

Week 4 TSK 148-158, TSK Ex. 31

Transition and Orientation

We ended our last phone call with a focus on not-knowing. As someone pointed out during the call, our concern is not the ordinary kind of not-knowing, which arises within a structure that divides a field of knowledge into known and not known (for instance, I don't know how to play the guitar). I don't see too much of interest in that kind of not-knowing.

The not-knowing that TSK points to is very different—not knowing as the source of all knowing. Not-knowing is the field from which ordinary knowledge takes birth. That helps clarify why Rinpoche equates it with the Body of Knowledge.

One way to look into not-knowing is to go to our sense of limits, a theme we have been exploring for a couple of weeks now. Another way is to question the self as knower. In the phone call, we briefly discussed the possibility that one form for this questioning to take is to challenge our commitment to the self and its wants and desires, letting ourselves be guided instead by the wish to contribute. Try making this the walkabout for the week: a shift in attitude that we can put into play whenever we interact with others. It may be helpful to let yourself be guided by this comment from the reading (161): “It is attitude that sets up discriminations and determines their significance, and attitudes can be lightly worn”

Although a focus on limits and on changing our attitudes may suggest that not-knowing-as-source- is available ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’ the range of our ordinary knowledge, the TSK Vision does not make those kinds of distinctions. As Rinpoche says repeatedly, knowledge is inseparable from being. As he writes elsewhere in VOK (169):

“Even if we cannot always contact [intrinsic] knowledge, the confidence that it is available within each situation is enough to transform our behavior. Knowing that we find knowledge by looking within what is happening, we do not feel the pressure of manufacturing it or importing it from somewhere else. We are free to acknowledge when we do not know, and we understand that doing so can be a vital step in letting knowledge come alive in our hearts and our spirits.”

In the reading for this week, which comes from TSK, we take a different approach to contacting a deeper knowledge (what TSK might call second-level knowledge.) Again, as in weeks 1 and 2, it is temporality that offers a starting point. We are used to thinking that one moment succeeds the next, with no gaps. But this whole structure arises within the realm of the already known. If the linear structure drops away, a new kind of not-knowing becomes available within the gaps and discontinuities (TSK 148). Similarly, if we discover space where we had previously seen solid objects, new, unknown possibilities emerge.

The analysis of these and other possibilities in the reading is rather dense and difficult. This difficulty, it seems to me, differs from the difficulty we encounter in the other TSK books. The difference is not easy to describe, but I would say that in this reading, we are asked to look with great precision at our experience. We will work with that precision in the phone call.

As a good starting point for engaging the reading, consider this passage from TSK 156:

As long as we consider our experience to be made up of ‘things’, our lives and capacity for appreciation and fulfillment are constantly being restricted or locked up. . . . The vivid and radiant quality of our experience cannot shine through.

We thus return to the idea we began with in the first class for this session: When our usual ways of knowing give way, we can experience in ways that are more alive and radiant, more open to the possibilities of a different kind of knowing. The reading explores ways in which that might be possible.