

**TSK Online Course, Fall 2012**  
**Orientation for Week 4 (Reading: DTS 82-85)**

[Reminder: We are not having a phone call next Sunday, November 18. The next phone call will take place at the usual time on November 25.]

We are used to thinking of time (like space) as a universal absolute: an objective reality that can be measured out precisely using our various ‘time-keeping’ devices. But as we have been exploring, the notion of absolute, objective time is only a tool we use to make sense of one aspect of time. It is not time itself. Time has more to do with the dynamic through which different ‘ppf structures’ emerge to shape ‘present’ experience and then give way to others.

We have been looking for ways to discover this dynamic in our experience, and I have emphasized in particular becoming familiar with the past-present-future structure that shapes each new moment. In the phone call, I suggested we could also look more carefully at just what constitutes a ‘moment’ of time. We practiced briefly with a piece of music, and people had a lot of interesting things to report about their experience.

Now, if time is not absolute and universal, infinitely divisible into identical units that stretch back to the first moment in time; if it does not include within its domain all moments from a hypothetical first moment right down to this present moment (which, by the way, is different for you as you read this than it is for me as I write it!), then what better understanding might be available?

Here the notion of lineage comes into play. We ended the last phone call with a brief discussion on this theme, and I also mentioned it in the Week 3 orientation. You might think of lineage as a bridge between the dynamic of time and the ppf structure of each temporal moment. In looking at it, we begin to focus in more specifically on our connection to the past.

The focus on lineage tells us that the past of each present arises in the form of a lineage. Each present moment (with its own ppf structure) has its own lineage, whether it is my present moment or your present moment, and those lineages differ from one another. In a sense, you could think of each present appearance as a summing-up of the lineage that led to its arising. Your present experience embodies the outcome of a temporal dynamic. That is what the term ‘lineage’ points toward.

You might want to take a moment to look around right now to see whether how this vision of lineage affects your experience. Notice that there are interacting lineages: the lineage of your present concern or focus of interest, the lineage of each object you see before you, the lineage of the interaction of the objects you see, the lineage of your own body, the shared lineage that brings you into contact with the persons you encounter, those persons’ ‘private’ lineages, etc. To take just one example, you could look at the books on a bookshelf with this image or concept in mind.

Approaching the reading for this week in this way amounts to an invitation to engage the new vision of reality that we discussed at the beginning of the last phone call. On first reading, the part of the chapter we are working with right now might seem to be fairly abstract. But that is true only because we think of time in such abstract ways. Ask yourself what the denial of universal, absolute time in favor of lineage really means in terms of the objects and situations you engage all day, every day, and the reading will come alive.

The reading for next week starts by “isolating out” a point in time. Rinpoche very quickly concludes that the only ‘point’ that will work for this purpose is the *first* moment in time. Do you get a sense that this conclusion arrives a bit too quickly, almost like a magician trying to get you to commit yourself to a particular choice before you realize the consequences? I have that suspicion myself. Try working it out for yourself. Is the ‘first moment’ special because it has no lineage? Is it even possible to think of a moment that has no lineage?