

Opening Unknown Time – Spring 2013

Orientation for Week 4

In the Week 3 phone call, we looked in more detail at the restrictive and restricting ways of conducting that we are naturally led into, based on naming and pointing out. As Rinpoche writes (125), “we do not know how to conduct our lives.” The exact wording here is important: we do conduct our lives, but we do not know how to do it; in other words, we do not know how to do it right, or to do it in ways that allow for freedom, openness, and creativity.

A starting point to learning ‘how’ to conduct is to stay open to the “multiple variations” that are always presenting themselves, but toward which we are “inattentive.” We worked in the phone call with a list from the text of variations that are left out: “thoughts that cannot be thought, concepts that cannot be framed, sensations that cannot be felt, experiences that cannot be had.”

When we tried as a practice during the phone call to stay open to such possibilities, people had trouble, and that is natural. For the most part, we only know how to conduct the same. Where else could we look? What else could we do? But I encourage you to keep looking, following the approach to practice the way that we have been exploring for some time now: short moments (a couple of minutes, or even less) of letting go of what is expected, of seeing what variations are available. As I suggested at the end of the phone call, one way to do this is to connect with your “heartfelt concerns.” (p. 123) This suggestion from the text, though presented here only in passing, is deeply important, because when we always conduct the same, we easily lose track of such concerns. This has a lot to do with why we experience so much suffering (for a powerful description of this suffering, see the three paragraphs starting on p. 124 with the words, “In this familiar world . . .”)

All this is by way of review. For the next reading (which takes us to the end of the chapter), we turn from what we conduct when we conduct the same, and focus instead on how our way of conducting time also conducts time itself. As the reading says, “There is actually something quite magical [going on here:] the dynamic that makes it possible for appearance to take form is actually a part of what appears.” There is a distinction being made here between time as a construct and time as somehow more fundamental.

Trying to get clear on this distinction involves taking another look at linear time in a fairly sustained way. We explore as well the relationship between time and ordinary consciousness. Gradually we shift from the metaphor of conducting time to the metaphor of constructing time. Of course, ‘constructing’ is also an activity that presumably requires time to take place. So how can we make any progress? The answer given in the final section of the chapter is that we need a different way of knowing.

As a clue into what this different way of knowing might be like, consider the passage I quoted during the phone call from TSK, p. xxxiv: We are looking for “an integrated, natural intelligence,” one that is not fragmented into “reason, emotions, sensations and intuition.” Compare this list to the list on p. 129 of DTS (first full paragraph and what follows). What is the link? What are the differences? How deep is the connection? Are we talking at two completely different levels?