

## Orientation Week 3 Reading: LOK Ch. 18, 'The World of the Self', pp. 147-152

At the end of the last chapter, Rinpoche introduced the idea that in the end, our guarantee for the reality of our experience is the feeling that something is real. He calls this feeling the witness.

Rinpoche also takes a further step, one that for us is especially important: he links the witness to the sense of the self as the one who is experiencing. In other words, it is not just a feeling that something is real, but my feeling that my experience is real. That is the starting point, the ground of all our experience. Rinpoche moves quickly here, and I urge you to look back at Chapter 5 of Love of Knowledge, where he lays the groundwork for this claim. You can also listen to the recording of this week's talk, where I talk about what Rinpoche discusses in that chapter.

This new focus on the self lets us enter the "different world" that Rinpoche mentions on p. 144. For the past few chapters, we have been exploring the interplay between knowledge and time: polar knowledge as the claimed structure of present experience, descriptive knowledge as past-centered foundation for the content of experience, and the more abstract, almost timeless knowledge that lets us build up a reality we can understand through concepts, models, and interpretations. But in all of these structures, something has been missing: the unmistakable sense of my experience and my world. It is like the elephant in the middle of the room that no one has been willing to discuss. I have been encouraging us to look at this sense of self in various ways, but the feedback I have received is that this is rather difficult. Now we can investigate the self and its world more directly.

At this point, we should start to recognize our ordinary world, the one that we live in, and the one that seems in key ways far too limiting and frustrating. But now we have some tools to analyze and to explore experientially the structures of that world, and in particular the fundamental structure of "the self and its world," or "me and my world."

Notice in the discussion that we once more enter into the relation between the self and time. But notice also that 'time' is now connected to the wants, the needs, and the desires of the self. All this is related to the "feel of the real" that constitutes the witness. Ultimately, it is related to that sharp distinction between "my subjective reality" and the "meaningless" world of technological knowledge that is described in Chapter 5.

We are going to move more and more into the realm of felt experience in the rest of this program. For now, we want to focus on the 'feel of the real': the witness who testifies to the truth of what we take to be real. Here are several practices you can work with. You probably don't want to try them all, or if you do, work with each exercise lightly and perhaps pick one to focus on more strongly.

1 Get familiar with this 'feeling' of reality. The example of the cup on the table in the previous chapter (p. 143), can be done as an exercise. You can work with objects, but also with internal events, such as memories, though in that case the relation of real and not real becomes more complicated.

2 Focus in the same way on the 'feel of the real', but put the emphasis on the experiencing of sensing rather than on what you sense. For instance, when you hear a bird singing, focus on the experience of hearing rather than on the bird. Is the sensation itself, apart from what is sensed, real? What does it mean to say that it is? To say that it isn't?

3 You can do the same inquiry in a more positive or transformative way. As you let experience arise from moment to moment, can you experience the feeling of each moment being real as experience shifts? Does this mean you have to let go of the previous moment? What about the stories and models that situate 'this real moment' of experience in a large temporal or spatial context? Do you have to let go of them also? Or could they be present differently? More generally, what pulls you away from the immediate 'feel' of the moment?

4 As you go through the day, are there times when experience does not feel real? Can you characterize those times? Are they related to times of the day? Types of experience? Attitudes and emotions? Can you work with this? Does it seem helpful or valuable to do so?