

Winter 2011 The Stream of Thinking
Week 7 Orientation DTS 246-247

In this week's phone call, we ended with a short practice based on the first sentence of Exercise 1 of Dynamics. We will focus on this exercise (and its commentary) in a couple of weeks, but let's start with its practice now and continue to explore it.

The sentence we are focusing on says, "As thoughts and sensations come up, look within each arising moment for the quality of awareness it contains." Let me repeat a point I made in the discussion that followed the practice this morning, and that seems to me central: our usual assumption is that when we look at awareness, we are looking away from the content of the experience and toward the subjective pole of experience (the one that is aware.) However, the instruction is very carefully written to avoid that dualistic understanding. As the text says, awareness is found within the moment. It does not belong to anyone.

There is another important clue contained in this short sentence. Awareness can have different qualities, and the suggestion is for us to be sensitive to those qualities. Several people commented in the chat session that doing this exercise made experience seem richer, more open, more alive, etc. This greater aliveness seems to me to be the same as a quality of awareness with which we are not ordinarily familiar. Focusing on the quality of the awareness does not mean that we lose sight of the 'object' of awareness, so that experience becomes gray, or perhaps 'chaotic (Tina's comment), though that may also happen. Rather it adds new depths and dimensions to the experience.

The paragraphs we read for this week make use of the concept of a 'source-from' understanding. You may want to look at the main discussion of this concept in the text, which is found on pp. 188-190 (chapter 18). The discussion there offers some valuable theoretical insights. As an alternative to a 'source-from' understanding, chapter 18 suggests a knowledge that is 'prior' to appearance, prior to all pointing out. As it says, the prior can become primary. The natural question is how this 'prior' knowledge relates to the quality of awareness, and also to the several questions and possibilities introduced in the few short paragraphs that make up our reading for this week. As usual, Rinpoche manages to fit a vast array of possibilities into just a few words and sentences.