveal, recognize oneness as part of it. But it's not the dominant aspect and it's not what is emphasized at the times that eros is to the fore.

So eros needs the perception of otherness to remain. It doesn't want to dissolve it, because the otherness is what entices. If you like, the scope or the size, if you like, or the range, the depth, the complexity, the multifacetedness, the multidimensionality of the perception of the other, that is what we're saying is equivalent to the image, the psyche, if you like, in the eros-psyche-logos dynamic. That's the otherness that needs to remain and gets built. So in igniting and stoking the soul fires of eros, psyche, and logos, eros, we could say, creates or discovers the other, an other, or otherness, or othernesses. But it creates otherness that it desires to contact, to know, to experience, et cetera. So eros creates more attractive others, if you like, that stimulate more eros – we've said this before – rather than creating others that we then feel alienated from or aversive to.

So there's all kinds of implications for what we're saying now, and we'll return to these threads, we'll pick them up later, as I mentioned. But what it implies is that what some people call the art of disappearing – so Ajahn Brahm, I think, has a book called *The Art of Disappearing*, disappearing into *jhana* or just getting rid of the self or erasing the self or experiences of, quote, “no self,” or emptiness, or that kind of thing, or other kinds of art of disappearing, actually, valuable as they are, and important as they are as experiences, temporary experiences on the path, in the unfolding of insight and beauty and mystical awarenesses and opening of perception, the art of disappearing is not eros. Eros is not the art of disappearing. They're different, if you like. Or you can't reduce one to the other. Eros is not the movement of disappearing, and certainly not disappearing finally.

All these aspects that we've been talking about, all these pieces that we've been talking about, the recognition of the oneness, the knowing of the oneness, the sense of the twoness being retained, the sense even of a third, of something being born from the erotic connection of the two, even the kind of mutual emptiness of self and other, object, imaginal object, all of that actually is kind of implicit in the concept of participation. Participation. This is something I think I've touched on very briefly before, but to me it's, in all kinds of ways, a very powerful idea. But more even than an idea or a concept, it's actually a sense, again, that is opened for us if eros is allowed to do its thing and stimulate the soulmaking, there isn't a hindering, a blocking, a cramping, a constriction, a refusal, a dismissal from any side of the eros-psyche-logos kind of tripod.

So we begin to have a sense of participation, participating in the we, participating eventually in the universe but at much more than just a material level. So I participate in the universe by breathing in and out, or I participate by eating and urinating and defecating or whatever, I participate culturally to whatever extent that I do, I participate in the community that I'm in, the communities that I'm in, I participate in society by voting, by writing letters politically, socially, et cetera – all that's important and it's participation. There's a way that one can see the beauty of all that. But there's depths of profundity and comprehensiveness to this concept and sense of participation that eros will unfold. It's not just an idea. We could start with the idea of it, but eros will unfold, for instance, what eventually we feel like we are participating – my mind, which means my thoughts, my creativity, my insights, my playing with certain ideas. My mind is participating in the mind of God, if you like, or the mind of the Buddha-nature. My individual mind or the micro-movements of my mind. Participating in the soul, if you like, of the divine, the eros of the divine, or in the soul of the other, or in the world soul.

As I said, as the eros is allowed to expand and fertilize the perception, fertilize the psyche, fertilize the ideation, we get a sense of other dimensions to the different aspects of our being, and a sense that we are participating in those other dimensions. They're not separate from us. It's not that we're just one. It's not that it's just two, either. And there's a sense of a third, this participation is creating a third, something is being born of my participation in the divine, something is being born by the divine, if you like, using me and my particular personhood, all my particularities. I asked, I think it was in the last talk or the one before, whose eros is this? Whose psyche is this? Whose imaginal perception is this? Whose idea is this? Whose conceptual framework? These begin to be questions that come to the fore. They emerge out of the very soulmaking process. We can have a sense, a deepening sense of mystical participation. As I said, participation is a big word, and I think anyone with a little reflection would, as I say, it becomes obvious that we participate in all kinds of ways. But there's depths to that and levels of what that can mean to us and the beauty of what it can mean, the beauty of the sense of it.

Because in participation, the idea or the sense of participation, as I said, it's got a kind of oneness in it, implicit in it, but it also retains the twoness, and it keeps the threeness, or the birth of the third, if you like. And in it, my particulars, your particulars, the particular of whatever erotic object I am connected to, opening to, engaged with, the particulars are sacralized in that participation and as particulars they are sacralized. In other words, my particular – my bones, or this thought or whatever, it's not just sacralized because, as I said, its essence is equal with the essence of everything else in being universal whatever, play of awareness or universal love or something. Particulars, my particulars, your particulars, the particulars of the erotic beloved, are sacralized as particulars in this sense of participation. You understand? Because the participation needs the particulars. *Part*-icipation. Part. The part is not just all the same; it cannot be replaced, my uniqueness, your uniqueness. And that uniqueness is itself unfolding, and that's part of the participation.

Can you get a sense? It's a different kind of mysticism, if you like. It doesn't replace the oneness and the knowing of universal essence, but it's a different sense and a different concept. When we say things like that, and in fact wrapped up in everything – well, actually wrapped up in everything, literally, but also wrapped up in all imaginal practice and all this talk about eros and re-enchantment

and all that, but indeed wrapped up in anything that we might want to take as a subject in our existence – is the question of epistemology, the question of how do we know what's true or what's real, or how do we know anything, what can we rely on there. So epistemology is the philosophy of knowing, of knowledge, if you like. Actually, forgive me, I'm using that word epistemology right now in a way that kind of includes the implicit questions of ontology wrapped up in it, so really one word to embrace all that. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the question of reality, of what is real, of the, if you like, reality status of things, anything, of this or that, how real is it, if we could say, or what kind of reality does this or that have, et cetera. So as I said – yeah, just for shorthand, using that word epistemology to embrace all that, that whole nexus and flow of questioning, all that investigation into ways of knowing and their validity and their domains and the whole question of reality. So just a kind of shorthand term there.

So this is wrapped up, as I said, in what we've just been talking about, the sense of sacredness, et cetera, and the whole notion of the viability, the validity of imaginal perception, when we're talking about eros, all of it. It's wrapped up in insight into anything – into emptiness, even into impermanence. Wrapped up in our existence, even if we don't think and we're not philosophers at all. So this is important. We're saying these things about sacredness and this and that, and what are we saying about that in terms of its philosophical ground, if you like, the epistemology? Well, first of all, as practitioners interested in opening up the field of our explorations – I don't know why else you would be here – but as practitioners interested in opening up the field of exploration, interested in opening up regions of soul and of soulmaking, I would say we recognize and we admit openly that we grant an image its sacredness, its divine dimensions, its autonomy. Remember I was talking about the image has, in our view, an imaginal image has a certain autonomy. But we acknowledge that this is something that we grant the image. We grant it, through the way of looking or through the concept operating in the moment, the logos operating in the moment, through the way of looking we grant it sacredness, divine dimensions, autonomy. Without that, it cannot have these things for us.

And it's the same with eros. If you like, we can decide to see it as divine, as autonomous in the way that we're talking about, that it's not my eros, it's the eros coming through me, pushing through me from the divine, from a divine figure or divine level. It's autonomous in that sense. So we can decide to adopt that way of looking, that conceptual framework, as part of our way of looking, and see what happens when we do that – I mentioned this much earlier on the retreat – see what happens when we adopt a certain ideation, a certain logos, and have that actually be in the way of looking. But it's also true, and if you're experimenting with this stuff in practice, you will get this sense it's also that we discover sacredness, we discover the divine dimensions, the dimensionality, the autonomy of images and of eros – if and when we don't contract around or cling to some conceptual framework or way of looking that simply refuses to admit sacredness, divinity, autonomy. In other words, if we're open and we're not clinging to a certain rigid idea, then we will actually have the experience of getting a sense of, noticing sacredness, autonomy, divinity, dimensionality, actually revealed in the experience.

So what is it then? Is it that we give it that, we grant it that? That it's just coming from us? Or is it that we discover it? Are both true? Do we create and discover? Is there some kind of amalgam (I think I used the word at one point)? Now, this question in regard to sacredness of the imaginal and of eros, the epistemology there is a very similar question to the epistemology in relation to anything. So this is related to much broader epistemological questions regarding all experience, *all* experience. I would say that in the field of – let's just say for now imaginal practice and the exploration of eros and what we're talking about, and I mean the wider field of imaginal practice, not just intrapsychically but the way that comes into our perception as well of the world, of self, of other – that we can and we should see it both ways, both that we acknowledge the dependent arising, if you like, we grant an image a sense of sacredness, a sense of divinity, a sense of autonomy, a characteristic of autonomy, but we also discover it. Can I move between those two perceptions, those two ways of looking, ideas, if you like? Can I even somehow adopt both at the same time? Yes, I can.

And if we can do that and have that kind of flexibility, this will be the most useful for practice. I think much more mature than plumping for one or the other. But it will be useful in the sense that it will liberate our perception. It will liberate perceptions, experiences for us. It will open and fertilize that whole soulmaking dynamic, the eros-psyche-logos. It will galvanize the soul, galvanize soulmaking, if we can kind of hold this epistemological question quite skillfully. And this, to me, is a really interesting area. Historically – and I think I’ve mentioned this on another retreat, other retreats perhaps – probably within all religious traditions and perhaps most philosophical traditions until maybe very recently, within the history of humanity there have been streams which have wanted to kind of give a kind of independent reality, if you like, to the world of the imaginal or to what we might call knowledge that’s sacred, or sacred knowledge, or something like that. So you get that in Sufism. You get it in many of the Buddhist traditions. In a way, you even get it in the Buddha of the Pali Canon.

There was a group in England called the Cambridge Platonists, active in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas More and John Smith, et cetera, sort of resurrected Platonism with variations. And wanting to give, or in fact giving a place for the possibility of knowing, in a similar way that we know things through the senses, possibility of knowing immediately in that way – in other words, not by rational deduction; knowing, having sacred knowledge, knowing the *mundus imaginalis*, Latin for the world of the imaginal. They’re actually just creating a third kind of knowing. So there’s rationality and abstract knowledge and there’s what was regarded as concrete knowledge – in other words, knowledge that’s sensual, through the senses, of external things. But there was a third sort of category of what the Cambridge Platonists called spiritual sensation. It wasn’t to do with thought and making rational deduction. It wasn’t to do with the kind of sensation where I touch this chair or this table or whatever it is, concrete and externally conceived. It was another dimension which had its own kind of immediate sensation, spiritual sensation.

So they kind of gave, if you like, there is this independent reality, the *mundus imaginalis*, or certain things we can know as sacred, et cetera, and there’s a way of knowing that. There’s just a third way of knowing that, so that we say it’s true if I deduce something logically, from rational deduction, and if my logic is correct then I conclude something is true; it’s true if I can touch it and see it and everyone agrees with me; and there’s a third kind of it’s true if I open and use my faculty of spiritual sensation. But all these things exist independently, if you like. They just need the right tools to uncover them, discover them. So a lot of these traditions, for instance the Sufi tradition, will talk about this way of knowing, this spiritual sensation, this knowing directly of the *mundus imaginalis*, is available to one who has purified their heart. That word, heart, in Sufism, in Islam, mystical Islam, refers to the organ of imaginal knowing, not so much the seat of emotion but the organ of imaginal knowing. One who has purified their heart knows what’s independently existing as a reality in that way.

And this still goes on, people just kind of asserting “this is real,” this kind of knowledge, sacred knowledge or this knowing of what appears in the imaginal, and it’s an alternative to kind of Cartesian dualism of there’s just mind or matter, and kind of philosophical positivism where if you can’t measure it or see it with your senses it doesn’t exist. So that’s one option and it’s been very popular and it still is popular with different people and different traditions, et cetera. But there’s another – an alternative, I would say, is to recognize that reality, so-called, or perception is participatory. Our sense of reality or reality itself is participatory. Our experience is participatory. In other words, we fabricate experience. We are involved in the fabrication of experience, the fabrication of the sense of reality and the fabrication of what then we deem real.

So this is not going to the extreme of a kind of slightly New Age sort of “all of it’s just mind-made, you create your own reality” version, take on things. But neither is it the other extreme of just assuming that things that we perceive exist as they seem to independent of our way of looking. That notion of independent, objective reality has been kind of nailed in its coffin, if you like, for the most part by modern Western philosophy, either of the so-called continental variety or the so-called analytic or Anglo-American variety, from lots of different directions, and philosophy of science, and in lots of

different ways. It's not really viable, this sort of basic notion that we have generally, that we're taught really and we feel as an intuition, that things exist objectively, independent of the way of looking, and that was also a kind of axiom and a goal of the scientific method. That's what it's supposed to do – it's like we can know how things exist objectively, independent of the mind, independent of our biases, independent of our perspectives and all that.

So both in the philosophy of science and wider Western philosophy, et cetera, the naivety of that kind of objective realism has been, you know, kind of left in tatters. As I said, it's not really viable anymore. And yet, so often even for people who have heard that or read certain things, so often, and often tacitly, people try to build Dharma, or there's an attempt or attempts to build Dharma and the whole conceptual structure of the Dharma on some kind of realist basis. And either a kind of religious realism that I was alluding to earlier, or a secular modernist realism that might have a materialist basis or it's just "this is reality as it seems to be, and this is what we have to deal with" in the kind of existentialist version of that. It's often on this realist basis, or sometimes a third option which is quite popular among Buddhists who tend to try or aspire to not – at least Western Buddhist often – try to, aspire to, not argue or get into conflict; they just say, "Well, anything's okay. People just believe different things and it's all good, it's all fine. Just don't argue."

But in all of that, to me, there's a kind of naivety, an inadequacy of kind of philosophical engagement with the issues of epistemology. So what's more attractive to me is to recognize perception, experience, so-called reality is participatory. It's always participatory. I've gone into this in other talks in terms of quantum physics and other developments in modern philosophy and postmodernism, all kinds of things. So modern philosophy often expresses this insight to a certain level, but often then doesn't do much with it, or those who, as I said, have read about it and say, "Yes, yes, I understand," the question is, what do you then *do* with this insight into, in a way, we could say insight into emptiness, into the emptiness of the inherent existence of things, the recognition that the way of looking contributes to the so-called reality, that reality is participatory in that kind of way.

Modern philosophers seem really ill-equipped to do anything with it because they actually don't have meditative training, so the actual ways of looking are very, very limited in scope. They don't have that range to actually experientially engage different ways of looking and actually open up different cosmoi, cosmoses, whatever the plural is. Or again, they see that emptiness, see the way that reality, so to speak, is constructed, and acknowledge it, but then just revert to a kind of realist philosophy which usually ends up being just the same kind of realism that modernism, that we're all educated with and indoctrinated with by modernism: there's a real world, it's material, the way we know things goes back to this kind of objective knowledge. Nothing really gets shifted or challenged. There's a reversion.

So this is really interesting to me. Oftentimes it's not stated, of course, because intellectually one knows, "Well, that's not the correct position," but practically speaking, and implicitly conceptually, in weaving a new version of the Dharma or whatever, it's actually there. So this is interesting to me why this happens, why there is that kind of backing down or reversion or inability to follow through on that level of insight and open things up. So I think there is a practical reason, to do with meditative skill. There also may be a psychological or psychological reasons that have to do with soulmaking that I'll come back to later on in the retreat.

I think it was the physicist John Archibald Wheeler who died not too long ago, great physicist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, teacher, a student who worked with Niels Bohr, teacher of Richard Feynman and Roger Penrose, wonderful thinker. I think he coined this term, we live in a 'participatory universe.' I think that was his term. Knowing is participatory. Knowledge is participatory. Reality then is participatory. There is not this independent existence, independent of the way of looking. So we participate also in the concepts that we create, conceptual frameworks also. They are participatory.

One of the kind of ways of approaching this whole insight into emptiness philosophically is with the notion of participation, but as I said, it's also something that eros, if we allow it, if we allow it to unfold, if we allow it to stimulate the soulmaking, we will have at some point this sense, this



deepening sense I should say, of participation in all its mystical levels and openings and dimensions. We'll have the sense of it and the idea of it, the concept, the logos of it will, I think, emerge as an important logos, as a viable logos, and also one that we can plug in and try as a flexible option, you know? And what does all that bring then? Then this sense of participation, this idea of deep, profound participation, what does that itself bring when we open it up as an idea, when we participate in the idea of participation, when we actually have that sense? Well, one of the things that's implicit in it – and I'll say it again – from Plato's depiction of Eros as a hermeneutical daimon, daemon (not sure how to pronounce that word); in other words, a demigod, an imaginal figure, if you like, Eros, whose realm is the realm of hermeneutics, of interpretation, of ways of seeing, ways of knowing, ways of understanding, ways of perceiving. And this is in regard to *everything*, everything, everything, in regard to the whole sense and every aspect of existence. How are we seeing it? How are we sensing it? What is it to us?

What it becomes depends on our hermeneutics, and our hermeneutics is stimulated by eros. So again, it's participation. The idea of participation opens up the hermeneutics, and the recognition of hermeneutics opens up the participation, the recognition of participation. Participate in the creation/discovery of reality. What might all this mean with regard to the Dharma? If eros, if we regard it with respect, if we don't just pigeonhole it as a fetter, as a defilement, eros will open things up as we've been explaining. And in relation to the Dharma as something we love, as a domain and area that we love, eros will open it up. As the soulmaking dynamic infuses the Dharma, relates to the Dharma, eros opens it up. Now, you can see this personally, I think. You can also see it historically. This is something I'll come back to.

In the Pali Canon, the Buddha said, "Seeing impermanence, one becomes disenchanted. Disenchanted, one becomes dispassionate. Dispassionate, one is liberated." So we've touched on this before in I think the very first talks, and you can see the wisdom there, the process that he's alluding to of renouncing clinging, et cetera, and letting clinging go, and then the liberation that comes up. But with this exploration, or further exploration, exploration sometimes based on insight and deeper insight into emptiness rather than just impermanence, and also this exploration that opens up through eros and the soulmaking dynamic, one could also say now, modeling on his statement there or phraseology, one could also say something almost opposite regarding disenchantment and dispassion. One could say now, one could see the validity of saying now, or the possibility of saying now and seeing, recognizing, one could say seeing the emptiness and eternality of images – seeing the imaginal in other words, seeing that image is image, but it has this timelessness – seeing the emptiness and eternality of images, the world is re-enchanted. The world and the self enchanted and empty, one is free to become impassioned. Impassioned, infinite things open infinitely.

Seeing the imaginal, seeing the emptiness and eternality, the timelessness of images, the world is re-enchanted. The world and the self enchanted and empty, one is free to become impassioned. Impassioned, infinite things open infinitely. In other words, if we allow the passion, the eros, if we allow the soulmaking of the imaginal, the world is re-enchanted. And in that, infinite things open infinitely. In other words, this soulmaking movement, the way this opens things up, everything, infinite things, and opens them infinitely potentially, potentially infinitely. You can also turn this phrase around, so that, as I said, the passion, the eros, leads to enchantment and the sense of timelessness that comes with images, the eternality. All these aspects – enchantment, eternality, eros – they're mutually dependent, so you could turn that phrase around anyway.

Some of you will be familiar with some Vajrayana teachings and you can see the connection there or recognize in what I just said, you can recognize something akin to a Vajrayana opening of tantric perspectives, tantric understandings, tantric project, if you like. So something then happens in the whole sense of what we're seeing the Dharma is and where it leads and what the possibilities are. Dharma becomes bigger and becomes endless in a certain way. So eros will extend, will widen, deepen the image, the psyche, and the idea, the logos, of Dharma, just like it will with anything it comes into

contact with. And the pothos in the eros will create this endlessness to it. So something, if we allow soulmaking really fully, maybe something in us eventually recognizes that the soul needs an endless Dharma, a Dharma that is endless. What does that mean? If awakening, if we kind of are not chained to the mooring of regarding awakening, final awakening, as an ending of rebirth, what does an endless Dharma, what might it mean?

The reduction of my personal suffering or stress or my neurosis in a kind of rather narrow modernist version of Dharma, it's like that's what awakening is – that's not endless. It's not big enough, perhaps. How might the Dharma be endless? We'll come back to this. But four possibilities occur to me. One is through a much deeper understanding of emptiness. Now, that in itself is not endless. In other words, one perhaps gets to the point where everything is understood to be empty, absolutely everything at a very thorough, deep level, but it's certainly much further than just this aspiration to, as I said, reduce my personal suffering, my stress or my neurosis psychologically. Still not endless, though. However, if one sees fabrication – going back to some of the original things we were talking about – and then actually sees further that fabrication itself is empty, too, then actually the whole duality between fabricated and unfabricated, the whole ground of everything is taken away. The whole ground between fabricated and unfabricated, between sacred and profane, all of that, everything is opened up as magical.

And opened up, too, are ways of looking. As I said, we end up with nothing but ways of looking. And the range of ways of looking is opened, so that, in that, there's a kind of endlessness of exploration of ways of looking. The validity of different ways of looking and the practical possibility of ways of looking is opened, and it's all magical, it's all part of the magical, sacred fabrication that we can be involved in, participate in. And there's an endlessness of exploring different ways of looking, the beauty of that. So that might be one way that a Dharma could be endless. Another way is in the sort of, if you like, the Mahayana sort of vision of what a buddha is, what an awakened, enlightened being is. If you know some of the texts, what that involves, to be enlightened in the Mahayana sense, through the 10 or 11 bhūmis to full buddhahood is something so far beyond anything that's realistically possible, as a Sanskrit teacher I had once, Peter [?], said, a Mahayana buddha makes the God of the Old Testament look like a schoolboy in short trousers. It's so kind of grand and far-out. It's effectively infinite, that level of potential that we're talking about. So there's a kind of fantasy of rebirth through this eons and eons of time and a kind of cosmology there, and that whole, if you like, fantasy – and I'm using it in a good sense – there's a kind of endlessness to that fantasy, because realistically no one's going to say, "I'm a buddha now." So one's always in that larger cosmological, imaginal fantasy and the beauty of that direction. So there's a kind of endlessness there.

There's also an endlessness in the kind of more pop, if you like, understanding of a bodhisattva as someone who devotes his life, her energy and life to serving others, to easing suffering. So you could say kind of socially or environmentally engaged Buddhism, in that sense, there's a kind of endlessness there. There won't be an end of social problems, environmental problems to address. So there's an endlessness in that. That's a third possibility of endlessness. And a fourth has to do with soulmaking. So soulmaking is brought in as and recognized as a kind of fundamental dimension or direction – I think dimension better – of what practice is and what the Dharma can be. Then that, too, creates an endless Dharma, because soulmaking is endless. Why? Because of exactly what we just said, have been saying for a while now, about the eros-psyche-logos dynamic and the way the pothos will push it to create more and more, discover more and more, open more and more, potentially infinitely.

So there's a kind of endlessness there in the integration, the incorporation of a notion of soulmaking organically into the scope of what the Dharma is. Now, those four are not necessarily separate at all. You can see that. And we'll revisit this. We'll revisit this. But if the eros is strong, deep, then I wonder whether that needs to happen at some point, a sense of a path or a territory that is endless, can accommodate soulmaking.