

Eros Unfettered (Part 4)

Eros Unfettered Retreat

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So you can see in so many different ways the possibilities of supporting or blocking the erotic movement, the movement of soulmaking, the process and dynamic of soulmaking. This, we could say, this is what the soul wants. What do we love about being in love? We love the love, yeah, sure. But maybe more, maybe more than that, we love the sense of soulmaking when we're in love, to echo something we said the other day. We love the sense of the infinite potential, the infinite creation and discovery, creativity and discovering with respect to the beloved other, in and with respect to them, in and with respect to the self, to the world, to the eros, to divinity. Eros, if it's allowed to stimulate and open this soulmaking dynamic, the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, the bigger meaning of eros, eros opens, it opens things up, and that opening is what is soulmaking. And we love that.

So part of that opening, too, is – I mentioned this before – it opens up the very sense of existence, the very way we see and sense and conceive of existence. Eros, if you remember from Plato's definition, or Plato's depiction, really, not definition, Eros was a hermeneutic daimon, meaning he's some kind of demigod that has to do with interpretation, with hermeneutics – interpretation of everything, everything. So whatever eros comes into contact with, whatever it flows towards, wherever there's erotic connection, there's a fertility and an opening up of the hermeneutics there, the interpretation of this facet, this thread, this aspect of existence, the self, the other, the world there, the eros itself.

So eros, if you like, opens for us the gates into the garden of infinite interpretation, to borrow a phrase I used on the *Re-enchanting* retreat. The garden of infinite interpretation. Eros is what takes us in there. So again, I'd like to draw on some Kabbalistic teaching. Most Kabbalists, both with respect to scripture, sacred scripture, but also in relation to the world – so both with scripture, and any aspect of existence – held almost axiomatically that it's subject to potentially an infinite variety of perspectives and interpretations. Not just sacred scripture, but the world and others and all that. So it's very similar to what we're saying here. And some of these teachings about multiple interpretation in Kabbalah I got from this writer that I enjoy, Sanford Drob. He describes one Kabbalist, Moses Chayim Luzzatto. Moses Chayim Luzzatto lived in Padua, I think, in Italy, in the early 18th century, I believe. And he's talking about comparing the multiplicity of meanings in and of the Torah, basically the Old Testament, the multiplicity of meanings in and of that, comparing that to the many nuances of the flames from a hot coal.

So the flame from a hot coal flickers and has different colors in it at different times, suddenly goes green or blue and moves, shapes, and grows, diminishes, et cetera. So all those multiple, flickering nuances, it's somewhat similar to the multiplicity of meanings of the basic texts. It's not taken one-dimensionally or in a kind of narrow, literalistic sense at all. So this Rabbi Moses Chayim Luzzatto said of this, of the Torah, "whose words and letters are like coals," he said, "and whoever is preoccupied and busy with it," in other words, whoever has that erotic connection with it, that arousal of interest that we talked about, that connection there, "inflames the coals, and from each and every letter a great flame emerges, replete with many nuances which are the information encoded in this letter. This is the reason why though the Torah [as a whole] is infinite, even one of its letters is also infinite, but it is necessary to enflame it and then it will be enflamed, and so too the intellect of the human being."

So again, we get the image that I was using before, and I think it might even be a classical one, of eros as a flame. Actually I'm making the connection with eros there, but eros as a flame. And when there's that erotic connection, just as he was describing there without the language of eros, we could say something similar happens to whatever there is this erotic connection with. And eros, as a flame, it

needs something to burn. It needs the fuel of what? Of the beloved other as psyche and logos. The psyche and the logos are the fuel. And actually then the flame, too, if we follow the analogy, it sort of mixes, because the psyche and the logos are what is then perceived of the thing, and that becomes the flame that we behold, if you translate it back to his image. But again, that really reflects the fact that eros-psyche-logos are not separate.

Origen wrote, "We enlarge our soul, which was previously contracted, in order to be capable of receiving the wisdom of God." "We enlarge our soul, which was previously contracted, in order to be capable of receiving the wisdom of God," or, if you prefer, the *jnana*, the gnosis of Buddha-nature, the *jnana* of Buddha-nature. This is what soulmaking wants and ties us into. There's an opening here that's possible, enlarging our soul, enlarging that eros-psyche-logos dynamic, which was previously contracted, in order to be capable of receiving the wisdom of God. What is the wisdom of God? What is this *jnana* of Buddha-nature, if we put it in Buddhist language? It's the seeing of the divine, and the ideation, the creativity of ideation, the conceptuality and the seeing of emptiness, all that together is the *jnana* of Buddha-nature, the wisdom of God.

Whose psyche, logos, eros, is this? Who does it belong to? Where does this movement of soulmaking have its root, its origin? Where does it come from? Who does it belong to? Is it mine? Is it yours? We enlarge our soul, which was previously contracted, in order to be capable of receiving the wisdom of God, the *jnana* of Buddha-nature.

So when there is no imaginal dimension, the initial impetus of eros for more will just get diverted into greed, unless what we practice is a lessening of fabrication through some way of looking, of the self, of the object, or whatever. But without the imaginal dimension, the eros gets diverted into greed. You can see this not just in relationship with another human being or a partner or lover or whatever, but you see it in relation to nature, or land, or beautiful places. If there's only one dimension there, if this beautiful nature that I'm beholding, this landscape or whatever it is, doesn't allow an opening of dimensionality, doesn't have within it this dimensionality that the eros, that the wanting more, can move into, then what happens? "Ah, I like this. Where will I go next year?," and I'll fly off here or there and travel, and I'll collect places, at great expense to the environment, perhaps.

It's forced into the horizontal because there is no vertical. It's just matter, it's pretty, nice, pleasing colors, whatever it is, nice sunset. But it can only occupy one dimension because that's all that is seen in it is a one-dimensionality. The more has to go into a horizontal movement, can only get more horizontally – in other words, more of *this* elsewhere, because I've exhausted this in front of me, because there's not more verticality, more depth, more dimensionality to move into, and there's not an inexhaustible mystery there to move into, so I need to go somewhere else. The vertical is discounted or blocked or simply not available.

And it's interesting, in relation to this, this is something actual in concrete, physical, in the life, that the perception of it is not allowed, or prevented from opening up. But conversely, even something, an image purely from meditation, can actually, as we've seen, open up a cosmopoesis regarding nature, and it often does with the erotic imaginal. So nature, wherever we are, is seen to have this depth, and it's come from the eros and the imaginal dimensions of the meditation even before we looked at that nature. So I don't need to travel to get more. To give you an example of one of the ways this works, I had a dream. This is a few years ago. I dreamt there was a kind of big, arched wooden door, and somehow inlaid in the door were kind of carvings and sort of ornate, abstract shapes in the wood and in the stone arch that was sort of carved around it, shaped around the door.

The dream was just of the door, and there was organ music coming very loudly from the inside. And something about this moved me to tears. It was really the beauty of the door. There was something luminous, yes, but numinous, something divine. I couldn't even put my finger on it. And wonderfully deep. There was this sense of depth that I couldn't articulate, that was pregnant with beauty and full of beauty, something that was very hard to describe but even kind of pinpoint what that depth was. It wasn't at all obvious at first. And with the music, as well. There were a few young men around in the

dream, a little further away from the door, and for some reason they're mocking me; I don't know why. So I had that dream, and then in the meditation in the morning, I revisited it. It seemed there was so much beauty and depth there that I took it up as an imaginal meditation.

Again, interestingly – I'll just mention this as a matter of technique – it was hard to connect at first and to bring it alive. But again I played with something which I'm not sure how unique to me it is; it might just be a personal quirk of mine, or it might be something that's more universally applicable. But I played with that sort of floating energy body turning cartwheels, sense of the subtle body that I mentioned the other day. And then that helped that numinosity and beauty and connection with this image of the door and the sense of sacredness and praise. It helped it all to arise, just as vital, just as beautiful, just as moving, and really not separate from me. There was something very beautifully connected there.

Then I floated – you know, there was this energy body sense, so I floated in the image – and rather than make the door open, I sort of let it open. And inside was kind of a rainforest, a bright orb of light like the sun. But there don't seem to be any walls there or borders. It's just this forest and bright light, and such a sense of beauty and reverence. And looking up, somehow at the same time looking up, there were stars there and more music. I'm aware in the image I could sort of travel into this landscape and kind of go on a bit of a journey, but I decide not to, for that reason about the difference that I pointed out between narrative images moving through a lot of space, a sort of shamanic journey versus actually a kind of image that's sufficient to itself. So the depth there remains a little bit pregnant, not yet fully explored.

I'm mentioning that partly because at one level it's sort of like, well, nothing much happened. It's certainly not sexually erotic. So on one level, it sounds like not that big a deal as a dream and as an image. But it was a) tremendously touching for me, and b) there is eros there, right? There's this sense of attraction, beauty, dimensionality, divinity. And in that attraction, in the way that it stirs the soul, there's all the elements of soulmaking there. The reason I'm mentioning it now as well is because as I moved through the day – and I think I was even working that day – I periodically just recalled the vision, the image during the day at different times, and noticed the cosmopoesis that came from it. So it was a vision of nature in this case, not of some sexual thing, but a vision of nature and a whole relationship with nature, with this rainforest and the beauty there and the door opening into something, that actually spilled over into a real sacredness of cosmopoesis in relation to whatever was around me that was redolent of that image, characteristic of that image.

So again, coming out of the eros and the imaginal, in this case originating not even with actual physical nature. There's a sense of the relationship with nature being opened, transformed, deepened, so that there isn't a need to necessarily go here or there, see this or that place, necessarily. Because the more in the eros can get infinitely satisfied in the infinite depth that can open up there. Doesn't need – as I said, it's not constrained to the horizontal. It's right here. I don't need to go elsewhere on this same flat, horizontal level. It's infinite right there, infinite in depth, infinite in possibility.

So we can see this in all kinds of ways. Also, again, non-sexual, with respect to someone who's not a lover, but an actual person or a thing in our life or something. So, for example, the fantasy of a teacher. And again, I'm using fantasy in a good sense, in a creative, soulmaking sense. There is fantasy and image when the teacher/student relationship, even when they don't know each other, they've never met in person, when that is potent and deep and fertile, when there is eros there and there's a fantasy of the teacher or fantasies and images of that teacher, in the best sense, in the imaginal sense. Then what can happen is, again, if we're talking about how this process gets blocked or limited, either, for example, my soulmaking process, the eros-psyche-logos dynamic in its expansion, it reaches, if you like, the limit of what the teacher is presenting. So the image, the way they are or the way they behave or act or comport themselves or dress or speak or whatever it is, it can no longer meet the expansion that's happening in my soulmaking process of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic. And we need, or want, we need more. We need a larger, wider image, someone that can give us that or hold that, if you like, in

their being. Or a deeper, wider logos than this teacher is presenting and communicating or teaching. You understand?

Something in your soulmaking, my soulmaking logos, soulmaking movement in relation to this fantasy of this teacher, it reaches the limit of what they can hold, or what their presentation of themselves can hold, and of their teachings can hold, and the soul needs something more. And then the eros goes out of that relationship, and oftentimes the power of the teaching goes out of that relationship, the soulmaking goes out of that relationship. Or what can happen is my fantasy or image of them or of what awakening is changes. So I'm talking about spiritual teachers now. For some reason, my fantasy just changes of them, my image of them, or my whole fantasy, image, or logos of what awakening is. And again, it shifts, the eros can no longer flow there for what the soulmaking needs. So there's a diminishing of the eros or the eros means that I move elsewhere for something that can support that psyche and logos.

I can't remember, I think I've shared in other talks in the past, I don't remember, but I lived as a musician for quite some years in the US, and twice during those years at different times there were periods where the whole sort of soulmaking relationship with music and with making music and writing music and playing music just kind of collapsed. It collapsed to a kind of one-dimensionality. So everything that music sort of was so full of, so expressive, so resonant of other dimensions of existence and meaningfulness, et cetera, it just – in different ways, at different times, once for a very short period, once for a little longer – kind of collapsed to just, like, “Why all this fuss about sounds and certain relationships?” It lost its magic, if you like. It lost its image. Those words, I'm not sure, but they may well be related, magic and image. It lost all its imaginal dimensions, its meaningfulness, its soul resonances. And the erotic relationship with making music and improvising or writing music was just gone. It came back. There were certain things that actually helped that to break, if you like, and certain things that allowed a new level of fantasy to come back.

Actually, if we go back to the whole fantasy of a teacher thing, you know, in some traditions, for instance some of the Tibetan lineages, the teacher, the guru, the lama, the instruction is “regard your lama as the Buddha.” And it's hard to say how many people actually take that literally, like they really are the Buddha; there's something there that they are the reincarnation of a buddha or something very close to a buddha. It might be taken very literally, or not. I don't know, and there's probably a real variety in that, how literally people take this “your lama, your guru is the Buddha” teaching. For me, it's exactly this kind of literalism or realism, whether it's religious in the narrow sense or whether it's secular, it's the realism that's a little silly.

So what we're trying to open up here is something, a kind of middle way that it's not a realism and a shrinking literalism and kind of concretization there that would strike me as really a bit silly, but it's also not a kind of dismissal, and a refusal to admit other dimensions, and something about the nature of perception and ways of looking and soulmaking and eros that dismisses all that and just goes to a kind of realism of another level, a shrinking to that one dimension, for instance. Something, if you like, in between – which isn't some sort of happy compromise; it's something that's at a different level of understanding, of concept, of engagement, of wisdom, I would say.

So there's the difference between an idol, and actually believing this thing or this person is really divine in a kind of very concretized, limited and reified way, and then it somehow encapsulates the totality or it is the totality of what divinity is – there's a difference between an idol and an icon. Here's, again, borrowing from Henry Corbin and also Jean-Luc Marion, a postmodern French philosopher and theologian. An icon is more – admits of this open-endedness, admits of dimensions of unfathomability, dimensions of divinity that will always exceed whatever is in front of us, always bigger than the actual perception. But somehow this thing, or this beloved other, or this object, or whatever it is, functions as a kind of portal, if you like, to that infinity of infinities, to that dimensionality and divinity. But it's without kind of naive realism and it's without limitation, as well.

So you can get icons and idols in relation to images, of course, but you can also get them in relation to ideas. So an idea can become, or a conceptual framework or a logos can become an idol, becomes, again, limited, and we say this is the truth, this is real, this is true. Or it can become something that's held in a different way, not reified, not taken with a truth claim, and not limited. It becomes more potentially open, expansive, expanding. We'll return to this in relation to ideation. But in a nutshell, it's not inflation that's a problem, if you know this word from Jungian psychology, or at least not how it sounds that's a problem, this expansion of the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, this expansion of the imaginal, et cetera, and the ideation. That's not what he actually meant by inflation, but it's not the expansion per se that's the problem – it's the reification and the identification that's the problem. Reification and identification are the problems, not this expansion, not the inflation. Because where there's reification, identification, there is not the imaginal. It's not image as we're using it.

Now, last thing. Sometimes, and in some relationships most of the time, perhaps all the time, sometimes and in some relationships it's not acting on the eros that actually stimulates. It's the containment of the eros, preventing it from spilling out in certain ways into actuality, that actually allows the increase of the psyche, the growth, the expansion of soulmaking, of image, of logos. It's not acting. So what happens by kind of creating a space that is free of manifest action, that space becomes a kind of alchemical vessel, a crucible, if you like. The fire or the heat of eros accumulates in that space where there isn't the possibility to act on the eros in the most sort of immediate or obvious or one-dimensional way. And this crucible and the vessel and the heat, the fire, heating that vessel, the fire of eros heating that vessel, heats and stimulates and galvanizes, catalyzes the soulmaking process. There's alchemy here.

We cannot or we refuse to get our more, the more that eros wants, on the horizontal, material level in this relationship, with whoever it is. And therefore the more is, if you like, forced or funneled, as I said, to other dimensions, to open other dimensions, to discover, to create other dimensions, because it's kept out of *this* area, of this dimension. So the pressure to create, to find more, it will find it at other levels and create those and discover and open those other imaginal dimensions. So for example, non-consummation sexually in a relationship, a certain relationship, or on the physical plane of manifesting, you know, being friends and hanging out or whatever it is – the kinds of boundaries that often exist, and sometimes are stringently reinforced, between a psychotherapist, say, and a client, or a teacher and a student.

Rather than seeing this as then, “Ah, yes, the reason for those boundaries is so that you can re-experience the Oedipal triangle and the frustration of not being able to get the mother,” et cetera, so it's projected onto the therapist or whatever it is, or the teacher – which, again, mostly is a kind of psychological reductionist view of what's happening there, and so, “by reliving that, you're reliving the Oedipal trauma, if you like, or pain, and you can find a healthier way to navigate that and to confront it and to accommodate it,” et cetera. Rather than that kind of psychological reductionist view, actually what if we see those kind of boundaries, the necessity of them, as a kind of alchemical vessel? An alchemy of soulmaking is possible through the containment of the eros, through this space, sacred space if you like – *temenos* is the Greek word for sacred space, I think. So through the non-acting at that level, sometimes in some relationships, a *temenos* is created of soulmaking, for soulmaking.

It's not for letting go and diminishing one's desires or letting go of craving in one's life or renouncing eros or trying to let go of sexual desire or anything like that. That's not the purpose, in our view, in this way that we're talking about now. It's for the sake of soulmaking. This space, this boundary, this *temenos*, is for the sake of soulmaking. So the erotic tension is preserved, the fire is contained, and so heats up more, doesn't disperse. The erotic tension is preserved because the two doesn't collapse to a one in union. Actually we'll come back to that piece.

So this boundary or containment, if you like, I'm not talking now about kind of preservation or containing of the sexual energy, for example, in certain sexual yogas, ancient and modern, where for instance the man doesn't ejaculate so the energy is contained and rechanneled, so it opens bliss or

opens certain energy centers, and so that there can be a melting, the consciousness melts into oneness and that sort of thing. Not talking about that. That's all valid and good and fine and can be helpful and important. But actually it's not for that, this kind of temenos that I'm talking about. It's for the sake of the fertilization of the imaginal, for the sake of the increase of soulmaking, the support of soulmaking, the vessel of soulmaking. You understand? It's different. The imaginal is involved.

Just finish with a quote from William James, the psychologist and philosopher. I'm not sure exactly where it came from, but. I'm not quite sure what the scope of his intent and meaning was, but you can maybe hear it from the perspective now of everything that we've said. So he wrote about "the fantastic and unnecessary character of a man's wants." I'll just keep his gender-biased language for now, but. He wrote about the "fantastic and unnecessary character of a man's wants." And he said even when the want's gratification, even when the gratification of the want seems "farthest off, the uneasiness they occasion is still the best guide of his life, and will lead him to issues entirely beyond his present powers of reckoning. Prune down his extravagance, sober him, and you undo him." Prune down his extravagance, sober him, and you undo him.

So there's something in this, what he calls the fantastic and unnecessary character of the eros. It does give rise to a kind of uneasiness, unsettledness. Why? Because it's dynamic, and because it grows things. And if we let it expand in the way that it naturally and organically wants to, it will be "the best guide of his life, will lead him to issues entirely beyond his present powers of reckoning," will, as I said, open up insights, open up the sense of existence, all of that. Prune down his extravagance, sober him, and you undo him.