

TSK Online Program, Unit 11

Week 2 DTS 102-114, LOK Ex. 22

Transition and Orientation

Last week we looked at the witness as being equivalent to something like the ‘feel’ of the real. This ‘feel’ is there before the witness testifies, at least in the way usually understand what it means to give testimony. You could even say that we feel it most when the witness falls silent, and we find ourselves in tune with the underlying dynamic energy of time, with a deeper time in which the usual distinctions do not hold. We briefly practiced ‘Marriage of Sound and Breath’ (TSK Ex. 24), which, like other meditative practices in TSK, seems to allow for this kind of immediacy. Attuned to breath and sound and a kind of silence, we can at least glimpse what it would mean for knowing and being to be inseparable. Such moments are inherently nourishing, and a lot of meditation practice aims at evoking them (though not necessarily as the final aim of meditation practice).

So what gets in the way of this immediate witnessing? What leads us astray? We might say that the problem starts when the witness begins to testify, for its testimony is about “the identity of the self and the substantiality of the world.” (LOK 193) But that is not quite right, at least if we follow the description given in LOK itself. It is not that the witness testifies wrongly. The problem is that we interpret what it has to say in terms of self and world, based perhaps on how we have been conditioned to respond. The text says, “But perhaps the witness is speaking of something different.”

As last week’s reading unfolded, it left this possibility open, choosing instead to challenge the way we interpret the witness; in other words, challenging the story of the self. The suggestion made was that we have no way of knowing the self directly; that all the evidence we rely on for our sense of self-identity and the substantiality of our world remains disconnected from the immediacy of the witness. This is true even if we try to identify with a ‘deeper’ self or ‘inner’ self, or even a ‘witness self’. These would all be new interpretations, and somehow the witness must be more fundamental than any story. As last week’s reading says (in its closing sentence): “. . . the true source of the creative energy that the self seems to manifest might be found elsewhere, in a realm yet to be explored.” While the coming week’s reading does not directly undertake this exploration, it is good to keep in mind that we are headed in that direction.

The reading from DTS for this week again directs us toward the dynamic of time. Linking our failure to engage this dynamic with a fundamental not-knowing, it suggests that to deal with this not-knowing, “we call on a witness to cognize and verify” the knowledge we claim to possess (103). In the phone call, I emphasized that the witness being described here is not the witness that silently testifies to the “feel of the real,” the witness we discussed last time, whose workings I have referred to again above. Instead, this witness comes into operation after the dynamic of time has already been frozen. You could say that it’s an attempted solution to being cut off from the dynamic of time. This witness situates a ‘here’ and affirms substance. In doing so, it

inevitably affirms certain boundaries. The result is to exclude a deeper knowing from the temporal structure (105). When this witness is active, we are trapped in an isolated subjectivity (106).

We might ask why the notion of 'the witness' is being used in these two very different ways in LOK and DTS. The situation is a little more complicated than that: you could investigate by looking up references to 'the witness' across all the TSK books. Yet a simple answer might point out that TSK uses the same word for 'ordinary' knowledge and for knowledge that is free from all conditioning. In the same way, it may be that a 'lower-level' witness expresses in its own frozen way the aliveness of time and the availability of knowledge.

As we explore these questions, it helps to look for the witness in operation. The place to look is anywhere that we affirm limits. So here is a walkabout that heads in this direction:

See if you can track how you are feeling as you go about the day. When you feel ill at ease, frustrated, agitated, restless, or vaguely empty, look for the basis for this feeling. After all, you probably don't want to feel like that. So what keeps the situation, the feeling, intact? What makes that limit 'real'? Is it the story you tell to justify your feeling (If you even have one!) Or is it some sort of more fundamental commitment? Can we sense the witness there?