

## Winter 2011 The Stream of Thinking Week 2 Orientation

Since we will be doing the same reading for this week, I will use this Orientation to review some of the main themes in light of what came up in the phone call.

We are looking at thinking and how it covers up the availability of space and the possibility of freedom that space offers. Michael brought up a good point: what if I'm not particularly motivated to want to connect with space, what if it seems empty and uninteresting to me, and the idea that it offers freedom is too abstract or remote to change that perception?

One possible answer is to think differently about what it is that thoughts (or "the operation of the thinking mind") covers up: not space, but the immediacy of experience. When we are involved in thoughts, we are removed from experience. To borrow an image that Rinpoche uses somewhere, trying to experience with the thinking mind is like trying to feel a fur coat with gloves on. Whether we think in terms of space or in terms of immediate experience, the point is the same (at least to begin with). The rich and nourishing part of what life offers us is not available.

The practice I suggested in the phone call and for the coming week is to direct your attention to sense experience and then see how thoughts come up against that background. As I mentioned, you can look out for two kinds of thoughts. The first, distracting thoughts, take us away from sense experience entirely. The second is the kind of thought that comments on experience, judging it, comparing it, connecting it with other experiences, etc. It's good to look at both kinds of thoughts. Airi found that thoughts connected to sensations were lighter and more malleable. I don't think we dealt adequately with that in the phone call, but it would be an interesting topic to explore online.

After the practice, Linda brought up the question of the connection between thoughts and emotions. The nature of this link is very fruitful to examine. Do thoughts trigger emotions? Do emotions give rise to thoughts? Are the two even separate. Is there such a thing as a thought without an emotion? An emotion without a thought?

Finally, Bruce suggested that there was at least one kind of thought that seemed useful in the practice: the reminder-thought that makes you go back to sense experience. My question here is whether the realization of having drifted away comes first, followed by the thought, or whether the thought is the carrier of the realization. Or is this even the right model?

I didn't say much about the idea of thought-forms in the phone call, so let me give an example I was thinking of recently. I've been up at Odiyan, the Nyingma country center. Odiyan has several dogs, whose job it is to guard the ducks and other waterfowl, and they have been trained to know that there are certain places they can't go. It's as if there is an invisible line that they can't cross over. That invisible line is a good example of a thought-form in space. Space has been carved up, and freedom has literally been taken away. Notice that this happens without language: the concept itself shapes the thought. Of course, it's not just animals. For instance, we may train ourselves not to think about certain parts of our lives. As the current idiom has it (new idioms often have knowledge close to the surface), we "don't go there."