

Session 10 Week 1, March 1

WIR 125-128, DTS 42-50, TSK Ex. 34

Orientation

Welcome to Session 10. In these six weeks, we finish reading the Space section of DTS and also read short selections from TSK, KTS, and SDTS. Sessions 11 and 12 will focus on knowledge.

First, some reminders and announcement of date changes. As you know, the retreat has been rescheduled to July 26-30, and this will have an impact on the timing for Sessions 11 and 12. There will be a three-week break before Session 11 starts on May 3. And then, due partly to my own schedule, there will be a long break before the start of Session 12. Session 11 ends June 7, and Session 12 starts August 2. I'm thinking I will use that break for an optional writing assignment (required, for those in the Teacher Training Program).

Now, as we start Session 10, let's take a moment to orient ourselves. In the last session, we worked through a lot of very rich material from DTS. As a quick and partial summary, based on Week 6, we could say that our focus on substance, content, and things limits what we can know. We rely on names and identities, and when it comes to our own identity that means we react to experience emotionality and with limited understanding. What is left out in all this is appreciation for space. This is not the physical space that we assume has to be there in order for physical objects to show up, but the allowing space in which appearance manifests from moment to moment. When we connect with space appearance is freed from the labels and claims of substance we impose on it.

In Chapter Six, which we read for this week, Rinpoche offers a new way to engage this idea. He suggests that we could 'flatten' space. This may well strike you as a surprising move. We are used to thinking that when we flatten something, we lose an important dimension, that "reality has been reduced in scope." (43) For instance, a two-dimensional photo can only hint at the three-dimensional reality it captures. This is something to reflect on carefully: Why is this move helpful?

Departing from the text, it might be useful to imagine flattening an emotion. Again, the natural tendency is to think that doing this means stripping away what is alive and rich. For instance, if someone is depressed, we say in English that they have a "flattened affect." In other words, they don't have emotionally 'appropriate' responses, such as being glad to see a friend. Nothing seems to matter very much.

Clearly, this is not what is being suggested here. So what is Rinpoche pointing toward? One clue is the Buddhist virtue of non-attachment (for an example picked almost at random, see *Gesture of Balance* 169. That idea is both well-known and commonly misunderstood, along exactly these lines: people assume that not being attached means not caring, when that is not it at all.

All this looks very different if we think of flattening the space within which the emotion appears. The emotion continues to appear, but its substance, its reality, the identities it relies on for the hold it has over us does not. Perhaps that gives us a clue as to what is being said here.