

Orientation Week 6 LOK Chapters 21-22

First, a reminder that the reading is different from what is listed in the syllabus. I have added chapter 21, so the reading is both chapter 21 and chapter 22 (Pages 169-182) . This makes the reading a little longer than usual, but only a little.

We are getting ready to bring together our two themes over the past few weeks: the possibilities of temporal knowledge, and the claims of the self, who presents itself as the one who unites experience across time and guarantees the reality of the real. As we will see in this week's reading, that claim of reality is best understood as a story. But before looking at that, we need to look at the many roles of the self. That is chapter 21. In chapter 22, we then turn back to consider what this understanding of the self has to tell us about time. Of course, our interest in time is not purely theoretical. By asking about time, we are asking about the operations and structures of the self.

Chapter 21 makes clear that the self is not only the witness (the role we have been looking at); that it plays a central role in every domain of our experience. We already saw this last week, when we looked at how the self tries to find satisfaction by turning to its own feelings. That is the self as owner of experience. You could also speak of the self as the one who enjoys experience, or the one who judges experience. But the categories here are broad enough to cover all these possibilities.

The really new element introduced in this chapter is the self as the interpreter and narrator. Now, we already looked at interpretation in an earlier chapter, where Rinpoche suggested that what we understand is real—no matter what 'candidate' for being real we put forward, is only an interpretation. Now we look at the self as the source of those interpretations. So you may want to review that chapter, and compare the distinction between self as interpreter and

self as narrator that is made on p. 170. The focus in this chapter is on the narrator.

I have personally found the description of self as narrator, and especially the idea that the self itself is a story told by the self—the ‘founding story’—to be enormously helpful. Here I want to add something to what is in the text. Usually we think of stories as something that is told, the way you might tell a friend the story of a movie you have seen. But what Rinpoche is talking about here seems to me to go much deeper. You might think of it as the story that we live, the story that we inhabit, in the same way that a character in a novel inhabits the story of that novel. We are always inhabiting one story or another, or perhaps several layers of stories at once. This way of looking at our experience seems to be very helpful. For one thing, it suggests that if we could inhabit a different story, or vary the story we inhabit right now, our experience would be very different. TSK could be understood as a way of making such variations possible at a very fundamental level.

Now, chapter 21 lays out in just a few pages the inner structure of the ‘self as witness’ model of reality that we were looking at earlier. Chapter 22 begins to challenge that story by looking into the dynamic of time. The discussion here is preliminary, but it lays the foundation for what will come. Ex. 22 is an experiential way of starting this same inquiry. I suggest that you try it out a few times during the week.