

**"Until All is Liquid" (Emptiness and Sensing with Soul)**  
**Four Circles, Four Parables of Stone and Light**  
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A few times over the last few years, in talking about imaginal practice, and introducing it and sensing with soul, I've quoted an alchemical maxim or guideline, from sometime in the Middle Ages, I think, which says something like, to paraphrase, "Don't proceed with any operation," with any alchemical operation, "until all has become water," or "all has become liquid." So, "Don't proceed until all has become liquid, until all is liquid." And we've sort of co-opted that maxim and that phrase, and interpreted it a certain way, in line with this teaching around the kind of loosening or liquefying that happens when there's less fabrication, and the necessity of that, the place of that in sensing with soul and in imaginal practice.

So this is what I want to go into, just say a few things tonight about that. This aspect, it's also one of the elements, one of the nodes: slightly less fabricated, slightly less fabrication. So this loosening or liquefying or degree of unfabricating of the perception of self, other, world, etc., and the elements, the aspects of our existence and our being. Notice that the maxim doesn't say, "Don't proceed until everything has disappeared." Things are liquefied, but not completely faded. It's not possible to actually practise imaginal practice in the depths of fading, in the proximity of the Unfabricated. That whole meditative journey and exploration into the deep end of fading, towards the Unfabricated, opening to the Unfabricated, I think that's absolutely lovely, and a priceless thing for a human being; something amazing, if anything deserves to be called amazing, and potentially liberating. It *should* be liberating if one approaches it the right way and understands it and contextualizes it the right way. And sometimes it's liberating for people even if they don't fully understand it, or have not arrived at it with a proper context.

So beautiful, lovely, amazing, potentially utterly transformative and liberating, that depth of fading, really, when all perception disappears – self, others, world, subject, object, time, present moment, space, the whole show fades through less clinging, through the withdrawal of clinging. And that whole experience and the beauty of that, I think is really important. When we come to practising with sensing with soul, though, as I said, in those depths of fading and unfabricating, there is no sensing, certainly not in any usual sense. So sensing with soul needs this kind of wide middle ground, middle territory, middle region of selves, objects, things, materials, a world, etc., appearing. They still retain form. Form is part of the perception of this or that, or this or that imaginal object, or that sensed with soul, etc. So some form is there. It's not a dissolution of form through this fading. It's not going there. There's a range where form is retained, but there's a kind of looseness to that form, less reification.

So sensing with soul, the territory, wide territory for sensing with soul practice, operates in this, where there's form but it's loose and somewhat less fabricated. It's liquefied. It's malleable, rather than rigid and reified and entrenched and solidified in that sense. So there's a kind of dance, as well, around reifying and non-reifying, but really probably more important for now is this region of form but liquid form, form but malleable form, form but un-reified form.

We've been talking about emotions and a little bit about self-view and self-sense, and we'll come back to self-sense as the talks go on, hopefully. In order for powerful soulmaking to happen with respect to emotion, with respect to image, with respect to *dukkha*, with respect to a self-sense, with respect to eros and the sense of eros, it needs to retain some form of emotion, image, self, eros, *dukkha*, whatever it is. We're not completely dissolving those. And in that retaining of the form, but liquid, malleable, un-reified form, that's the region, the region like quicksilver in alchemy, like mercury – it's liquefied, it can take on different shapes – or like molten gold or whatever.

So this is what we're really interested in, and tonight I want to talk about the place of that unfabricating and loosening and liquefying, and also the practices of emptiness with regard to that. If we talk about practising with emptiness, or emptiness practices and understanding emptiness, fathoming what that really means, and the fullness, and the radicality, and the comprehensiveness and depths of what that means, I think it's a journey. It's something very profound, subtle, complex, really at the edge of what conception can articulate, and then going beyond that edge. And that journey of exploration in practice and understanding, to me, takes time. Like any journey, it takes time – generally speaking. Maybe there are some people that just kind of get the whole thing in one go. I've never met anyone like that. I've met people who *think* they have, but when I hear them speak, or I read what they've written about emptiness, it seems to me to be missing either some depth or some comprehensiveness, or both. So for me, it's something – I'm saying this as a reminder to those of you who are interested in that journey into the depths of emptiness and the fullness and radicality of what that means. It's really a journey, and it takes time, and takes work, and play, and willingness to experiment, and all that.

It's interesting – again, we're back to individuals and the variance between individuals with regard to so many different facets of what we're laying out and explaining, and with regard to emptiness, too, because some people don't seem to have a need for any deep emptiness practice. They can work well with images, they have a sense of the imaginal Middle Way, of the theatre-like quality of them being neither real nor not real, etc., and for sensing with soul and imaginal practice they don't seem to need emptiness. So I would definitely acknowledge that possibility. Not everyone needs emptiness. I think I haven't kind of put the full stop on that conclusion yet, but I think that may be a possibility – for the conclusion for myself, on that possibility. Some people, either because they just have a kind of artistic temperament, or because they've read a lot of modern philosophy, etc., about ontology and epistemology and cultural contingency and all kinds of things, and that philosophy has not just been a kind of bookish, superficial mouthing of whatever's trendy at the moment in academic circles, etc., but it's actually gone deep, it's permeated. Or, as I said, they have this kind of artistic/poetic sensibility that's accessible to them, that's part of the way they see things anyway, or for whatever other reason.

Other people *do*, I think, need emptiness practice as part of what – I want to say *grounds* sensing with soul and imaginal practice. Without it, there is too much tendency for reification. It takes it out of the realm of what we would call imaginal practice. So it kind of grounds it, or keeps one on a path, wide as it is, that path, in some respects. The emptiness practices help, because there's a Middle Way there, in terms of real/not real that comes from emptiness understanding, and imbues one's sense of everything as one goes deeper, one's perceptions, one's sense of life, one's sense of the world, etc. So some people, I would say, *do* need it. Some people approach emptiness and there's a kind of *should*

there: “Oh, I really should – Rob and all these other Buddhist teachers go on about emptiness and how central it is and how important it is.” But there’s no real eros for emptiness, or not for the Unfabricated, not really for the teachings of emptiness so much. And so the whole impetus to explore emptiness practice is really coming from a *should*. Generally speaking, my observation is that when any practice or any aspect of practice or strand of practice comes from the motivation of some kind of *should*, because a person thinks they should, and there isn’t the eros there, there isn’t the juice, there isn’t the libido and the lubrication and the aliveness and the fire, it tends not to be very fruitful, the practice explorations that are driven by some sense of *should* that’s been imported from somewhere or other.

If that’s the case, somehow, at some point – and it might be later on in one’s practice or whatever – if one needs emptiness, somehow that *should* needs to be converted to a real curiosity and aliveness of desire to explore, to understand, to play. And of course, some people have a real eros, something lights up in their soul when they hear about emptiness, or when they hear about the Unfabricated, or the little tastes that they have, or wherever they are on that journey that I alluded to – this whole journey, certainly of unfabricating, but even more the journey into understanding emptiness, which is a bigger journey than just unfabricating – wherever they are in that process, they love it, they enjoy it, and there’s just a desire and eros to want more. So that’s a kind of ideal relationship with emptiness exploration.

Some people, it seems to me, over the last years, especially when I’ve been teaching imaginal practice and contextualizing it with emptiness teachings, or letting the emptiness teachings inform and form a basis for the whole soulmaking paradigm, it seems to me that some people take the emptiness on faith. In other words, they don’t have a deep, personal realization of emptiness through practice, through meditation, they don’t fully understand it, but they understand a little bit. They understand, for instance, that there’s no ultimate reality, and therefore, there are just ways of looking, and that legitimizes the flexibility of ways of looking. [15:36] And in a way, it seems they’re taking that on faith, that much understanding. They’re taking it on faith from me or from another teacher, Catherine or whoever. But it’s enough. Or it’s enough for a certain range and depth and fertility of exploration of the imaginal. So that’s quite interesting to me as well.

The full shebang with emptiness and the Unfabricated and all that, and out the other side of the Unfabricated, that’s really quite rare – I’d say unfortunately, but whatever; it’s just how things are, for different reasons at this time. But wherever one is – and this is one of the points I want to say – it can be really fruitful, wherever one is in one’s understanding or practice of emptiness. That’s really one of the main points I want to make tonight. And it’s interesting that sometimes a person hasn’t, as I said, got that personal, meditatively based, experientially based conviction, understanding, realization of emptiness, but they’ve taken some understanding on board, through faith in a teacher or a teaching, or just a resonance with a teacher, just like [snaps fingers], “I *know* that’s right.”

And I think back to myself years ago – and I think I mentioned this in some talk or other – I had this intuitive trust in emptiness teachings, which I didn’t understand, which I had limited sense of experientially, etc., but something in me banked on it, and then later explored practices and understandings more deeply to fill out and add to that kind of intuitive faith in it. This, to me, is interesting, that there can be something, an understanding absorbed on faith, and that forms some degree of a basis, a platform to engage soulmaking practices.

I will mention one thing here just about the strand of emptiness practices per se. It's not exactly what I want to talk about, but I'll say it anyway, because part of that journey – at least the way I would outline it, certainly, and I think there's no way round this if you're wanting to experience and understand deep emptiness – the movement, as I said, towards the Unfabricated, the movement of unfabricating at different degrees and ranges and depths, the movement towards more fading. A person engaged in that direction of exploration and all the subtlety and beauty and rigour and enchantment of such a journey, that thread there of unfabricating, almost everyone – in fact, I don't know that I've encountered anyone who's taken that journey who doesn't, at some point, get tight or pushy trying to achieve *more* fading. So there's a certain degree of fading of perception, of body sense, self-sense, world-sense, this or that, *vedanā*, whatever it is, all of that. And one feels like, "Oh, this is going great. Now, I've seen this much fading before. Let's just push for some more." And so it becomes a kind of task to achieve more fading, and one can get quite tight around that, and one can actually feel that tightness and that pushiness in the practice.

So this is very, very common, this trying to achieve more fading, and more fading than however much one has, unless it's a totally unfabricated experience, and then getting tight around that and stressed around that. So a couple of possibilities here, just to put them out. One is that one can check one's intention. Notice that that's happening, right in the thick of practice, in the subtle, delicate surgery of that movement. Recognize it's going on, and actually just – two things, two possibilities. One is just slightly shift the intention – not so much to achieve this or that amount of fading, but the intention is a curiosity around dependent arising: I'm really interested in, I'm really curious about why there's this kind of appearance now, or this degree of fading, or this degree of solidity/substantiality now. What is it dependent on? Clinging. What does that mean? Clinging, in the way I use the term, is a very big word. It involves a lot, at lots of different levels. But shifting the intention to curiosity about dependent arising takes some of the pressure off trying to achieve more fading. They're obviously *connected* as intentions, but an intention of curiosity is a lot less pushy, and it's less got the driven goal of achieving more fading. So that's one possibility.

A second possibility is actually to remember that insight, in the way that I commonly use the word, insight actually is what brings letting go. So where there's insight, where there's an insight way of looking, where I'm looking at something with insight, sensing something with insight, with a degree of insight understanding, then it brings letting go. It should bring letting go. Often it will bring letting go right there and then as I'm sensing this thing with that insight way of looking. And because there's letting go, there's ease, *now*. So that again, the motivation, for example, for doing a practice like a welcoming practice, or relaxing clinging, or *anattā*, or regarding objects of perception as empty or whatever, the second intention, apart from curiosity, can be actually ease. It should bring ease now. And so I'm practising this with an intention for ease. Again, that shifts the intention out of the tightness or crampedness of clinging to the possibility of achieving more fading. So in that second one, even the striving to achieve more fading is let go of as it's perceived as a dis-ease – it's a kind of clinging, right?

Another point in relation to this journey into the depths of unfabricating is not to worry if not everything fades. So yes, there's that possibility, that all perception, every element of perception disappears, fades, gets unfabricated, is not fabricated at that time. But in a way, it's okay if, and it's quite common for, say, you know, most of the body has gone, everything has gone except my teeth or

whatever. And then what can happen in that, we say, “Oh, that’s not faded yet,” and then one gets pulled to focus on trying to get *that* thing, my teeth or whatever it is, sounds, or a certain realm of sense perception, or a certain object that doesn’t fade – one gets pulled into an intention of focus on trying to get *that* to fade, and that actually becomes a kind of obsession. Again, it’s a clinging and aversion, and clinging and aversion, if we understand dependent arising deeply, are exactly what will fabricate an object. So if I’m aversive to this object, essentially, because I want it to fade, because I want complete fading, I want to get rid of that remaining thing, it’s a kind of aversion, and that keeps fabricating the object so it actually won’t fade.

So some partial fading, some only partial fading, can often be enough for a practitioner to intuit the universal truth of the insight regarding clinging and dependent arising and fabrication. In other words, yes, not everything fades, or the experiences in that sense door, or this object, or whatever it is, doesn’t fade, but there’s enough moving up and down of this spectrum of fabrication and experience, and understanding the relationship with clinging – clinging, again, in the broadest sense – that at some point, up and down, up and down, I see it, let go, let go, let go, everything fades more and more, even if it doesn’t completely fade into a total experience of the Unfabricated, at some point the sort of intuitive wisdom [snaps fingers] grasps something, it *gets* something, and it *gets* the truth of that insight regarding clinging and dependent arising.

Conversely, some people actually have a total experience of the Unfabricated, as I mentioned earlier, but they’re not understanding it at all in terms of clinging and dependent arising, and they may not get any liberating [insight], or they may certainly not get the full possibility of liberating insight there. So what’s more important is the insight and the understanding, and that can be understood by the intuitive wisdom faculty or whatever we might say, even when there isn’t complete fading. So I put that out just for those of you who are perhaps in parallel exploring this movement into unfabricating as part of the larger weave of Soulmaking Dharma practices, or who are kind of taking maybe time out from the soulmaking to go into emptiness more, or whatever, whoever that’s relevant for.

What do we mean when we say ‘emptiness’? I hope to come back to this in another talk, but people mean – if you’ve been around the Dharma a while, and you’re listening carefully, and reading carefully, you’ll see that there are a lot of different interpretations of what that means. So I hope to come back to that, and the implications of that variety and those choices of interpretation. But what do we mean when we use that term? Well, we could say, in answer to the question, “What is the basic reality?”, we could say, “Well, emptiness is the basic reality.” And then, a follow-up question, “What is emptiness?” “Emptiness is no basic reality.” What is emptiness? Emptiness is no basic reality. Emptiness is the reality of no basic reality. So in a sort of Zen-like nutshell, that is what we mean when we use the word ‘emptiness,’ or that’s the main way we are using the word. What is emptiness? It means there’s no basic reality. Emptiness is the basic reality, and that basic reality is that there’s no basic reality.

Wrapped up in the way we talk about emptiness and all this business are two really central concepts that you will have heard me use a lot: fabrication and ways of looking. So fabrication, we’ve already touched on, but this meditative, experimental exploration and curiosity about the fabrication of perception – not just of the self-sense and the personality sense, but of self at every level, all objects, all phenomena, the whole world, time, space, etc. And as I said, developing the art of certain practices that fabricate less, and understanding how the mind fabricates more at times. And then, in fact,

understanding also that the mind is fabricated, awareness is fabricated, so really there is no basic reality there – time, space, the whole show. So that notion of fabrication is really central to the main way that I would teach emptiness and explain emptiness and encourage someone to explore it. There are other ways, too, but in a way, they all come back to fabrication.

And implicit in that is the second idea, as I said, of ways of looking, which means that a consciousness is always, when it's perceiving anything, it's always engaged in some kind of way of looking, way of sensing, way of relating to – those terms meaning, that I just used, 'ways of looking' as an umbrella term for all that: way of sensing, way of relating – to whatever it's perceiving. And through playing with different ways of looking, we discover that some ways of looking are more fabricating than others. They fabricate more *dukkha*, more self, more solidity, more subject, more object, more time-sense, etc. So playing with different ways of looking, seeing their effects on fabrication and on *dukkha* and on all kinds of other things. And possibility of taking this all the way, as I said, into the depths of unfabricating, opening to the Unfabricated, and then realizing, in a way, there's nothing *but* ways of looking. They're empty, too, but we're just left with ways of looking, and the possibility of looking, of sensing, in *this* way at times, in *that* way at times, in this other way. This is going on automatically anyway, and we have certain default habits of looking, of sensing in this way or that way, but through practice, we begin to kind of loosen the rigidity of, the entrenchment of certain pathways of ways of looking that tend always to solidify this or that, or reify the self, or whatever it is – certainly reify time, etc.

And all that gets loosened up, and we can begin to explore: "There's this kind of way of looking that loosens things in this way, and loosens *dukkha*, and loosens self. There are these kinds of ways of looking that loosen self to a certain extent but allow some skilful fabrication," etc., and the whole range there. So emptiness, fabrication, ways of looking – completely tied together. That there are only ways of looking, and that no way of looking reveals an ultimate truth to how a thing is, is an understanding of emptiness. That's what 'emptiness' means. There are only ways of looking. No way of looking is the ultimate truth of this thing or that thing.

Now, again, in regard to the eros that might be involved in such an exploration, I think it's important that this whole idea of ways of looking, this logos, really, of ways of looking, the possibilities of ways of looking, that conceptual framework, it's important that it really comes alive. It, itself, the logos, the idea of ways of looking, as I've just very briefly outlined (and much more elsewhere), that idea of ways of looking needs to become imaginal. It needs to become poetic, beautiful, powerful. In other words, that create/discover possibility that's implicit in the whole idea of ways of looking, that the way of looking creates the appearance, shapes, informs, fabricates whatever appears, the magic of things, the groundlessness, the sense of then the possibility of viewing oneself as an artist of perception, as a magician, as a sorcerer, etc., all this may be woven into, in a way, falling in love with the whole idea of ways of looking – as opposed to, again, it sounding like some kind of abstract, "Yeah, sure, ways of looking. Yeah, you can look at things different ways," or just some intellectual sort of philosophy.

So we end up bowing to all that in some way, this whole idea of ways of looking, and everything that's involved in it. It becomes imaginal in the sense that it becomes dimensionalized, and the self, other, world – the idea of ways of looking, the self that relates to ways of looking, and the world that it

opens up, all of that becomes taken up by the soulmaking dynamic, all the elements, the eros-psyche-logos. So the whole relationship or conception to that idea, it's not a kind of anti-libidinal or deflationary idea. It's not, "Oh, it doesn't matter," or "It's just a way of looking," or whatever, as if we don't care. There's something very beautiful. And if one goes deeply enough into it – I think, again, this is important – the whole idea and practice, when we've absorbed it in the heart, of ways of looking, that whole conceptual framework and the exploration of it reveals, opens us to a really profound mystery and sacredness about consciousness and the cosmos.

So at one level, it might seem, yes, we can have a way of looking that sees sacredness, or we can have a way of looking at another time that decides *not* to see sacredness, or doesn't see sacredness, or whatever. And that's true, at a certain level. But as one goes deeper into this whole exploration of ways of looking, and that whole logos there in practice, it reveals the mystery and the sacredness of the indissoluble entwinement of consciousness and cosmos, the poetry of that, the beauty of that. [37:56] So in that sense, emptiness and ways of looking has everything to do with participation, as well, which, again, is one of the elements. There's a relationship there between the whole idea of participation, and the mystery and depth of that concept, and also the whole teaching of ways of looking. This is, I think, quite important.

So when we can fabricate a little less, through whatever means – there are all kinds of ways of doing that – when we can let things, allow things to become liquid, when we can liquefy and loosen things, then that allows image to arise. There is the possibility, in the loosening and unbinding, to some degree, of perception, of this or that, there is an increased possibility of image arising in practice, of sensing with soul. Actually, I should throw in one more discrimination there, or a related point, slightly different: liquefying things, loosening things with a taste of deep emptiness, unfabricating, not only allows the possibility of image, opens up the possibility for the birth, the reception of an image, it also may empower, give power and depth to an image that is already accessible.

So I think on the recent retreat we did, *Roots into the Ground of Soul*, I think I shared at some point – I can't remember the context – that sometimes, before, for instance, giving a talk on the imaginal/soulmaking, especially when it felt like there was a chance of a difficult audience and hostility, but actually any time, really, in the past, and I still do it, calling on the imaginal/soulmaking lineage – beings, historical and angelic, if you like, of the past, of the present, of the future, imaginal beings – and calling on them for help, for support, recognizing myself as wanting to serve that lineage, and support it, and move it on, and be part of it, and conceiving of myself imaginally as part of that tradition, that lineage. It's an imaginal tradition, really. So yes, before any time, really, often I talk about soulmaking, certainly before a difficult talk, or when I'm very tired sometimes from illness – I think I mentioned these podcasts were scheduled, and I was really struggling with health and fatigue, and didn't want to let the side down, so to speak, didn't want to let this lineage down, this tradition for whom I'm one of the temporary spokespersons, perhaps, imaginally.

So then, imaginally, prayerfully, aligning myself in the imaginal realm, with that imaginal lineage, and devoting myself to that, putting my intention in alignment and devotion to that, and calling for help. What I failed to mention on that *Roots into the Ground of Soul*, just in the moment of it, was that what I often do with that is have a few moments of really deep emptiness perception beforehand. So I go, just based on past practice and all the work I've done, very deep into some unfabricating of all

things, and then coming out of that, dipping into that, coming out of it with that powerful liquefying and unfabricating, *then* engaging in this prayerful, devotional, dedicated relationship with the lineage and asking for help. And that dip into deep emptiness and that deep unfabricating, even just for a few moments, lends that whole imaginal sense of the lineage, and myself, and what I'm serving, and what I want to serve, gives it much greater power. It's already accessible as an image; it's something I can generate and call on and call back, but the power and the soulmaking power of that is amplified, I think, significantly through that dip into emptiness, deep emptiness.

So yes, deep emptiness can empower images that are already there, already accessible, and also, the unfabricating, the loosening, can support and open the possibility of an image appearing, coming, visiting, being received. And in regard to that latter possibility, we have to point something else out. As always, there's a mutual dependent origination. So yes, dependent on fabricating less and liquefying is the arising of image. But as always, the dependency runs both ways. There's a mutual dependent origination, which means that when we sense with soul, when there's an imaginal perception, there is some degree of loosening. There is some degree of less fabrication.

[44:36] So I sometimes give the example of, especially recently, challenged with health stuff and the sort of nearness of death and sensing that, sometimes I describe going into a mode of sensing my life and death from the perspective of eternity, *sub specie aeternitatis* in the Latin – the sort of bird's-eye view from beyond death or beyond time. And in a way, what that's doing is stimulating or igniting the node, the element of eternality, of the twenty-eight elements. Seeing my life, my death, my narrative from that perspective ignites, turns on, the eternality node. And then my self, and my life, and my death, and my journey through life to death, from birth to death, becomes image, and in that, there's a certain loosening, unbinding, a fading of perception *to some degree*, which is exactly what we're talking about, yeah? Brings energy, etc., alignment, all that.

So if we go back to the alchemical maxim, "Do not perform any operation, do not perform any alchemical operation, do not begin the work until all is liquid," yes, but it also works the other way round: the arising of an image, to the degree that it's imaginal, will also liquefy things. It will certainly liquefy the sense of that image, but also the sense of self and the sense of world, the sense of time, all of that. Again, I really want to stress this non-linearity, necessarily, of all the elements that make up the imaginal. Yes, this liquification, this unfabricating to some degree, this loosening, unbinding, is an integral part of, a necessary part of what's happening in imaginal practice, but it might not always proceed step-by-step like that: "First you do the unfabricating a little bit, and then you can have an image." It might come in any order.

Another thing, another sort of – I don't know if it's a caveat, but something that it's important to be aware of with all this. I'm also aware that some people might hear some teachings on emptiness, either on their own, in the context of an emptiness course or something, or book, or whatever it is, or in the context of imaginal practice, and feel a little daunted, and feel a little like, "Whoa, I'm so far from those kinds of experiences that you're talking about, and there are so many different practices, and they all seem quite advanced," etc. So I'm aware of that, and I want to address that too. Let me share something, an imaginal experience that's related to what I want to say here. Basically, what I want to say is that any degree or depth of loosening, unbinding, unfabricating, any degree of bringing in emptiness is generally going to be helpful with imaginal practice, with sensing with soul, unless one



has just got the foot rammed on the accelerator, “Emptiness! Emptiness! Emptiness!”, and is really leaning and emphasizing that understanding of emptiness as a way of looking at all perception; then things will just fade, and, as I said before, at that time, there’s not going to be any image. There’s not going to be any perception. But you can *come out* of that, and things will be loosened. So you can dip in, and come out. But not at that time of full-throttle emptiness contemplation.

What I really want to say is, whatever little bit of emptiness or liquefying or unfabricating we can bring to bear can be really helpful. I’ll share something from a few months ago. I was struggling with some after-effects of treatments and things, and quite tired and physically uncomfortable, and different bodily systems taxed by the medication and things. I sat to meditate, and almost immediately, a soulmaking constellation came together. I use that word deliberately here: constellation. I can’t remember the exact order of appearance of the various elements of the constellation, but one was a word, actually, or an idea of stamina, forbearance, patience with the suffering and difficulty. So that came just as an idea, really, a word. But it was lit up in a certain way; it had a sense of significance, of depth, etc. It was woven into the imaginal tapestry there.

Another was the idea and then the experiential sense, the meditative sense of all experience, including and especially the *dukkha* of the pain I was feeling at the time, the discomfort, the inconvenience, the frustration with respect to medical stuff and things that were going on with doctors, etc., at the time, the whole situation of being very ill and the whole kind of likely movement towards dying – so the idea and then the sense of all experience as *just appearances*: it’s just an appearance. Some of you who are familiar with emptiness practices will recognize that as a certain level of emptiness perception. One just regards this or that, “My body, it’s just an appearance,” “This thought is just an appearance.” Even the perception of this desk is just an appearance. Time is just an appearance. So one can decide to employ it as a way of looking: “It’s just appearance, just appearance, just appearances.” And that can be very beautiful and very liberating. It’s not the deepest level of emptiness perception. It’s a wonderful practice if you take your time to develop the skill in that, and you will notice how liberating it is, but it’s not the deepest level. It’s only a certain level of emptiness perception. It’s one of a whole range of practices.

But in this case, it just came, almost by itself, and it’s something that I’ve practised a lot of in the past. It’s one of the practices I’ve done of that range. It’s not the deepest. It’s only a certain level. But it was enough to change the relationship at that moment with the whole health predicament, with dying. And like all emptiness practices do, as I said earlier, it should release aversion. It should be a letting go. It should release clinging and aversion. And in so doing, it releases *dukkha*. And [it] also then allowed a sense of stamina, and the kind of ability to persevere with strength, with steadiness, with a sense of uprightness. So there was this idea of stamina that came, and sort of alive with imaginal import, important, and then there was this emptiness perception *at a certain level*, not the deepest, which I’m, from past practice, quite used to, etc., just came by itself.

There was a third element to this imaginal constellation, which was a kind of Middle Eastern man in a black robe, and his features were not visually clear, but his energy was quite stern, and he was encouraging me to stamina. So he was kind of standing and sort of dancing opposite me, quite fierce, and a tremendous amount of energy he had. There’s a kind of tough love, I suppose, he was teaching or communicating me. And he somehow communicated, not necessarily in words, that my illness and

possible dying may be for the sake of more than me. And I had certain associations with that, with regard to the Saṅgha and things like that. That piece, I checked out – I’m always a little bit cautious when something in the imaginal practice has to do with self, and check it out. It had the imaginal Middle Way; I wasn’t reifying that as some kind of self-glorification or something like that. So that put me at ease with that aspect of it. These three aspects came together – the word ‘stamina,’ the idea of stamina, the idea and then the sense of all experience as just appearances, and then this Middle Eastern, stern, fierce teacher and what he was kind of communicating to me as he danced. I felt better immediately, just very, very quickly. The body softened. The energy body opened. The energies opened and were kind of enveloped in a warm light, I felt. And I could feel that as potentially healing, if I wanted to, so I sort of lingered there a little bit.

So several points here, by way of illustration. One is, notice the complexity of some images – that they actually involve several elements in combination here. I can identify three in this case. Second, as I said – and this was the main point that I wanted to communicate right now – the use of emptiness perceptions and practices to loosen things, liquefy things, and to aid in that way the imaginal possibilities, really important. So this “just appearances,” this attitude, way of looking, of regarding all experiences, especially the difficult ones, as just appearances, really, really an integral part of what opened up here, and of supporting that possibility of opening. But – and this is the point – they don’t always have to be the deepest emptiness practices or perceptions one knows. In this case, I’ve spent a lot of time exploring emptiness, and there are much deeper emptiness practices than this “just appearance” view, but it didn’t have to be the deepest one. So really, either wherever you are in your kind of exploration of emptiness and loosening and liquefying and unbinding, unfabricating things, that’s going to be helpful, and if you’ve gone quite deep with these things, then anywhere along the range of what you’ve explored up to that point will be helpful. You don’t always have to go to the deepest level of emptiness. I mean, that could be great and helpful, too, but it’s not always necessary.

So that was the main point, but let’s just say a couple of other things. The facets of the imaginal constellation there, those three facets, affected and transformed each other. They were kind of mixed up, involved in each other, affecting each other. So what happened as the thing became more imaginal was that emptiness perception, that emptiness way of looking of “phenomena/experience are just appearances,” that also became more soulmaking than it would be in a purely emptiness practice that wasn’t imaginal and soulmaking, because it was affected by, wrapped up in, in dialogue with, and informed by the other, more imaginal elements that were going on – this idea of stamina, and this stern teacher and fierce teacher in a black robe – so that what the word “appearances” came to mean also gained range, and dimensionality, and depth, and fullness, and richness. It meant, it included, certainly, my illness, the *dukkha*, dying early, etc. – that was appearance – and with all the freeing ramifications of that. But it included more, also the narratives of my life, again. And also, even more than that, that these appearances (the narrative, and the experience, and the illness, and the dying, and all that), they *are* me, and they are not me, of course. But they *are* me and not me. They *are* my soul.

So this was an intuitive, imaginal, soulmaking understanding. These appearances are my soul. Now, of course, at other times, I can have a completely different way of looking: appearances/experiences, my narrative, none of that is me. In this case, because of the flexibility of ways of looking, there’s a possibility – and this kind of just happened organically in the imaginal mix of things, in the

constellation there; there was the opposite view. They *are* my soul. And that sense of that narrative, and the early death, and illness, and all these experiences, and even the things that I was looking at in the room, the sofa or whatever was there, the table, they *are* my soul. And all of that, the narrative, death, illness, etc., formed an image. There was awareness that image is not just for me, but it's also for others. So it was awareness of self being an image for other, of course, which we can be, and I think we *should* be. In the fullest and deepest and most beautiful human relationships, we become image for each other. We become imaginal image for each other.

So the emptiness perception itself, the emptiness way of looking of “just appearances” also, as I said, took on, became dimensionalized in becoming imaginal itself. I'll come back to this in another talk, but there's a way of using emptiness practices at times that kind of denigrate experience and the phenomena of our experience, internal, external, etc. Because it's in the service of letting go, it's like, “Ah, that doesn't matter. That doesn't matter. It's empty. It's empty,” and there's a kind of letting go, a “holy disinterest” I've called it sometimes. It's almost like saying, “It's nothing. It's empty.” And that's very valid at one point, but it leads *beyond* the world, so to speak. If I just keep regarding things that way, it will take me to the Unfabricated. Of course, it can get hijacked with aversion and, as I said, with anti-libidinal tendencies and deflation and all that. But in this case, the notion of appearances that got opened up and filled out in both a liberating way and an imaginal way was not a kind of denigration or degradation of appearances.

So I was reminded of a passage from Henry Corbin where he, in his lifetime, was accused of being a Docetist. Docetism was regarded, at some point, by the church authorities, as a particular kind of heresy. What it means is the view or the philosophy that Christ was not truly human, but was an appearance. Some of you will know parallels of that with certain teachings about Buddha-nature, that the Buddhas that appear in the world are actually appearances – they're kind of appearances, if you like, projected forth from another level of the *dharmakāya* and the *saṃbhogakāya*, etc. So Corbin, in his teaching about the Abrahamic traditions, and his teaching with regard to Christ and all that, was accused of – or his interpretation of those teachings and of those stories, in his teaching, they would be more helpfully regarded as appearance.

He was accused of heresy, and he replied, yes, I am a Docetist, but it's a Docetism that is

far from degrading “reality” by making it “appearance”; on the contrary, by transforming it into “appearance” [by transforming seeming reality into appearance] it makes this “reality” [in inverted commas] transparent to the transcendent meaning manifested in it.<sup>1</sup>

So we could say “just appearance” as a way of just letting go: “Eh, that doesn't matter,” and then usually there's *something* that's ‘real,’ and this is just ‘appearance,’ and I want that ‘real’ thing. But he's saying no, in making it ‘appearance,’ by transforming it into ‘appearance,’ it makes this ‘reality’ transparent to the transcendent meaning manifested in it. In other words, when we sense it that way, what it means to be an appearance, it means it's illuminated, it's translucent, it's transubstantiated into the theophany or angelic manifestation or radiation of divinity. It's perceived that way. Similarly, what happened here in the weaving together of these different imaginal elements, a certain emptiness mode

of looking, way of looking that *could* be denigrating of appearances was actually then woven into something that was much more sacred and beautiful and soulful.

[1:07:01] There's a relationship. You can recognize some of what we're talking about in this relationship between unfabricating and sensing with soul and the opening up of the imaginal, you can recognize some of that in other traditions. Certainly in tantric teachings, as I've pointed out many times, they're actually premised on understanding of emptiness, so that one's usually instructed to meditate on emptiness for a certain amount of time, and then engage in deity visualization, etc. I want to quote something from the Jewish mystical tradition, if I can find it. This is from Shneur Zalman, in a book called *Likutei Amarim*, sometimes called *Tanya*, and he said, "Love derived from the understanding and knowledge of the greatness of the blessed *Ein Sof*" – *Ein Sof* means literally 'without limit,' but when you hear or read the explanations of how that's used in the Jewish mystical traditions, the Kabbalistic traditions, it really means a kind of nothingness. So it's something akin to the Unfabricated. So:

Love derived from the understanding and knowledge [the understanding and experience] of the greatness of the blessed *Ein Sof* [of the Unfabricated, let's say] is called *re'uta d'libba* [which means 'heart's desire'].<sup>2</sup>

So, in other words, when we love that experience and the understanding we get from it, we love the Unfabricated, there's that movement, that love is called the heart's desire, and from this heart's desire, he continues, "from this heart's desire is produced a garment for the soul in the world of *Beriah*." There are a lot of Hebrew technical terms here, but that world of *Beriah* is one of the sort of strata of many worlds. So this world of physical manifestation is just one world; there are other planes of existence. *Beriah* also means, the world of *Beriah* is the world of creation. So this love and desire, this heart's desire for the Unfabricated, from that heart's desire, from that love, is produced a garment for the soul in the world of creation, in the world, we could say – well, I'll put it into our language in a sec. "In the world of *Beriah* [in the world of creation] which constitutes the Higher Garden of Eden."

So here's a love, derived from knowing the Unfabricated, the heart's desire for the Unfabricated and for all that that implies, and from that heart's desire is produced a garment for the soul in the world of creation, and that world of creation constitutes the Higher Garden of Eden. So in *our* language, we can talk about the heart's desire based on knowing *Ein Sof* means the eros based on knowing emptiness and the Unfabricated, if we just translate terms. The eros based on knowing emptiness and the Unfabricated, that eros – being eros, if it's allowed to do what it does, it will impregnate and deepen, enrich and complexify, expand, etc., the psyche and the logos and the whole sense of things so that the energy body and the imaginal body and the whole world open up, and become imaginal, and become dimensionalized, and become divinized.

This garment for the soul in the Higher Garden of Eden, in the Garden of Eden. So this love of emptiness, this knowing of emptiness and the Unfabricated, that eros *does* something, based also on the experience of emptiness. It opens up the energy body. That energy body becomes a garment for the soul. The energy body experience, a garment for the soul in the Garden of Eden, in a world transformed, dimensionalized, divinized, eternalized, given meaningfulness, beauty, resplendent with

all the elements of the imaginal. So that whole indispensable place for emptiness, unfabricating, and the love of that, too, the eros for that and what it can open up, it has parallels in Buddhist tantric teachings and also, as we just quoted, in certain Kabbalistic teachings from the Jewish tradition. And we can understand that with our words. So I hope that makes sense.

So emptiness is powerful. Going back to what I said earlier, people have different relationships with it, and different sort of degrees of desire and curiosity with regard to it, but it's powerful in terms of what it can deliver, certainly for our Dharma practice, for our lives, and definitely for imaginal practice. Also, just lingering on tantric parallels, some of you will have heard of *tummo*, the practice of the inner fire, the inner heat that is a sort of famous practice among Tibetan yogis. Lama Yeshe has written about it, and Geshe Kelsang, and other people. You can find books about it. And in a way, what it involves is sort of visualizing the channels of the energy body, and visualizing certain things happening in those channels and in the central channel, the vertical channel of the body, of the energy body. And in a way, a by-product of that practice is the generation of internal heat. The *purpose* of the practice is not so much to keep you warm in the snow, but the purpose is that in working with the channels of energy in this way, that a very deep perception of emptiness comes about. So rather than through some kind of analytic meditation or playing with fabrication, one actually works with the energy body, and that delivers a deep understanding of emptiness.

Again, mutual dependent arising: things work both ways. You will notice, when you're contemplating emptiness, when you're engaging in emptiness practice and it's kind of working well, there is an alignment, harmonization of the energy body, just as there is when we do imaginal practice and an image is becoming imaginal. But this can go very deep. So when we have a deep moment of realizing emptiness – and it could just be a moment – you will feel something quite ... 'dramatic' is not really the right word, but there's a real sense of the energy body and the whole bodily experience being cleared out and sort of purified, as well as being aligned and harmonized. So the work with the channels and visualizing can lead to an experience of emptiness in the Tibetan teachings, but also the other way around: emptiness practice, emptiness experience, will purify the energy body and the channels there, and you can actually feel that. And it will liquefy and unfabricate, to some degree, all perception.

I want to say something else about that. Again, at a deep level, that's a quite, as I said, almost dramatic, palpable experience, but even a little bit, you'll notice that. Something happens in the energy body, because it's untangling the knots and the contractions that clinging causes. As I said earlier, with regard to its place and its use in imaginal practice or alongside or supporting or opening imaginal practice, you know, there are all kinds of ranges of the depth and power of different emptiness practices, and they're all going to be useful and helpful, so don't get hung up, "Oh, it has to be this really deep thing." Sometimes it can be really deep, and these things can, with practice, they can be very quick. That usually takes quite a bit of time of developing emptiness practices, but there's always individual variation.

So sometimes what's very powerful, for example, in opening up sensing with soul is just a few moments, even, of contemplating the emptiness of time. [1:17:58] Now, for those few moments to be powerful, they will depend on probably quite a lot of practice and developing familiarity with contemplating the emptiness of time or ways of looking that kind of unfabricate time, etc., or realize its

emptiness. But if that's the sort of thing you're interested in, or if it's the sort of thing that's available to you, or if this is relevant later on, sometimes this can be very powerful. A few moments, perhaps, only, of some way of seeing the emptiness of time, and then turning the attention to anything – could be the body, or something else, anything that appears in time and changes in time, which is all things that we know in the world of conventional experience. So some contemplation of emptiness of time meditatively, and then turning the attention that's kind of imbued with that understanding of the emptiness of time, just turning the attention to something which appears and changes in time, and the sense of a timeless dimension will be allowed, will be supported and made manifest there. And again, that being one of the nodes, of eternity, timelessness, there can be then the perception of that thing – whatever thing it was, the body or whatever else, the world, whatever – that can be sensed with soul, because we've ignited one of the elements of the imaginal, one of the nodes.

But as I said, any kind of emptiness practice, or any level – please don't get daunted or self-critical or despairing if you hear about practices that you haven't approached yet or that seem a long way off for you. I mentioned, I think, in one of the talks already on the retreat, how just a little bit of *anattā* practice, of regarding something that we would usually identify with or take as me or mine, and engaging a way of looking that regards it as not me, not mine, very lightly – a degree of that *anattā* practice can allow the self to become imaginal. The sense of self becomes an imaginal sense of self. Why? Because *anattā* practice is one of those unfabricating practices. When we regard things as not me, not mine, it's actually very, very powerful, potentially. It's really worth developing as a practice if you can, if you're interested.

So not the whole, again – not the accelerator, the gas pedal rammed down, full throttle, because that will just fade everything, and then you would have to come out of that, and that still might be helpful. But just a degree of *anattā*, a sort of light touch, liquefies things, liquefies, in this case, the sense of self. And in a way, *anattā* practice is also stepping out of the normal self-sense. So the normal, habitual, mostly unconscious kind of programme for consciousness is to appropriate this or that as me or mine – body, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, intentions, consciousness itself, etc. By engaging the *anattā* way of looking with respect to some of that or all of that, you're actually stepping out of the normal self-sense enough, and in stepping out of that kind of normal, entrenched self-sense, then there's actually room, space, for the self to be viewed in other ways. So a degree of *anattā* practice – it doesn't have to be, like I said, the whole hog – can be really helpful in liberating the possibility of sensing the self imaginally, of perceiving an imaginal self rather than just the locked-in, conventional, reified, solidified sense of self.

I want to mention another possibility here, that, again, I feel very strongly that emptiness can and should be in the service of love, certainly, and the *brahmavihāras*, and not just liberation, not just personal liberation – emptiness in the service of the *brahmavihāras*, but also in the service of a sense of sacredness, and senses of sacredness. What you can notice sometimes is that opening to more emptiness or deeper emptiness, at some time, can actually open up and support a sense of prayerfulness. Or it might be that we feel moved to adopt a prayerful stance with respect to something or some situation, or just with respect to the cosmos – not really prayer as supplication, as asking, but just a prayerfulness. But very easily for us as human beings, that prayerfulness can feel blocked at times, or limited, or stuck in some way. Of course, when we're asking for things, when there's a

supplication, oftentimes it's because there's something we want, or feel we need, and the self wanting that is reified, and that reification of the self actually limits the sense of the prayerfulness and the openness of the prayerfulness. It doesn't feel so alive, or so rich, or so deep, or so beautiful when the self is reified.

So seemingly paradoxically, when there is, so to speak, less self, when the emptiness of the self is seen or engaging a way of looking that experiences the self more emptily, that actually opens up and fires and supports a deeper, wider, more beautiful and richer, more soulful quality of prayerful supplication. One still might be in the level of prayer of asking, of supplication, if that's the right word (I hope it is), but the whole thing has become looser, less solidified, less contracted. There's still a self that's praying in the asking sense, as one level of prayer, but that self is kind of see-through; it's looser, just because it's seen as more empty. So just as emptiness opens up and should open up the *brahmavihāras*, and support the *brahmavihāras* – I've taught about that in the past – so also the emptiness can open up the prayerfulness, and enrich and deepen it, and make it more beautiful. And it might be, unless you're used to this, that that seems paradoxical – the self is asking; if I've seen the emptiness of self, why would I ask for anything? If self is empty, it doesn't need anything. There's nothing to need. Yes, it can go to that level, but we're talking about sort of the more subtle play of the pedals here, some intermediate territory of emptiness that opens up the richness and the breadth and depth and beauty of soulmaking perceptions, of sensing with soul.

I'll just say one thing to finish tonight. We talk about the imaginal Middle Way, the theatre-like quality, neither real nor not real, being one of the elements of the imaginal, of sensing with soul. But that doesn't really equate completely – so the imaginal Middle Way is not the Middle Way of emptiness that Nāgārjuna and others talked about. Not exactly. So I want to come back to this later, but all things are empty – at least in my understanding of emptiness, and I think Nāgārjuna's and other people. All things are empty. So that means an imaginal perception is empty, but also a conventional perception is empty, and a deluded perception is empty. All of that is empty. All of those perceptions are empty. All things are empty. But still, although all things are empty, partly things are empty in different ways. At the deepest level, they're all empty in the same way – for instance, everything is empty, all things are empty because time is empty, and anything, to exist, must exist in time. So everything's empty at that level. At other levels, there may be more – some things are empty in certain ways that others aren't. The stock market is empty because it's just a social convention that people get very het up about, but it's just a social convention.

Anyway, at a deep level all things are empty. But still – and I've said this before – there's an ontological difference in status between an imaginal object and a conventionally perceived physical object. To say that, "Oh, they're all the same, because they're all just empty" – there's a difference in ontological status there. So when we talk about the imaginal Middle Way, we're not talking about exactly the same thing as emptiness. I want to come back to that in another talk, hopefully. We'll see.

But what I do want to say right now, to finish, is about the sort of degree of latitude or flexibility or range with how much we reify at any time, if we talk about imaginal practice. So it might be we really emphasize this neither real nor not real, theatre-like quality, imaginal Middle Way. But maybe, *maybe*, there's a rightness to relating to certain images where we *are* reifying, to certain images. And in that sense, those images are empty, but just empty in the way that a person is empty, or any conventionally

agreed-upon physical entity is empty. So there's more reification, if you like, going on than what we mean with the imaginal Middle Way, or within that imaginal Middle Way there's a range, and we can kind of reify a bit more or bit less at different times, perhaps. Maybe there's a rightness in all that. I've said before that I think it will be, in the long run, much more fertile to be quite diligent and curious about that sense of the imaginal Middle Way – it's really a certain flavour, this theatre-like quality – and give that quite a lot of importance to begin with. And “to begin with” might be for years in imaginal practice.

And then, based on that experience and feel for that – it's really a certain feel; it's like it feels very different than other experiences – based on the familiarity and the experience with that, then we might start exploring more of the possibilities of more reification, etc., with certain experiences, certain images, certain senses. And I feel that that will be much more fruitful. It will also preserve, as I said, the territory and the domain of imaginal practice from just getting mixed up with other stuff and its particular fruits being lost, its unique fruits being lost. So I guess my request and encouragement is to kind of lean on that for a while. I know it kind of challenges people, or even irks some people, etc., but I do feel it's important. And having said that, there might be, at times, and with certain experiences, certain images, the possibility of reifying a bit more, and maybe even the necessity or the appropriateness, let's say, of reifying a bit more.

Some of that might be just to do with a person's own, let's say, growth of their soul or psychology. So for someone, it might be good for them to pray to a personal god, asking for help for themselves, humbly, and reifying self, situation, and god. It might be that a person just jumps too easily to this non-reification, and there's not, with it, enough of a certain kind of traction in the being, in the psychology, in the soul and the heart. So it might be, for personal reasons. But it's a tricky one, you know, in teaching this. Also emptiness Middle Way – it's really tricky, you know, and it's something that really, in the journey of understanding and practising with emptiness, it's something that I think refines itself, and gets more and more subtle, and more and more precise, what it really means to say things neither exist or not exist, things neither do exist nor don't exist, this emptiness Middle Way. It's really part of the journey, and one sort of wobbles back and forth, either side of that Middle Way as the understanding kind of hones in on what it really means, intellectually but also really intuitively and experientially.

But similarly, with the imaginal Middle Way, it's a tricky teaching, it seems, for people. On the other hand, like I said, it might be – to me, it just has a certain flavour, and I can tell when I'm working with someone whether they're in that or not. They recognize it if I point it out, often. Not everyone, but if there's enough sensitivity and familiarity. It's palpable – you're in a different realm there when there's not the reification. So I think it's sometimes really palpably obvious, and it seems to be something that many people struggle with for different reasons. But, you know, I was talking with Catherine as well – we realized that we don't want to kind of get attached to a position of non-reifying. There may be a kind of spectrum of reification in imaginal practice which we are free to move along at any time, more or less, and maybe for different reasons at any time, that it's more right to reify, more appropriate, more helpful for whatever reason we have in mind.

So it might be, as I said, something to do with a person's personal growth, something to do with the fullness of their being, or it might have to do more with the experience itself, and the image itself, that



there are whole categories of being, categories of experience that share a lot of aspects with imaginal experience, but they're not imaginal – we're talking about other things. We're talking about opening to different realms, as perceptions that are as real as anything else, as real as seeing my friend walking down the street, or having a cup of tea or whatever. It may well be, my inclination is to say there are, many kinds of realms of experience and being. And in those cases, to adopt a non-reifying stance in the sense of the imaginal Middle Way may not be attuned or appropriate.

So it's complex. It's really complex. But it feels important to mention, you know? Certainly I've heard accounts of – I mean, there's the whole realm of psychic phenomena, ESP, and all kinds of things, and shamanism, and energy perceptions, and aura perceptions, and all that. And that's all important and great, I think. Again, wanting to differentiate it from the imaginal. But I've also heard accounts of people near death – I don't mean actually near-death experience; I mean who are in the process of dying – reporting, as they're on their deathbed or whatever, perceiving angels, perceiving other planes of beings, etc., knowing things about friends or relatives on the other side of the world without any communication, all kinds of stuff. And it's interesting. Since the diagnosis of the metastases, and this sort of high likelihood of dying soon, there are times when I also feel as if other planes of existence are sort of opened up to my perception. I shared this very briefly in another talk the other night. But sometimes it's almost like the perception of the angel, or the angelic dimension of a human being, is almost more heavily weighed than the perception of their human aspect, if we can even separate those two. And it does have a different quality than what we're calling the imaginal or the imaginal Middle Way. There's a sense of really opening to something that has the ontological status, the degree of being, of reality, equivalent to any human perception or any physical perception.

So I just want to mention that. Obviously it's a huge subject. I don't have it at all figured out. I don't know anyone that does, etc. But this business of the importance of the imaginal Middle Way – it's not quite the same as emptiness – it's quite a wide Middle Way, and we might have a range within it, more or less reified. And again, it's quite individual, when to lean on that as a teacher, talking to a student: “Less reification, more theatre. Can you notice that element?” And when actually to lean on the more reification, even if it's imaginal – to sense, “You know, in a way, this sense of your soul may be more real, this imaginal sense of yourself, this imaginal sense of what you're given by the angels or the angel out ahead may be more real, more important, more significant, more central, more of a solid pillar and guide in your life than anything which conventionally, socially agreed-upon perception would sanction.”

So there are individual differences at different times, certainly in teaching, but also we get a feel for this for ourselves, and moving within that range of the imaginal Middle Way. *And* there might be a whole gamut of experiences that fall outside of the imaginal, and therefore the whole Middle Way thing, the imaginal Middle Way, doesn't pertain to them so much as just an emptiness Middle Way pertains to them, as it does to any object, physical or otherwise. So I just want to mention that as the teachings evolve, and to point that out.

Okay. Let's stop for tonight. We'll hopefully say more about emptiness in a later talk.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 244.

<sup>2</sup> Shneur Zalman, *Tanya*, chapter 39 (Kehot Publication Society), [https://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya\\_cdo/aid/1029067/jewish/Chapter-39.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1029067/jewish/Chapter-39.htm), accessed 21 March 2021.