

Guidance for Week 7, 178-184

The reading for this week continues with a theme that we discussed in the phone call this past Sunday: the self, along with its ignorance of how time's dynamic unfolds, are both 'given' by time. Notice the way in which the first paragraph of the reading, given in the form of a commentary on the previous exercise, relates this idea to the earlier description (on page 149) of 'feeding time into time'. Notice also that the self's failure to understand time's dynamic is linked here to a particular attitude or orientation to experience; namely, one of "rigidity" and "lethargy." Can you find this connection in your own experience?

The reading offers a new suggestion for a more open approach to time at an experiential level (179): that we work with the self as it emerges from time. This is not necessarily easy, because usually the sense of self is already included as part of each moment of experience. To understand what is being said here, you will want to look at the previous set of exercises, since the discussion doesn't make sense without them. Of course, the central focus is on what is described here as the 'zig-zag structure' of this more experiential approach to 'timing'.

On page 182, Rinpoche uses a couple of words that are related to the way we physically walk. One is the idea of 'reeling along', which suggests the way someone who is drunk would walk: almost a stagger. The other refers to the possibility of being off-balance. It is worth remembering that our ordinary way of walking is as a kind of controlled falling: we fall forward and catch ourselves, fall forward and catch ourselves, etc. In other words, our usual way of going from point A to point B consists of a steady sequence of moments of being off-balance. This is a good metaphor for what it means to maintain a linear temporal point of view. It is also a good set up for Exercise 23, Going without Going, which is a real favorite for people on TSK retreats (at least, I like to assign it). Again, you could try doing this exercise, even though it is not assigned. The instructions suggest doing the exercise for at least 20 minutes at a time. After all, we have years of experience reinforcing our usual linear way of being in time, so now we need to give ourselves "enough time" to explore other alternatives.

The reading suggests that once we begin to appreciate second-level stages of time, we may not be able to move unthinkingly from Point A to Point B. I don't think this is a real danger, in the sense that you will get lost on your way to Point B and never get there. But if you're worried about it, keep in mind we don't very often go from Point A to Point B anyway. Usually in a sequence that goes from A to B, we get drawn away into a whole different train of thought or experience that interrupts that sequence. It's like meditation: I focus on my breath, but between one breath and the next, I notice a sound or a pain or get lost in a memory, and so on. In that sense, the model that's presented here is actually a simplification. It might help you to think about the consequences of this greater complexity. Does it make any difference in terms of the experiential possibilities being described here?