Week 7 Spiritual Rebirth

As we progress on the journey we increasingly feel the limitations of self. We start to see our ingrained habits more clearly, with less self-delusion, self-justification and blame. We can’t help underestimating the sheer blind habit of selfhood. The most important thing is *wholeness –* wherethinking and feeling flow together in a new unity and all our energies are aroused in a single act of perception. This new faculty of wholeness – intelligent but not heady, richly felt but not merely emotional – takes us beyond the threshold of ‘being-me’.

Spiritual rebirth arises spontaneously from spiritual death. Once we’ve seen through the delusion of self-attachment a continuous stream of self-less mental states arise. We see ‘things as they are’ without distortion or attachment. Our mind, no longer circling back to ‘me’, naturally reaches out to others in empathy. We enter a magical realm where the usual ways of thinking and perceiving no longer obtains. Even concepts of space and time are transcended. Language fails…The boundary we usually impose between ourselves and the world dissolves and we’re freed, momentarily at least, from the unquenchable thirst to be someone, do something, get somewhere.

Dharma life means setting up the conditions, internally and externally, for *dharma-niyama* processes to flow more and more freely:

* *internally* by cultivating integration and positive emotion: taking full responsibility for our lives and making an effort to live more ethically.
* externally by helping create conditions that support a truly human life. Eventually, a new order of conditionality arises within us because ‘self’ has got out of the way. This new order of conditionality can only arise to the degree to which we have spiritually died.

We need to guard against literalism:

We are creatures who take things literally. We have apredisposition to see the world ‘out there’ as really existing, from its own side, independent of our perceiving faculties.

We therefore have a very strong tendency to make a *thing* out of the ever-changing flux of reality. Our tendency to literalize has practical consequences: it’s stops us going deeper. Two types of literalism

* *dismissive literalism*, where we dismiss whatever goes beyond our commonsense assumptions as superstitious and fanciful
* *credulous literalism* where we take things literally in the credulous sense

Self cannot will what is beyond self. Spiritual rebirth can’t be taught – we have to catch it from people who are more in touch with it. Our belief in ourselves as a fixed, really existing thing in a world of fixed really existing things, is wrong – we’re taking experience literally.

Varieties of spiritual rebirth

* *Experiences of ‘heightened significance’ –* The form is still there, if anything more vividly so, and yet at the same time some mystery pervades it, some open-endedness.
* *Experiences of beauty* unification of pleasure and meaning. Time seems suspended, and, as we step out of our endless desiring, we feel finally satisfied, at least for a while.
* *Experiences of meaning –* The problem with the language of ‘meaning’ is we can assume ‘meaning’ to be essentially conceptual. It is often felt as a kind of atmosphere, particularly a shared atmosphere.
* *Experiences of un-selfish love*

Spiritual rebirth, by definition, is indefinable: we need to be careful not to try to pin it down.

Reality, or to put it more simply, life, is patterned. It has certain regularities. When we act positivity in accordance with *karma-niyama* processes, we create a different kind of mind. Creating this new mind is the great task of the dharma life.

What we actually need is confidence in *karma-* and *Dharma- niyama* processes

*Dharma-niyama* processes are always pulling on us. The trouble is, lots of other things are pulling on us as well. The journey is therefore about aligning ourselves more and more with the pull of reality. Without some glimpse of spiritual rebirth we’ll drift back to the laissez-faire nihilism that surrounds us. The primary way in which we ‘cultivate’ spiritual rebirth is by discovering, enriching and uplifting our imagination.

***Imagination***

*What it isn’t*

* *Not just about Art* And not about ‘fancy’. Fancy is about rearranging the usual contents of the experience in new, arbitrary combinations without changing their fundamental character. Fantasy is fundamentally to do with wish-fulfillment. It seduces us away from the real issues of life by peddling make-believe solutions. We can indulge in spiritual fantasy as well.
* *Not necessarily about images* Imagination is a faculty we all share, but we may not be aware of it and it may not function very strongly in our lives. We need to recognize, educate and cultivate our imagination so that it becomes a more and more central to our way of being in the world

What it is

The way we can tell if imagination has entered into our life is whether we have been taken a little beyond ourselves.Imagination always goes beyond our present way of seeing into a deeper, more integral sense of how things are.Imagination is the synthesis of reason, emotion and the senses. Genuinely imaginative experience has all the rigour of intellectual thought.

***Imagination is characterized by:***

* Aliveness: something *unwilled* enters our experience, something uncanny. It – art work, visualized figure in meditation is felt to be alive.This ‘aliveness’ in turn transforms *us.*
* *Discovery:* Imagination is characterized by a sense of discovering some deeper truth. What is discovered through imagination is truer, richer and more complete.
* *Unity*: Imagination unifies the contents of experience by discovering something within them, some underlying meaning and significance, inaccessible to ordinary consciousness.
* *Playfulness:* Imagination often comes in sideways, when we least expect it.
* *Ascent***:** Imagination has the capacity to ascend further and further beyond self-attachment

Practice

Spend some time this week deepening your engagement with the arts. Make time for those aspects of life that have within them a touch of the imagination: read a good novel for an evening, go to a gallery, read some poems everyday

Spend more time in the natural world (as the basis of imagination) The deeper experience goes, the more unwarranted and auspicious it feels. Deeper experiences bring us closer to nature, because ‘deeper’ always means ‘less self’. Less *self* equals more *world*

Carry on with the Mindful Walk

Daily meditation – practicing Buddhanu Smirti x 3 times in the coming week.

(On this evening especially start getting them to think about how they are going to carry on the Journey i.e. what weekly class will you go to; booking on a retreat; taking the next step :joining a class team for instance)

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate spiritual death (in the provisional sense) during the week, so as to share with the whole class

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read the poem.