

Orientation Week 8 LOK Chapter 24 and p. 216

We are exploring the idea that we are trapped at a very superficial understanding of experience, and that because of this superficial understanding, we have placed limits on our own freedom, or own ability to experience more fully and to act on our own values.

What can we say about this superficial level, and about how we could go deeper? A key concept here is that the 'witness' gives us the sense of what is real, but we have distorted what the witness has to tell us by letting the self claim ownership of the witness. The exercise for examining this is simply to watch the narrative self and the owner self whenever they speak up, and in particular to look at how we are not in control of our selves: we do what we do not want to do, we do not do what we think is valuable, and we have only limited ability to change the way we react to new situations and to direct our attention toward our own goals and projects.

Because the structure of the self depends so strongly on a particular understanding of time, we have looked in quite a bit of detail at the structure of time. Here too, it seems we are trapped at a superficial level. We 'understand' how time appears from moment to moment (even though this understanding does not hold up very well when we question it), but we do not understand the dynamic of time. That is why we have been working with Exercises 22 and 23, which ask us to make contact with this dynamic, to go to a "a time . . . prior to all meanings" (193).

Chapter 24 starts by reminding us that this situation and these limits are not always present in the same way. Sometimes we seem able to go to a deeper level, to be "sharp, penetrating, and one-pointed." Then it invites us to go into a detailed analysis of the self, and guides us carefully through the obstacles that arise when we try to do this. It links these problems to our usual understanding of time, and then looks back at how this relates to the witness.

All of this can be understood as a presentation in a new way of material from earlier chapters, a summary and an invitation to move further. Look carefully at what is said here about stories as they relate to the witness. As the chapter says (197), "the witness can only be witness if it is more than another story . . ."

Included in the reading for this week are two paragraphs from Chapter 26 that explore a way in which the self might 'go along with' the kind of questioning we have been doing, but only up to a certain point. The suggestion here is that it is natural to feel a certain resistance to questioning. We will explore this same point further in the reading for next week, our last in this current program.