

Opening Unknown Time
Fall 2012

Introduction

This year we investigate time. In terms of readings, the structure of the course is simple. We will work our way slowly and carefully through Part Two of *Dynamics of Time and Space*. We will read and review only a few pages each week, which means that (as currently planned) we will take 4 six-week sessions to complete Part Two, finishing in the Fall of 2013. Taking the course this Fall does not commit you to doing the whole four-program sequence. You can step out at any time.

The readings for the course play an important role. They will guide us deeper into how we experience time and encourage us to develop a new vision of what it means to live in time—to live ‘timefully’. The heart of the program, however, is not the readings, but your own experience. The goal is to change your relationship to time: to live time differently.

How can you bring about this changed relationship, this ‘timeful’ way of being? The answer has two parts. The first has to do with your own individual practice. The second has to do with how we can sustain each other as an ongoing community of inquiry. Each supports and makes possible the other.

Let’s start with individual practice. My hope is that each of you will make a commitment—to yourself, to me, and to the others taking the program—to actively investigate the operation of time in your own life. The readings and sessions will support you in this, but you are the one who needs to be actively investigating. I don’t expect that you will do this 24 hours a day, but I do expect that you will find opportunities each day to do this inquiry. This kind of daily inquiry, carried out over weeks or months, can initiate a kind of slow-motion revolution: a way of putting into operation a new vision of reality, a new way to engage the world.

Now, the beauty of this kind of inquiry is that it can happen within your daily activities. There is a lot of value to practicing TSK intensively: setting aside time for daily practice of TSK exercises or going on retreat. But there is just as much value in asking what is happening as you go about your life. How are you engaging the past or the future right now? How does your relationship to time change from one moment to the next? You can ask these questions without setting aside time to do so. In fact there is a special power in taking this approach, because as you do, the ordinary can become extraordinary. You might be practicing TSK inquiry as you take the bus to work, or while you eat lunch or look out the window, or have a casual conversation. You may decide to look into the operation of time as it unfolds during a particular activity—say, cooking dinner—or you might remind yourself by setting a timer, or whenever the thought strikes you.

However you do this kind of inquiry, make it a habit, like brushing your teeth (another good opportunity!) Five minutes of this kind of practice can lead to new questions and new insights. Even 30 seconds of real questioning matters. Of course, any form of question will eventually get stale, so you will have to reinvent the nature of the inquiry. But as you engage the practice more and more, this will happen spontaneously. Just how this works will become more clear as we go along.

The second foundation for learning to live timefully is the support of the community of inquiry constituted by this class. All of us have learned a particular way of living in time and understanding time, and we mostly take it for granted. Now we want to challenge what we have learned, to do it differently. But custom and habit make it difficult to do this. You’re just one person, thinking your own thoughts, having your own experiences, and there is tremendous pressure to fall back into the usual ways of engaging time, the ways you are used to and the ways that everyone else accepts without ever even thinking about it. That’s why this class can be an important support. Together, we can carve out a ‘place’ where it makes sense to ask questions about time and share our experiences as we do so. Together, we can get deeply involved in time. Revolutionary acts are seldom carried out by individuals in private.

That’s the purpose of the discussion group on the website. In past years, the discussion group has not been all that active, but I would like to encourage you to make it the home for a real community of inquiry. (On the other hand, if some of you prefer to create a community differently—meeting together face-to-face, creating a group on Facebook or Google+, emailing or twittering—that’s fine too. Let us know what you’re doing, and perhaps that will become the

method of choice for others.)

I am not going to try to organize the community. That will be up to you. I'm thinking, however, that I may give you assignments to post online some of your observations, reflections, or questions. (If I do, I'll try to make sure that you have technical support to deal with the mechanics of doing so. Without support by others, your own intention to make time (and your relationship to time) a focus for inquiry will be a lot more difficult to sustain. I recently heard someone speak in this connection about creating 'heroic communities', communities that can support heroic efforts. And the effort we want to make is truly heroic, because it calls for a continuing, sustained investigation of a dimension of experience that ordinary knowing is always trying to cover over.

The reading for Week One invites us to question our usual assumptions about time. In the transition and guidance for Week 2, I will have more to say about how this questioning can begin to take form.

Finally, a reminder at the outset: the kind of questioning we want to do here is exhilarating, even if we only practice it a minute or two at a time at various points throughout the day. Relax, enjoy yourselves, and let the joy of inquiry, openness and discovery be your guide.

Opening Unknown Time Fall 2012 Orientation and Guidance for Session 2

We didn't discuss much of the assigned reading for Week One in the phone call, so we will look at it again next week. But for now, the most important point is get familiar with time. As one moment unfolds, how does it lead into the next? Don't expect to know the answer, don't expect to see this unfolding. It's better to see that you don't have an answer.

For instance, as I write these words, I don't have any clear sense of how one word follows the next. I don't know how the future emerges. In some sense, I know the words I will be typing in the future, and the past (in this case, the notes I took to myself earlier in the day, and the record they left that is available in the present) is a part of what has happened/ is happening/will happen. But what is the connection that links up these three dimensions of time? We can't let the usual answers—the usual *not-knowing*—close off inquiry.

Let's start the inquiry from a very open place. We all know something about the three dimensions (if that's the right word!) of time, but how are those three dimensions related to one another? For instance, if I remember something that happened to me this morning, how is my present act of remembering related to the past experience that I remember? When I remember something, am I really living in that past moment? Am I connecting to it? Is the past moment real? Was it real while it was happening? Is the past any more than the present memory of the past? Is the future any more than the present imagination of the future? If the answer is yes, what does this 'more' consist of? If the answer is no, how does the past have the power to form the present, and how does the future give us a way to 'live into it'?

In the first *TSK* book, Rinpoche suggests (Ex. 19: 'Past, Present, Future of Each Moment') that each present moment has a past and a future 'tinge' to it. This is related to the sentence we discussed from the first paragraph of the reading, which tells us that "We take form from the past and live forward into the future." It is also connected to two forms of knowledge discussed in some detail in *Love of Knowledge*: 'descriptive knowledge' and intentional knowledge.

But there's no need to trace out those connections unless you want to. Instead, try making this into a 'walking around' practice. As you read these words, or as you make plans for this evening, can you find a past-present-future structure within each moment? Right now, looking for the right words to express that idea, I have in mind a future in which you are reading them. As you read them, you most likely don't 'have in mind' the past in which I wrote them, but you may have in mind some other past, as well as a future in which you actually try to do the practice (Or does this immediately become the present?)

This is the very basic—but very powerful—practice we can start with. Look for the past and future that form part of each present. If you think you've found them, don't try to hold on. In the next moment, your mind may go off in a different direction, abandoning the past-present-future of the previous moment. Sometimes our present present seems to be closely linked to a past that immediately preceded it. Other times it doesn't not all. We are always starting over.

There are countless other ‘places’ in your experience where you can see time at work. Here are a few suggestions:

Watch people on the street or in other public places. Can you get a sense of the past and future that inform their present?

Reflect on calendars and clocks. You have an appointment for 2 in the afternoon, and in due course, the time for the appointment arrives. What does this simple, ordinary fact tell us about time? Is there anything about this sequencing that misleads us with respect to the dynamic of time?

How does time relate to your emotions or moods?

How does your body move through/with time?

No matter how you question time as an active presence or structure in your life, questions lose their freshness. We look, we see more clearly, and then we get tired of seeing ‘the same thing’. This just means that you will have to reinvent your questions and come up with new ones. The reading can help here, offering new and unexpected vistas of time, new sources of inspiration. Most fundamental, however, is simply to care about time and how it affects you. You have to be willing to allow for the possibility that questioning time truly can work a slow revolution in your life. Go into the inquiry without expectations, open to what appears. It’s a serious training, but it’s also a lot of fun.