

Winter 2011 The Stream of Thinking
Week 5 Orientation DTS 57-58

In this past Sunday's phone conversation, several people raised the question of the relation between thoughts and a more feeling-based (or affective) kind of experience as their base or foundation. Some people had a sense of the feeling as rich and positive, others were more aware of something possibly fearsome. Others linked it to a 'readiness' to have the thought. This is an interesting and important question, one well worth pursuing.

One way to think about the connection is that thoughts give form to an inchoate feeling. In effect, they crystallize it. Once the feeling has been thought, it has a name, and we know how to react to it. It may help us come in contact with the feeling; on the other hand, it may be a way of covering up the feeling. Since a couple of people commenting on this have a background in psychology, let me cite a book by a therapist that has interesting things to say about this: Donnel Stern, *Unformulated Experience*.

There is also a different way to conceive of this, which is that the thought comes first. This goes against our usual understanding. The idea is that as the thought takes form, it establishes the feeling that it then presents itself as naming.

This second alternative may or may not be true. But it fits well with Rinpoche's suggestion (p. 56) not to look for explanations for why a particular thought arises. Explanations are themselves a kind of thought, so explaining the thought in terms of a more fundamental foundation in feeling may not help that much. And at a deeper level, the seemingly undeniable sense of a realm of feeling that underlies thought may itself be the product of an establishing thought.

The pages we read for this week are very playful, but they are playful for a reason. We want to see if there is a way to engage thoughts—and their contents—without establishing anything. The way proposed in the text is playful and symbolic: to put it in language like that found in the reading, that's the point.