

**Opening the Sense of the Energy Body**  
**Four Circles, Four Parables of Stone and Light**  
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All right, as I mentioned in the introductory talk, some portion, a significant portion of this series of talks will be devoted to different aspects or different areas of, let's say, the skill or the art of sensing with soul, of imaginal practice, and my intention is to say, I hope, quite a few things I haven't said, put out there before. Obviously there will be some repeat, and that's a good thing. So hopefully, there are things here that are helpful in regard to different areas, different strands of the weave of imaginal practice, sensing with soul. There's no necessarily obvious order in which to present this material, and there will be inevitably, I think, some overlap between the different areas, the different strands, but I'll try and sort of present this bit of strand and then this strand, despite, you know, some inevitable overlap.

Okay, so tonight, I want to say a few things about energy body, and as I said, there's no obvious order why I put that first, but we do put a lot of emphasis on it. But actually everything's important. So talking about, you know, skill and developing skill, developing the art of the energy body, of that kind of awareness, of that kind of sensitivity, of the possibilities that are there, and of being able to work with it skilfully, artistically, etc.

[2:20] So just to review, in terms of kind of definition, if you like: what we're calling the energy body, we could say is actually a kind of awareness. More than a thing itself or this kind of experience or that kind of experience, it's a kind of poise of awareness. But what it involves, we could kind of break down into three aspects, and obviously they're totally interwoven and overlapping, etc. And the three aspects are, **(1)** when we're talking about energy body, it's the **felt sense**. So this is really important, the felt sense, meaning this space that my physical body inhabits, the space sort of outlined by my physical body, maybe even a little bit bigger. What does that feel like? What is the felt sense, the texture, the vibration, the experience there, the tightness, looseness, energization, harmonization, or whatever it is? So that's one aspect of energy body, the felt sense.

**(2)** The second aspect is what we might call **the image**. Now, we don't necessarily mean an imaginal image, but it *may* be an imaginal image of the body. So this I'll come back to. But there is usually always some kind of image of the body. So I shut my eyes, and you have a vague image in the back of one's mind of my body, sitting here, wearing what it's wearing, the limbs sort of in their relative locations, etc., just very conventional. Other times in meditation, the image one might have, say in, I don't know, the first *jhāna* or something – the image that one might have of the body might just be a diffuse cloud of white light, and that's the image that corresponds with the felt sense.

So there's the felt sense, second is the image of the body, **(3)** and the third is **the idea of the body** or the concept of the body. So, you know, in our Western society, usually we have the idea that the body is made up of cells organized into organs and systems, etc., and those cells are made up of smaller bits which go down to molecules and atoms, etc., and there's this exchange. And out of that interplay of molecules and atoms at the cellular level, etc., the body is structured and formed and functions, either healthily or unhealthily, etc., has this or that capacity, etc. But in a way, that's a reductionist model.

That's the convention. There's nothing wrong with it. It's just one view. It's the dominant view of our modern Western sort of outlook, world-view, that the sort of fundamental truth is in the basic building blocks that are purely material. In other words, they just exist as material entities and the functioning of material entities according to physical laws, all the known physical laws and chemical laws, and out of that, the body as a complex organism with its appearance, with its capacities, etc., arises.

[6:07] A different idea, more popular in some circles, actually throughout history, and you see it in some healing paradigms or New Age circles or sometimes shamanistic circles, is actually, you could say, more of a kind of, let's say, top-down approach – that the body perhaps has different levels of being, different strata to its existence. So, for instance, there's an astral body, or it's almost like the body has different sheaths, maybe seven, maybe nine, whatever it is in the different systems. And so, for example, the astral body is a certain level of higher energy, and it might function, this astral body, this energy field as a kind of matrix, if you like, that forms, shapes, and directs, to a certain extent, the material, physical body. Instead of being reductionist, bottom-up, so to speak, this is an idea, just as an example, of different ideas of the body where a sort of higher energetic level of body, if you like, informs, shapes, directs and, if you like, cares for in some sense, the physical, material one that's obviously manifest to most people. Of course, there are an infinite number of ideas about the body possible, just as there are an infinite amount of felt senses or images we can have of the body. There will be some, as I said, that are very common, dependent on culture, upbringing, personal propensity, etc., but the range is open.

So all that together, those three aspects, we could say, is one way of defining what we mean by 'energy body.' And it's a poise of awareness. It's a poise of being. We're really saying energy body *awareness*. It's the kind of awareness, or the kind of attention, or kind of way of looking that is open to all the possibilities of that range of those three aspects.

[8:33] In a way, the first is, in some senses, primary experientially – let's just say, experientially primary. In other words, we really want to be anchored and very conscious and very in touch with, intimate with, the felt sense. I remember, I don't know, I've probably done it a few times in guided meditations<sup>1</sup> or just thrown out as suggestions a possibility of just imagining, as you're sitting in meditation, just imagining three lines, lines of energy that kind of course through the body – so two down each leg, sort of meeting at and centred in the lower belly, the very lower belly, and also centred there, a third line vertically upwards and maybe even going out the top of the head. There's a kind of, 'triangle' is the wrong word, but three lines meeting at a point and radiating out like that.

A little while ago someone came for an interview, and I think they were working on *samādhi*, but I actually can't remember what their main focus was at the time, but they reported, saying they tried this, and they were sort of working with it and trying to imagine looking at these lines that I had suggested, and looking at them in kind of close-up and really getting the detail of the lines. And perhaps they'd heard somewhere else, "Oh, energy tends to spiral into the body or out of the body," like in the teaching of chakras, etc., so they were kind of trying to imagine the close-up, these lines, and each line being a kind of a spiral. And it wasn't really very productive for them. They were saying, "Well, I'm sort of trying that, but it doesn't really do anything." To me, that missed the point of my intention in sharing that.

Again, it's not so much the visual details. They may or may not be important. And again, here there was a certain idea that was imported about what was important, but also about how energy *is* – it spirals or whatever. Sometimes seeing or imagining energy spiralling can be extremely helpful, but the question is, *is it*? Is it helpful at that time? The main thrust of what I had intended in sharing that, I think, was really more to do about a kind of structuring of the body or the energy body awareness, so that once you put those lines there in the imagination, it just *does* something to the sense of alignment, of openness, of harmony, etc., in the body. So it's kind of through the geometry of those three lines, in the space that the body inhabits, and what that does to the sense of well-being, the sense of the body, the sense of the posture, and also the possibility, for instance of *samādhi*. So it's more to do with – I don't know what to call it – the geometry and the structuring of the sense of the body that comes from that.

[12:22] So again, what I'm really saying is the felt sense is primary. It's really, really important. We don't want to lose the felt sense because we're chasing some kind of idea too much of the energy body that isn't actually really fruitful. So when we talk about image and ideas being aspects of the energy body, all these three – felt sense, image, and idea – they're tied together. So if I'm playing with a certain idea like spiralling, I have to check the felt sense and see: well, what impact does that have on the felt sense? And if it's an idea that at that time doesn't bear much fruit in terms of the energy body awareness, then it's not that helpful. Again, the key thing with this kind of thing – as well as the felt sense; really important – but another key principle to kind of extract out of that little incident that this person shared is the importance of experimenting, improvising, playing, and feeling and noticing: when I do this, when I imagine that, when I think this, when I conceive that, when I do this with the awareness, whatever this or that is, *this* is what happens. And if you're going for *samādhi*, then, “Well, oh, that feels good, that feels right,” so you go with that. So, this real importance of experimenting, improvising, playing, and feeling, noticing in the moment: what is the result of what I'm experimenting with, this particular experiment right now? How does it feel? What do I notice? Is it helpful?

[14:04] Stepping back, a slightly more general point is, in the global sense, if we talk about practice as a whole, any kind of practice, any direction of practice (*samādhi*, emptiness, contemplating *vedanā*, *mettā*, imaginal practice, whatever it is, ethics), it's something, I think, it's developable. Some people have kind of a bit more of a gift for it to start with, but it's definitely developable. It's like developing what I might call, what we might call a nose, a nose for what's important. So often I hear people, and sometimes even long-term practitioners, getting caught up in a certain differentiation or idea about this or that practice or this or that teaching, and it's kind of irrelevant. They could spend a lot of time sort of pursuing this or that, but it doesn't actually make much difference. So the importance, really broadly speaking now, about any practice, of developing this sense of, “Actually, what's crucial here? What is to the essence? What's to the point? What matters here?” For example, in this student's relating to me about trying to imagine in detail the spiralling, it's like, it's almost missing the point. We could give lots of examples in different areas of practice, but that's a very general point. It's like, can I develop this intuition, this sense and sensitivity and this nose for what is significant? What actually is the nub of what's important here in whatever practice I'm doing? What am I trying to do? How are the pieces working, and which ones matter, and which ones are very, very secondary and irrelevant, or more irrelevant?

[16:20] Okay, so, really in these talks, I want to throw out things – tips to try, things to consider, suggestions, guidances, things to reflect on, etc., as I said, about the whole skill and art of imaginal practice. So, see what's useful. There are different kinds of things in here. When we do imaginal practice, when we're sensing with soul, I might say or we might give an instruction, and I think it's almost universally a good idea, if one's practising with an intrapsychic image, if one's practising in a dyad, if one's practising sensing with soul with some object, some being in nature, whatever, generally I would encourage and say something like "Bring your whole body into contact with the sight or sound or other or whatever it is. Sense it with the whole energy body." So what does that mean? For some people that will be, "What does that mean to bring my whole body into contact with a sight?"

[17:59] Let's maybe try and break that down a little bit. **(1)** It means, or what I intend it to mean is that **one spreads or balances the attention or the awareness to include the object, the other, and the self, and the sense of the energy body.** Okay, so already we're opening up the sense of what we mean by 'energy body.' In relationship, you could say I bring the whole energy body into contact, but as I do that, I begin to see that actually the sense of the energy body *might* begin to include the other, as if there's a larger energy body, a larger sense of energy kind of encompassing the two. Certainly it spreads to one's whole energy body, but then that whole energy body comes in, is brought into connection with, into contact with the sight, the sound, or whatever. And then [there's] the possibility of that opening up another sense of the energy as encompassing the two. So that's one aspect.

[19:20] **(2)** A second is that the kind of, if we like, **the centre of knowing or perceiving is not simply the kind of default sense of eyes or ears or my head.** The sense organs are gathered in the head, so we tend to think of that as the centre of knowing, the centre of perceiving. Somehow I'm seeing it with my eyes, of course, and those are located in my head, and that's the idea and sense we often have as a default of our sensing, of our knowing, of our perceiving. But rather than the whole energy body – which may itself have a kind of centre and, for some, the heart centre is a sort of usual place for the soul sensing to feel as if it's centred, and for others, it will be, for me, it's more just the whole body as a total field. So that can vary. But this whole energy body is a centre of knowing and perceiving. One feels it that way, one senses it that way, one can imagine it that way. In our language, one creates and discovers it so. Again, the default in our culture – and it's really almost hardwired into our sense of things – is that the centre is my eyes are seeing, my ears are hearing, and that we can feel it located in the head. But what is it to actually, as I said, feel, sense, imagine, create and discover the whole energy body as an organ of perception?

[21:16] **(3)** And with that, sometimes, and I've touched on this – I haven't mentioned it for quite a while, but maybe it's implicit in some of the examples – sometimes there's the possibility of a kind of **synaesthesia**, that with the whole energy body coming, being brought into contact, being conceived, felt, sensed, imagined as this organ or centre of knowing and perceiving, that the senses start to kind of mix and blend, so that sound and sight and touch, etc., are less separate: they weave into each other, they imply each other, they reflect each other, they manifest across the boundaries between those different senses. So we hear with our body. That's not actually such an uncommon thing to happen when one's listening deeply to music or to birdsong or whatever it is, or actually anything – listening to a lawnmower, just the vibration, etc., is a certain, one level of that. But there's a rich possibility here of synaesthesia, for kind of mixing of the senses that can be very beautiful and very fruitful.

(4) So another aspect, when I say, “Bring your whole body into contact with this other, with the sight, with the sound, with what it is you’re sensing with soul. Sense it with the whole energy body,” a fourth aspect, we could say (and I mentioned this earlier), is that **the energy body sense is open to the whole potential range of perceived substantiality and image and idea**. So the whole potential range of perceived felt sense, to very, very etheric and light, to very dense, etc., the whole range of imaginal image and imaginal possibility, and the whole range of ideas. So bringing the whole body into contact also means bringing the whole, if you like, range of possibilities of the body, how I conceive it, how I feel it, how I imagine it, how I image it – that that is open, the gates there are open, that the range is open, so it’s possible for it to have that whole range, or anywhere along that range in manifestation.

(5) And, lastly, fifthly, and again, I actually alluded to it before, so this kind of overlaps with the first one, that a connection or sometimes even a flow, but let’s say **a connection is sensed between the energy body and the object**. So when I bring in this sensitivity and the delicacy and the care, careful mindfulness, in the larger sense of what we mean in these practices, of bringing the whole body, the whole energy body into the presence of, into relationship with another in a dyad, with an intrapsychic object, with an object in nature, that there can be, again – gradually we might notice it, or it might be immediately apparent, but sometimes these things, we gradually begin to discern them – that we begin to sense a connection. It could be a flow, but some kind of connection, energetic connection between the energy body and the object, the other. They form a kind of, we could say, unit of dyads. So, as I said, I kind of already touched on that in the first of the five here, but a unit of dyads means, yes, there are two. I can definitely feel two here, but I also sense a kind of unifying energy, or at least an energy that connects us, flows between us, ties us together, etc.

[25:43] Okay. If we just linger with this and expand some of what I just said, again, we’re so conditioned by the dominant materialist, reductionist, scientific and scientistic viewpoint of modern culture that it’s sometimes hard for us to actually *have* certain experiences, because the logos is so entrenched or so limited along certain, within certain circumscribed parameters, and it simply doesn’t allow other ideas, and so it might also inhibit certain experiences. Just in the way we talked about the eros-psyche-logos dynamic can be inhibited or blocked from its natural tendency to expand, it can be inhibited or blocked at certain times. One of the ways is by a limited, a limiting idea that we’re clinging to, and sometimes we don’t even realize what it is or that we’re clinging to it.

In our culture, the language and ideas and models we have for sensing and sensation aren’t quite adequate for sensing with soul. For example, as I’ve touched on, where is the sensing? We tend in our culture to think and feel only that, for example, touch happens on the skin, and for instance, at the end of the hand: I touch another person, I touch my beloved, I touch this tree, or whatever it is. Only there, that’s where the touch happens.

But when we touch, for example, a beloved who is for us an erotic-imaginal figure, or we touch the earth as erotic-imaginal other, when we sense it with soul, or when we listen to sound, as I said, to music, to birdsong, to anything, we don’t only sense or think of touch as taking place at the skin or with the hand, or hearing happening with the ears. Rather we sense the whole energy body, which is, as I said, larger than and more than the physical body. And we touch and sense with the emotions, hearts. Again, in our culture, we tend to have body as one thing, sensory contact as one thing, emotions and heart as something else, which, again, in our culture, might reduce to some kind of chemical thing

(maybe, maybe not). But when we begin sensing with soul, these things come together: I touch it with my heart. I touch it with my emotions. It touches my emotions. Because we have that word also in the language already: I'm touched by something. It's touching my heart. The heart also touches. And the soul-resonances. All this is involved, receiving, resonating, shaping and touching the object. So, again, there's this kind of much more, much richer and more comprehensive and multidimensional sensing that happens when we sense with soul, and the whole idea of this body, and the instrument it is, and its capacities, and how it works, and its sensitivities and sensibilities, that gets expanded, enriched, complexified, etc.

[29:37] Okay, so there's a sense there that we can talk about opening the energy body, and what we really mean is opening the idea, opening up the range of possibilities, opening up what we imagine the body to be and what we actually experience. So opening up that whole range, as we said. There's another sense in which opening the energy body is actually really quite important – well, I think, for *all* practice, and actually for living well, but certainly for practices like *samādhi* and imaginal practice and sensing with soul. I think I might have said this before, but again, it bears repeating, because sometimes when a teaching is really relevant to oneself, one hears it, but one doesn't really take it in. It doesn't land. It's almost like I'm so in a certain pattern or a certain idea about how things are or what I need to do that I don't recognize that actually that strand of teaching is significant for me, because I'm so set on something else being more important.

I would say, and I want to tread carefully here in this portion of the talk, but sometimes a person may well need to develop the energy body awareness and the skill to really allow imaginal practice. We have placed it, and we'll continue to place it really as something quite fundamental and indispensable and integral to sensing with soul, to imaginal practice, and the whole Soulmaking Dharma. But for some people, I might be interested in images, I like hearing about sacredness, or whatever it is, but there really isn't that basis. We're back to foundations now or foundations that can become roots, as we'll see. But there really isn't that developed basis of either awareness of the energy body or skill with it, and they might need to work and practise in different ways that really focus on that for a while.

[32:20] Sometimes what's a factor here, as well, is that a person is not used to opening the energy body, in the sense of having a lot of energy and openness in the sense of the energy body. So, you know, we can feel the energy body at different times as being more or less energized, of course, and for a lot of people there's a whole range there of sort of holding and having course through the body or the sense of the body or being filled with more energy, much more energization than one is used to. For many people, that whole range of having more energy in the energy body or the energy body being opened by having more energy – it's just not an experience that they're used to, many Dharma practitioners as well. For some people, that will be one piece of their developing the awareness and the skill with the energy body, is actually becoming used to having more energy in the energy body.

One of the ways that more energy comes is through the long breath. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, it starts with this breathing in long. The practitioner knows they're breathing in long, etc., breathing in short, as the second instruction, knows they're breathing in short. Many times, that just gets ignored. It's just, "Okay, know whether your breath is long or short," but even *that*, people don't really pay much attention to. They're more focused, for instance, on the sensations at the abdomen or the nostrils. I'm not insisting, I don't really mind. "Did the Buddha mean this or that?" It doesn't matter. My point

is really one *could* read that as actually an active encouragement, rather than just a passive noticing. Actually breathe long for a while, fill the body, the space of the body with *prāṇa*, with the qi of the breath or that sense or whatever.

And what this does is it opens and energizes the energy body, if you stay with it for a while. And sometimes that's quite, as I said, it's quite unusual, and in being unusual it's quite uncomfortable for people, for all kinds of different reasons. Sometimes it's just not familiar. Sometimes it's a bit scary. Sometimes it's other aspects of being that are attached or consequential on having a lot of energy. When there's a lot of energy and openness in the energy body, well, you know, it's hard for the mind not to open, it's hard for the soul not to open, it's hard for the emotions not to open, it's hard, perhaps, for certain structures of psychology not to open, or to be revealed, or to be changed, etc. And a person may, consciously or unconsciously, be a little bit resistant to all that. There are all kinds of possibilities of what may be going on here, and sometimes one needs to go into some of those reservations or concerns, etc., and go into the psychology, and work with it gradually and caringly.

Other times, one doesn't. One just needs, for instance, to practise the long breath. I gave some retreats using that, I think it was in 2007 and 2008, on *samatha*<sup>2</sup> and *The Art of Concentration*, etc.<sup>3</sup> There's guidance there if you want it, and you can find it other places as well. But opening and energizing the energy body with that stage of breath practice, as one example, and one becomes used to feeling it and used to the body being open and being energized, having more energy. The capacity of the energy body grows. And again, I've tried to explain why that's relevant just now, but it's often the case a person just doesn't see it as relevant. They think other things are important, and something else is the issue. I'll come back to that.

[36:37] But actually lingering on this for a while, this point, talking about opening the energy body. This openness of the energy body – which, you know, the energy body opens and closes all the time. It's doing that all day long, in different stages of openness and closedness, and it does that for many different reasons. So, as I said, practising the long breath tends to open the energy body. When there's craving, it tends to contract the energy body. When there's eros, it tends to open the energy body, etc. There are many, many things, factors that are important and influential in the state of the energy body at any time. But the capacity or accessibility, or the habit, even, of opening the energy body may be in the long-term really quite significant in one's life, certainly in one's practice and the direction of practice, and one's life as well. Opening, opening. The openness of the energy body is not divorced from many other factors, as I said just a few minutes ago.

For example, to name another, you know, radical sort of generosity, radical, courageous generosity is also an opening of the being. You can see that – it's like the fist is closed, clinging on to what I've got, my coins, my whatever it is, my pension, my whatever. And there's an opening of the being; I have to open the fist to give. So generosity is an opening. Radical generosity that is almost courageous in how much it's giving is also a kind of radical opening of the being. It, too, will have an effect. Everything's connected – dependent origination. I can't get away from it. That opening of the being, radically, in a radical generosity, will open the heart. It opens the energy body. It opens the sense of self. All kinds of possibilities.

[39:01] You can see, for example, sometimes a person's been practising Dharma for thirty years. They've never really practised, or the level at which they practise generosity is quite limited. I'm

talking about all kinds of generosity here. There remains a sort of contractedness, a sort of, almost like a stinginess of being, just holding, holding oneself in, holding. [laughs] I'm almost making this gesture – you can't see, making this gesture, almost like holding the energy body in. That's what happens when I'm not generous. The opposite happens with generosity. You see some people, as I said, practise for thirty years, go all over the world, check this teacher out, check that, read this, read that, do this practice, do that practice, and something's still contracted. There's still this almost perpetual sort of ... I mean, yes, some other things change, but still, you get a sense of their being; there's something still kind of tight there. Other people have been practising much less time, but are willing to experiment with a kind of radical generosity of being, and the courage that that takes. And you see: there are all kinds of consequences on the openness of being, openness of heart, ability to let go.

There are a lot of factors, a lot of, let's say, capabilities, readiesses, tendencies that may be related to things, for instance, like the ease of *samādhi*. How much is my openness and generosity connected with my capacity for *samādhi*? I would say a lot. Why? Because, again, they're both opennesses. *Samādhi* is a state of the energy body being open, and a kind of surrendering to whatever. Again, if we talk about the first *jhāna*, I'm surrendering. Part of it is, as much as I penetrate the *pīti*, the rapture, the bliss there, I'm also surrendering to it. I'm abandoning myself to it. I'm opening my energy body to that, letting it fill. So this capacity, this readiness, this willingness to or tendency to open in different ways is all connected. Again, a person might be practising for twenty years: "I really need to work on my focus. My mind just wanders. I really need to just come back to the breath again and again and develop my concentration." And they're sort of interested in *jhāna*, but they've basically kind of given up, and they keep trying to develop their concentration, convinced that if only they can just keep the mind in one place, nail it to whatever it is, the abdomen or the nostrils or whatever it is, that they will develop *samādhi* there: "Oh, my mind just keeps wandering. I just need to keep doing this." And not see that actually their lack of opening to the loveliness of *samādhi* and the possibility of *jhāna* and all that may actually be much more related to the openness of the energy body, and the unfamiliarity or the disinclination to open it, as we said before, either through generosity, with the long breath, whatever.

[42:53] And so sometimes one might hear this kind of thing, and think that's not significant, because "I know what I need to do is I just need to nail my mind to, my attention to, the tip of the nose," or wherever it is. And of course, that is an aspect, a factor. That ability to do that, to stay focused, to 'concentrate' in that narrow sense of the word, is a factor in the development of *samādhi*, but it's often (I know I've said this before) just way too overemphasized. A person doesn't grasp the broader set of often much more significant conditions and factors that come together to allow a deepening, allow opening, say, to *jhānic* experience and that kind of thing.

But this openness of the energy body, and for example, what I'm calling radical generosity, that whole exploration and lovely territory, also, it may be related not just to the ease of *samādhi* that a person experiences, but also to their ability to let go in general – in other words, to their freedom. Again, you can see it in the analogy of the opening the fist in giving, in generosity. It might also be related to not just the use of *samādhi* and the ability to let go in general, but also to one's kind of capacity or propensity for religious feeling, what we might call – I'll come back to that in a second – for devotion, for opening, for surrender, for a sense of divinity, and all that.



[44:51] I'm not saying this is the only factor. There are lots of factors involved in developing *samādhi*, involved in our ability to let go in life and be free, and also lots of factors that feed, of course, what we might call religious openings, religious sensibility, religious devotion and attunement. But these factors that I'm pinpointing right now, specifically coming out of our discussion about opening the energy body, they may be, as I said, much more significant than we realize. I have a colleague, Suvaco, some of you will know him, and I was sitting in on a talk I think that he gave at Gaia House some years ago, if my memory serves me, and he said [laughs] – I thought it was great, actually. He was talking to, you know, a room full of people in the meditation hall, I don't know how many people that is, and he said, "You know, some of you would be actually much better served by opening your house to a refugee family than by sitting on a retreat." It was a bold thing to say, and it probably startled quite a few people, I imagine. But again, it comes back to this radical generosity idea, and the opening that comes from that, and then what that sets in motion, if you like, or what it opens in the being and the ramifications for, let's say, for letting go, for freedom, for opening the sensibility, for *samādhi*, all kinds of things.

[46:36] So, there's a lot to consider here. All these things, as I said, will be mutually dependently arising, so it's not that one thing comes first and then another. Any of them can feed the other. So a devotional experience will tend to open the energy body, generosity will tend to open the energy body, and potentially it's one of the supports for, let's say, the capacity for religious experience, for sensing with soul, all kinds of things.

So, you know, sometimes in relation, again, a person's been practising for a while, and all this talk about letting go and craving and freedom, and they say, "I *should* let go of craving and aversion and fear." But it might well be that practising, for instance, more generosity, practising surrendering and abandoning and opening in relationship to the energy body and the sense of energy there, that may be much more helpful, as I said, in supporting the ability to really let go of craving, aversion, and fear, certainly than just saying, "Oh, I *should*. I've been practising so long, and I should." These factors feed each other.

[48:15] And, again, just repeating one of them. I just want to draw out one strand and repeat it: the capacity to open the energy body and the being in surrender to, let's say, something higher – so some kind of sense of divinity in the loosest, broadest sense – that is related to, all this is related, this opening of the energy body might be related to our capacity to surrender, and not just to a *jhānic* experience or a dissolution of the self, and the space that opens up there, but also it might correlate with our ability to, yes, surrender in devotion or have a devotional sense. It's the same kind of, or there's a lot of overlap between what is actually happening in the soul, in the energy body there.

[49:27] But all these factors, again, they're tied together in a kind of mutual dependent origination. So, again, I'm hoping to throw out in this, or offer in these talks, certainly tips and techniques, and this and that, but also just things to consider and things to reflect on or to question whether or not they might be relevant to you at any time.

I have to be careful; sometimes when we talk like this ... I want to really steer clear of a tendency to view myself, to view oneself in a certain way. So back to non-identification, *anattā*. "I am like this. Oh, I'm just closed, my heart is closed. I'm a miserable, stingy *da-da-da*. My energy body's closed. I'll never feel devotion. *I am like this*," as opposed to understanding the mind, the heart, the body, the

energy body, the attention, all of this, we could see it, and I think it's very skilful to understand all those aspects of our being as *habits*. And as habits, they're trainable, they're malleable, they're shapeable. They're not fixed in stone. So, yes, we can talk about habits of energy patterns. You can see it or sense it in people's bodies: there's a certain habit this way or that way. But it's not *who I am*. Okay? So, that's really, really important, if you're listening to some of this, and there's some kind of contraction of identification, and either praising yourself or (more commonly) beating yourself up or despairing or whatever. This is really, really important.

[51:30] But at the same time, we can also talk about styles of soul, soul-personae, if you like, something like that. Souls are different, you know. They're still trainable and shapeable, but we're also born, if you like, with different souls, different soul-styles and different soul-personae. So there are these two considerations, if we're really looking at the whole thing. There are these two kind of balancing considerations. Yes, we have individual soul-styles and soul-personae that we seem to be thrown into this world *with* or *as*, if you like, *and* all of it is trainable and malleable.

But just another brief point to consider is that also the kind of Dharma that one might gravitate towards might also be determined by – of course amongst other factors, so it's not going to be just one consideration – but it might be determined, amongst other factors by, for instance, this capacity. Do I have the capacity to really open the energy body, for instance? And related with that is the possibility: is it possible for me to feel devotion? Is it possible to have a sense of divinity and dimensionality, without which devotion remains fairly flat? So all these factors will determine to some extent, will contribute to determining what kind of Dharma one gravitates towards. If there isn't the capacity to open the energy body, there might not be the capacity to give oneself in devotion, in a really deep way that feels deep in the sense of permeating the levels of the soul and the body and the heart. And so that one is less drawn to a Dharma, for instance, like Soulmaking Dharma, that tends to talk in religious terms and soul-terms and devotion and divinity and all that. One may of course, again, avoid the kind of *samādhi* practice in the sense of *jhāna* practice, etc.

But it might be that, again, these factors, our capacities here or our trainings here – maybe that's a better way of saying it – our training of our capacities here may well determine, as I said earlier, our direction, not just in practice, but in life. That is not to say that any one Dharma direction is better or worse. That's just a completely irrelevant thing to try and measure – is Soulmaking Dharma better than this Dharma or Mahāsi or ...? Just not interested. But there are different styles, and different souls will be called to different styles. But the question, again, is: am I permitting my being, my life, my soul, my practice to be called where it is truly called, if you like, or is it constrained by just a habit of, for instance, the energy body not being open, and that limiting then my sense of capacity to open to any sense of divinity, etc., which just tends to make me not interested in certain paths? Great if it's kind of, let's say, intrinsic to my being that I choose this path over that path. *Less* great if I'm propelled in one direction rather than another only if my choice of direction is limited and constrained by habit, indoctrination, fear, whatever it is.

[56:20] But I'm reminded of, I think I quoted it in the *Eros Unfettered* talks – it's an aphorism that Nietzsche wrote in his *Beyond Good and Evil*, and he said (sorry for the gender language that he wrote in back then), "The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit."<sup>4</sup> In a way, he's talking about the same thing: the way we are with the body and our capacity or

ability to open that body in surrender, in abandon, in connection, to tolerate a lot of charge, a lot of energy – all that's intimately related with how we are sexually. Yeah? Now, this is obviously a fraught area, and there's all kinds of wounding people have, etc. But again, sometimes we can talk about different soul-styles, different sexual styles that are more or less intrinsic. Sometimes we're talking about no, a result of wounding or indoctrination or whatever it is, intimidation even. But there's a connection here between sexuality in the broader sense, and thus energy body in the broader sense that we're talking about, and also what path, and what spiritual path, and what spiritual possibilities actually open up for us. [58:07] I know that's loaded, and it can be tender territory for people, but I hope you can understand the point I'm making without any temptation to judge yourself or something like that. Again, these are things to consider, things to reflect on: is it relevant for me?

Okay, so again, we're going to say this again: it's not that one path is better or worse than another. What I want, am I free to choose? And am I free to choose according to what I love, and what my soul feels drawn to, and what makes sense to me? One point.

Second point, to repeat: yes, I think we can talk about different soul-styles, different soul-personae that we are born with, that we are given. I am given my soul. You know, how did it come to be that I'm like this? I'm given my soul, and it's a certain way, and it has certain tendencies and certain capacities, and other capacities are more limited, other tendencies are less developed, etc. So, yes, there's that. We can talk about being given a certain soul intrinsically, *and* we can talk about the trainability and malleability of our capacities, tendencies, inclinations, and what's available and accessible to us. Yeah? Really important.

[59:51] Okay, so there's another sense that we can talk about opening the energy body, meaning opening up in particular with regard to the image and the felt sense of the energy body. And I've put this out recently anyway, but I want to emphasize it to really make sure people get that sort of development or furthering of the teachings and the possibilities in this teaching of the energy body. We can, as I said, experience at any moment, whether we're with another, or with an object in nature, or just with ourselves in meditation, or just going about our day, we experience the energy a certain way – the energy of this body, or the energy between bodies, or whatever it is. There's a felt sense of that.

There's also an image of it, as I said before, as part of, if you like, one of the three, two of the three components of the energy body. But it's another step to then see or sense that experience of energy at any time, to experience it as imaginal. So often when people talk about energy body or subtle body, there's either an implicit or explicit tendency to, "We're talking about something real here. Maybe not everyone can perceive it. Maybe scientists would quibble with it or whatever. But we're talking about something real. The energy is like this. My energy was like that," etc. And that's all good and fine, but there's a kind of reification, basically, there: "This is how it is." What happens when the felt sense of energy or the image of energy is actually seen, sensed, conceived of, and felt as image?

There are all kinds of possibilities here. You know, it could be that the body is experienced as a body of flames. That's a clear image. That image can then become more fully imaginal, in the sense that we've talked about, as the nodes and the elements of the imaginal light up. The body can be imagined as sand, dense sand, or as I said, a kind of etheric light, etc. But it's another thing for that then to be seen as imaginal, and sensed and related to as imaginal. Yeah?

[1:02:45] The other day, I was practising in a dyad, and there was a sense of our bodies and the field between our bodies being liquid. But I'm not just using that as a metaphor: "Oh, it feels kind of, there's a kind of liquidity." It was actually really *sensed* as image. Not a visual image, but almost a kinaesthetic image. The sense of the energy body, we can almost decide to see it as imaginal, rather than I just kind of accept it as an experience, and the default view of most experience is *not* to see it as image, *not* to conceive of it as image.

Again, if we talk about the elements and the art of imaginal practice, sometimes things just shift by themselves and open by themselves, ignite by themselves, certain elements. Sometimes it's just from noticing a certain element that it ignites further. The flame ignites more, and then it can ignite other elements. And sometimes we can just decide to ignite an element. In this case, sometimes you'll find, if you experiment with this, you can just decide to see and feel and sense the energy body, the very sense of the energy body, the very sense of energy as imaginal. So, for instance, it's neither real nor not real, the imaginal Middle Way, the theatre-like quality. And that little, small but significant shift actually changes the whole experience quite noticeably, quite dramatically. And as I said, it can then become fully imaginal. That very perception of energy body or perception of energy becomes imaginal or can become more fully imaginal.

[1:04:46] I think I shared on the last retreat, Justin suggested to me one day (I don't know when it was, a year ago, I can't remember), rather than the energy body, you could talk about the imaginal body or the poetic body. I like those terms. I think any terms we use are going to have their particular limitations and difficulties that come from them, or they spawn certain difficulties. For example, I think in the definition we've given of energy body, the most normal, conventional experience of body – a solid body with a reductionist materialist view, etc., and just the usual sensations we might have of the pressure of my backside on the chair, my feet on the floor, etc. – in the definition we gave at the beginning of energy body with the three aspects (felt sense, image, and idea), that would just constitute one place on the spectrum of possible energy body experience. If we call something imaginal body, the problem arises that that conventional experience, that very normal, common experience that most people have of their body, is not imaginal, so the word 'imaginal' doesn't really fit, and sometimes it's very non-poetic either. So then do we talk about two kinds of experience, an energy body experience and an imaginal or poetic body, and where exactly do you draw the line? So I like these words or these terms, imaginal body and poetic body, because they open up the sense, through the vocabulary, they open up, they remind us to open up to the possibilities there.

[1:06:49] Another difficulty I probably have with either imaginal body or poetic body as words – and there are all kinds of difficulties with 'energy body' as a term, but with imaginal and poetic body, there's also they don't tend to connote too much the primacy and the sort of primary importance of the felt sense. So poetic body can often be, for some people, it might just be disconnected from the body, you know. There's no sense of feeling anything; it's just a poetic idea, etc. So we could use all three words interchangeably or whatever. But really I want to encourage the digestion of this expansion of the teaching of energy body to include the image of the body and the idea, and the image we have might be imaginal – fully imaginal, or more or less fully imaginal – and that's part of the energy body experience, if we're going to use that term.

[1:07:58] As I said, this, if you like, flipping the switch or igniting a certain node to see and sense the experience of energy at any time as imaginal, and not just as an experience of energy, has all kinds of effects. If you have enough experience with the energy body, as we've been talking about it, you may want to experiment with this next step, sort of bumping it up a little, if you like – not all the time; doesn't have to be. But just to, again, open up other possibilities that are, as I said, quite noticeable and dramatic in the effect there.

Sometimes you might be working in a dyad, and there's a lot of eros, for example, and there might be, you know, a sexual image that comes up as part of the dyad, as part of the practice there. If that's okay in the dyad – we haven't talked about this yet in the teaching, but I'm just mentioning it, really, to illustrate something else. So there's the dyad, there's eros, there's sexual eros and attraction, and sexual energy, but it's not really imaginal, or only part of the whole thing is imaginal. Maybe I feel like I'm imaginal, my sense of myself, but the other isn't, or vice versa, or whatever. So I'm just seeing them as a sort of – I don't know what you'd call it – a non-imaginal other, and myself as I've become more imaginal, or the other way around. It doesn't matter, the principle.

One could then, for instance, decide, like I said, to see the energy, to feel the energy, to conceive of the energy there – in this case, the sexual energy and the energy that might be even part of a sexual image that's arising – one might decide to see it as image, as imaginal. As I said, it's that shift. What needs to be there, what factors need to ignite to make that shift? And again, with that, then, it might be that the whole, not just the texture of the experience and the range and dimension of the experience, but also what opens in the whole experience might change. For instance, it might be that then where *I* was image but the other wasn't, and there was just this sexual energy, and it wasn't quite imaginal, etc., then *both*, for instance, might become subsumed – self and other might become imaginal. The eros, itself, the sexual image, the images, the energy and the desire, the sexual energy, the desire – all of that might then ignite. And the sense then may be, for instance, participating mystically in some kind of cosmic sacrament. This is the sort of, again, with the participation and the cosmopoiesis and the dimensionality, so this attraction here, this sexual image here, has other dimensions, cosmic dimensions. It's a holy sacrament that has its roots, its origins in the *mundus imaginalis*, in the world of images. And everything becomes imaginal there. So that's one example of the kind of thing that might open.

[1:12:05] I'll give one more example just to end tonight. Again, we're talking about the impact of that shift. I was practising in a dyad, and the person I was practising with was gazing at me and describing her experience, and almost all of what she was describing was the energy body experience. And I was very sensitive to her gestures. I felt very sensitive to her gestures, her words, and her energy. And the concertina opened for me. Again, what we mean by 'concertina' as one of the elements, one of the nodes, is the sort of spread of potential images, of the sort of incipient or inchoate images, waiting in the wings, so to speak, around a central perception, so they're not sort of fully present or fully dominant there. But nothing really ignited to become fully imaginal as I was there and she was describing her energy body experience, and I was there with that sensitivity and the sense of the concertina. So something felt slightly blocked in the process, despite my partner there having strong energy openings which she was describing to me. There was a lot of energy, and she was being very careful and mindful in attending to it, and opening to it, and sharing it, etc. And then I asked her at a

certain point, “That perception of energy, is it an imaginal perception?” She got it immediately: “Ah, very good.” And it shifted as a result of my just dropping that in, or she did something inside to shift it to an *image* of energy, so the energy openings she was feeling and sensing were regarded as imaginal, as I said.

The point I want to make now is partly a point about the effects of that, but partly a point about dyad practice, because when she did that, I felt *my* experience open up to image. So what had felt a little blocked in *my* experience, from my end, like the whole thing wasn’t fully imaginal, there was just sort of potential there in the wings, the concertina, but something felt a little bit like it wasn’t quite igniting. So that’s really interesting – *her* experience changed and *my* experience changed. This is, for me, really interesting, again, about the effects of this – I don’t know what we call it – shift of level, if you like, of sensing energy as image, as imaginal image, and the capacity to do that, and what happens when we do that.

Second point is: wow, that’s really interesting about dependent arising of experience in a dyad. My experience depended on a subtle shift in how *she* viewed *her* experience. So again, something happens. We may or may not, as I said in the opening talk, get into some teachings about dyad practice in this series of talks, but I’m saying this now, so I’ll just say it: something happens in one person, in one unit of the dyad or component of the dyad, if you use the technical language, and something correspondingly is then allowed to open in the other and in the dyad as a whole. So, yes, the significance and power of the option of sensing the energy body or the energy field between two people imaginally, sensing it with soul, rather than just as kind of plain experience or fact or whatever, which is the default and implicit way we tend to sense energy, if we sense it at all.

But secondly, this kind of, I find really fascinating and mysterious sense of what happens between two people when one person has a certain shift or makes a certain shift in their experience (in this case, as I said, viewing the energy as imaginal, rather than just as energy), and how that then affects the dyad, affects the other person’s experience, and affects the whole range of what then is possible.

Okay. I think I’ll stop there for this evening.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Rob Burbea, “Energy Body: Instructions (1)” (7 Aug. 2015), <https://dharmaseed.org/teacher/210/talk/31525/>, accessed 19 March 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Rob Burbea, *Samatha Meditation* (30 March–2 April 2007), <https://www.dharmaseed.org/retreats/1308/>, accessed 19 March 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Rob Burbea, *The Art of Concentration (Samatha Meditation)* (8–12 Aug. 2008), <https://dharmaseed.org/retreats/1183/>, accessed 19 March 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, “Chapter IV: Apophthegms and Interludes.”