

Winter 2011 The Stream of Thinking  
Week 3 Orientation DTS 53-56

We are looking for the best ways to investigate thinking and thoughts: their arising, their nature, their impact on our lives. Last week we discussed the fact that there are two different kinds of thought. The first is the thought that takes us away from present (perceptual experience.) When this kind of thought happens, we get lost in the thought, we wander off, we daydream. But these ways of describing things are a little misleading. We are not so much the one who does something (for example, get lost in a thought). Instead, we are more the one to whom something is done. It seems more accurate to say we are kidnapped by the thought, or pulled into its orbit the way a star pulls a comet into its orbit (what the reading refers to as the thought's gravitational pull. Thoughts happen, and we respond.

The second kind of thought is when we think 'about' something that is happening. We walk out the front door and think about how cold it is; we see someone wearing a dress, and think about its striking color. The difference between this kind of thought and the first is that the thought does not take us somewhere else. But it does take us away from the immediacy of the experience. The thought comments on the experience, and while the comment is 'passing through' our minds, it takes over, leaving no room for the experience itself.

The reference in the reading to the field communiqué is more obviously related to the first kind of thought, but it applies to both. In both cases, a new thought seems to establish a 'field' that determines what is real. You could think of it as a "thought of the whole." In the first case, the thought of the whole marks a radical shift in what is happening in our experience. In the second case, more like what we might call a "simple, ordinary thought," the thought affirms what is happening and gives it a slightly different flavor. But in affirming what is so, it also amounts to a thought of the whole.

For instance, I might say to myself, "It's too hot in here." This is a simple thought, one that takes shape in words, and it affirms the basic structure of the way things are: me, here, in this room, feeling discomfort, etc. But suppose I don't notice that thought, but instead find myself having a fleeting image of the sun burning down on a desert, perhaps with a slight sense of having been walking through sand that shifts underneath me and makes forward progress difficult. This is the more global kind of thought. In that moment, the field communiqué shifts in fairly fundamental ways. Still, both are thoughts.

These are just some reflections meant to suggest the kinds of things you might look for in your own thinking. We want to be looking at the nature of thoughts, at whether they take form in words, images, or other ways, etc. As I've mentioned, we may have to do this retrospectively. That is, I realize that I have been lost in a thought. Now it is finished, and I can look back on it and get a sense of its content, but also of the form it took: of the thought of an action. That is the basic practice.

In the phone call, I also asked you to do a different practice. Imagine an orange ball. You can do this with eyes open or closed, and the ball can change in size, color, intensity; in its relation to you and location in respect to you. The basic idea is that the imagined image of a ball is itself a kind of thought, and by doing this exercise, you are taking more active control of your thoughts than we usually do.

In the reading for this week, notice the discussion at the end about the difference between thoughts and direct experience. Is Rinpoche saying that there is no such thing as direct experience? Or is he saying that if we do contact experience directly, we have no way of going into that experience without making it the object of a thought? Or is the point something different entirely?