

The Stream of Thinking

A Time, Space, Knowledge Course
Taught by Jack Petranker

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Figure A ¹

Thought Forms in Space

In the winter of 2011, Jack Petranker* taught the second of three, 9-week segments of a 27-week Time, Space, Knowledge (TSK) class -- *The Stream of Thinking*. The course consisted of weekly, 1) on-line conference calls with the students, 2) guidance memos from Jack, 3) designated reading assignments from a TSK book, 4) exercises assigned to amplify significant points and encourage moment-to-moment inquiry as the fundamental method for exploring the TSK vision, and 5) students posting and sharing excerpts from their practice notes for comment by other students. The focus was to approach 'thinking' in terms of space. The course readings were taken primarily from the *Space* section of the book by Tarthang Tulku Rinpoché, *Dynamics of Time and Space*. ²

In preparation for the first week's class, students were asked to observe their thoughts, and provided with the following questions to guide them:

- What counts as a thought?
- Does the self own thoughts? Generate them? If not, where do they come from?
- What is the relation between thoughts and the world we experience as real?
- What is the relation between thoughts and emotions?
- What is the link between the thoughts we have and the decisions we make? Between thoughts and the actions we take?
- Can we control our thoughts – either their frequency or their content?
- Why don't we do what we think we want to do?
- What is the relation between thoughts and time?

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Week 1

Conference Call 1 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

We are exploring the role *thinking* plays in our way of making sense of the world. When we do, we find there's more to thinking than we normally realize. You can count your thoughts in a given period; there may be more thoughts or sometimes less, but as you become more experienced at looking, you begin to see a steady stream of thoughts. There's a lot going on that we might not normally view as a thought. The goal for the class is to focus on experience throughout the day, at many different times.

The chapter title of the reading for this week is '*Thought Forms In Space*', and is a play on words, thought '*forms*' (a verb implying a process) in space; instead of, to treat '*thought-forms*' as a noun -- thoughts as things that have taken place in space. So the chapter begins in Space. The context of space is important, because for our purposes space offers freedom. In what sense does space offer freedom? While TSK may not normally consider space as empty, even if you *do* think of space that way, we think of it as having *infinite potential*, ready to receive anything, and that's the flavor of the idea of what we mean by *the freedom that space offers*.

Rinpoché says in the first paragraph of the chapter, "**Space and the freedom it offers are available at the center of present experience, just as it is. If we do not discover space in our experience, it is because this space availability has been covered over.**" p.51

We think -- we make sense of our experience out of all the events, mental and physical objects, or '*stuff*' that's going on. And if you are looking at a vase sitting on a table, for instance, the space in which the object exists remains there, it *is* available. So if you think of space as an open availability offering infinite potential, then we would like to have access to this freedom and availability of space, and Rinpoché is saying we do. In the case of the vase on the table, we are closely focused on it, and we are *not* tuned in to the space that makes the vase available. It's not interesting, and because the space is not interesting it isn't available.

That raises the question, what would make space interesting and, therefore, available? Well, Rinpoché tells us, "**To recover space 'presence', we must clarify the operation of the thinking mind, whose active naming and identifying structure a world in which space has disappeared.**" So we could say, as we understand the way we '*cover over*' space, we will then *discover space*.

The second paragraph of the assigned reading invites us to do some exploration. Rinpoché says, "**Although thoughts often come and go as a kind of reflex, passing so quickly that they go unnoticed, if we take the time to focus on the stream of mental events, we soon observe that we are almost always thinking.**" And that is what we want to do, observe our thinking.

Let's try a practice now for a few minutes, and try and have a neutral background, so we can more easily observe a thought, so let's allow our senses to be that background – sounds, feelings, what we see around us. Against that sense background thoughts will come up. I want to point out two kinds of thought; **one** type is *distracting thoughts*, which take us away from sense experience. For instance, we may be focused on sense experience and suddenly a thought comes up about what we're going to do later, or tomorrow. A thought like that distracts us from our focus on our senses.

The **second** kind of thought is about the *content* of our experience, for example, we may be focused on our senses and then notice a chair in the room, and start thinking about the chair; its color, is it pleasant, whether or not it's comfortable, and so on. This kind of thought doesn't actually take us completely away from our sense experience, because our senses are still part of the experience of the chair, however, the senses and the thoughts *about* the chair being observed creates a sort of cloud. A useful metaphor might be a nucleus of an atom surrounded by a blur of protons and neutrons; where the nucleus would be our sense experience and the cloud around it our thinking. So we could say for these two types of thinking, the first leads you into its own world, and the latter leads you away from the immediacy of your own sense experience without substituting anything for it.

Now, as we engage this practice for five minutes, let's investigate the relationship between the immediacy of experience and our thinking, with these two kinds of thoughts in mind. (After a few moments of silence)

All right, who would like to tell us about your experience looking at your thoughts?

Linda – *I thought of two things about the second kind of thought, some kind of enjoyment or irritation, but not a thought, and also looking at a tree, there's this insistence on definition or labeling, the parsing out of experience in say darks and lights, and it seems to be based on some type of emotion.*

That's interesting; the connection between thought and emotion is something we're going to be looking at, asking perhaps, what is the motivation for a thought, and noticing its relationship to emotion. Both motivation and emotion are related words; they both have to do with movement, so you could ask, what moves us to have a thought? It seems like there is a connection between thought and emotion, that emotions are kind of a moving force. For instance you

may look at the tree, and see a dead leaf on the tree and your emotional response is you find that irritating. The emotion is there but there is also a thought. One of the interesting questions we will look at is do thoughts have to be in words? All I'm saying at this point is that the emotion seems to lend a kind of flavor to the thought.

Hayward – *I noticed there was a certain freedom of attention, moving from a focus on thought and then back to the senses, touch and temperature. I became increasingly aware of this freedom to move attention, that space had to be there in order to have the freedom of that movement.*

Right, it's interesting you used the word freedom. It's one of the things Rinpoché points out about space, in order to have the freedom to move back and forth, space has to *allow* for both possibilities.

Michael – *I found it discouraging to me that all my mental activities are covering over space, because I don't actually believe in mental space. (laughter) Therefore, space is not such a welcoming thing. My means of knowing are tedious, but I can't know something if I'm not attracted to it.*

Well, if this model we are using says, if only we had access to space then things would be different, and if something in you predisposes you against this, then that model is not going to be that helpful to you. Maybe one way to think about it is, if you look back at the exercise you just did, and you're focused on the senses, and the thoughts that Rinpoché describes as *space availability is covered over*, think of it as those *thoughts cover over the ability to experience with immediacy what's going on*. The streams of thoughts comment on the experience and that's what *covers over*. It might be like watching a sports event, say figure skating, on TV and the commentator often will not talk very much during the performance so as not to distract from the immediacy of the performance. And sometimes they talk too much, and you think to yourself, "Shut up already!" It interfered with my focus, my immediate connection and enjoyment of the event. Another example might be if you were listening to music, and someone was constantly commenting on it. That's the difficulty; whether it's covering up the freedom that space offers as Rinpoché says, or interfering with the immediacy of the experience, and perhaps the latter is a more helpful way to look at it. That's all I'm suggesting.

Ari – *When the focus is on sensation thoughts are more peripheral and malleable.*

Well, that's two different things, I can see where thought would be more peripheral, but you would need to look into what sense they are malleable, who is forming them, shaping them, who has that power.

Bruce – *Sometimes the thought pulls you and sometimes there's a reminder thought to return to sense experience.*

Yes, that's a nice observation. What's the nature of that reminder thought, keep looking at that.

So, this is the basic practice we want to continue on with in the coming week. We want to get familiar when we are thinking, when we are not thinking, and watch for the *distracting thoughts* and the *commenting thoughts*. Usually when we have thoughts we are focused on their content. The thought is about something. To do this practice we need to focus *not* on thought's content, but on the *activity* of thinking. I strongly suggest you keep some kind of journal to record your practice notes, and of course, posting them on-line is a great place to discuss them. (See appendix 1 – Student Posts)

Week 2

Conference Call 2 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

So we're saying, thoughts do have their value, but they also can get in the way of experience, or as Rinpoché says, they "*cover over space*". If we want to challenge that, and get back to more direct experience, we need to explore thoughts. As we do, we may discover that it's not so easy to simply stop thinking, and as it turns out, thoughts are more pervasive than we may have imagined. Sometimes we think we're having no-thought experiences, but we may discover that we're really having more *subtle thought* experience. There's that old saying from Mark Twain about the weather, "Everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it." Thoughts are kind of like that, we all have them continuously, but we seldom do much about them. But we'd like to have a little more direct control over them, to go into the control room, or go back stage. We could think of thoughts as the actors on stage, they say their lines, but we're also the audience watching passively. So as we explore thoughts, perhaps we want to take on the roll as Director, looking at the whole play, the story, the structure, the motivations, much more of the presentation than we are normally accustomed to seeing. In the second paragraph of the assigned reading, Rinpoché says:

“Although thoughts often come and go as a kind of reflex, passing so quickly that they go unnoticed, if we take the time to focus on the stream of mental events, we soon observe that we are almost always thinking. We might well wonder why this should be so. After all, in terms of their content thoughts tend to be trivial and repetitive. They recycle the same themes and images, call up the same memories, dwell on the same concerns. They react to whatever stimuli present themselves, leading nowhere in particular. As we go about our day, thoughts cycle

through our minds like the background hum of a household appliance or a nervous gesture that we repeat almost unconsciously." p.51

So the question is why do we do that continuous circle of thinking? Well, last week the question was raised, what's the relationship between thoughts and emotions? One possible answer as to why we have all these thoughts is that they seem to be tied to emotions. However, Rinpoché goes on to suggest something a little bit different, he says thoughts are related to the *field communiqué*:

"The purpose of all this activity seems linked to the role of thoughts as the 'carriers' or 'vehicles' for the interpretive structures that give experience continuity. In thinking, we affirm certain connections and identities that allow us to make sense of what is happening. Apart from its specific content, a thought considered as an action aims to conserve and pass on the order given by the interacting presentations of the field communiqué. Just as breath sustains the body, so thinking sustains the world that we inhabit." p.52

I'm thinking my reality into existence -- the room, the blinds, the chair, my associations with these things, and the ideas and assumptions that situate me in the world -- all those thoughts giving order are what he means by *field communiqué*. Were we not thinking and giving order to all this -- our world of the moment -- we couldn't sustain it. Rinpoché goes on to say:

"Beyond all particular interactions and all possible communications, there is the field of these interactions. This field steadily communicates its own availability as a field, together with a structure and a patterning that characterizes field operations. What we find meaningful depends on this global communication: the 'field communiqué'.

The individual appearances that make up the content of experience manifest *in terms of* the field communiqué, which unites them in somewhat the way that stock ownership unites the shareholders of a corporation. Emerging from the field, entities appear hand in hand. They enact a special intimacy that allows for characterizations, distinctions, and an interplay expressed through temporal 'from-to' structures.

In terms of the field communiqué, the realness of the real is simply the proclaimed authenticity of this mutually co-referring identification: a vital aspect of the ongoing intimacy of all that manifests. But this claim of authenticity does not operate only with regard to the whole: It is distributed out to encompass each communicated entity as well. We could even say that the *purpose* of the co-referring interactions that give the whole is to establish the certainty of each individual identity. This, then, is the ongoing meaning that the communiqué expresses: The whole sustains the identity of each particular part, while each part in turn confirms the manifested whole...

Though substance appears as substance, it does not depart from the original interplay of the communiqué, in which each appearance is echo-like in nature. The 'source' of substance is the interaction of what does not have substance. Each qualified imposed uniqueness is presented within the field. For each appearance, there is nothing above or beneath it, no point of origination more solid than its own communication." pp. 16-7

Our focus for now is to ask, what are thoughts for? And Rinpoché says they are to sustain and preserve our sense of what's going on, which includes our identity, and the sense that we inhabit a particular world and that thinking is always sustaining that particular reality.

We may notice the field that we inhabit in a particular moment is actually always changing, but also, thoughts change radically too. For a moment we think of one thing, for instance, noticing flowers, and then you think about going shopping. There are big jumps in our thoughts, and the field is always changing. So there are two big questions. Why do we think so much, and why do our thoughts change fields and jump around so often?

Try this exercise, take a few moments to observe your thoughts, and see how they jump from field to field. Then look into what counts as a thought. There are two ways to do this, one is *as* you're thinking, directly in immediate experience, and the other, is to *look back* at what has just been thought, retrospectively.

Also, for the coming week, I want you to try another practice as we explore what counts as a thought. That involves generating a particular thought. For this purpose we'll assume an image can be a thought. This image is an orange sphere, or ball. Imagine this ball; you can play with it making it larger or smaller, darker or lighter. So for the next week, from time to time, bring to mind the image of an orange ball, and do things with it.

Orientation Memo 2 –

Since we will be doing the same reading for this week as we did for last, I will use this Orientation to review some of the main themes in light of what came up in our conference call.

We are looking at thinking and how it *covers up* the availability of space, and the possibility of *freedom* that space offers. Michael brought up a good point on the conference call: what if I'm not particularly motivated to want to connect with space, what if it seems empty and uninteresting to me, and the idea that it offers freedom is too abstract or remote to change that perception?

One possible answer is to think differently about what it is that thoughts (or “the operation of the thinking mind”) covers up: not space, but *the immediacy of experience*. When we are involved in thoughts, we are removed from experience. To borrow an image that Rinpoché uses in *Love of Knowledge*, trying to experience with the thinking mind is like trying to feel a fur coat with gloves on. Whether we think in terms of space or in terms of immediate experience, the point is the same (at least to begin with). The rich and nourishing part of what life offers us is not available.

The practice I suggested in the phone call and for the coming week is to **direct your attention to sense experience and then see how thoughts come up against that background**. Again, watch for two kinds of thoughts. The first, *distracting thoughts*, take us away from sense experience entirely. The second is the kind of thought that *comments on experience, judging it, comparing it, connecting it with other experiences*, etc. It's good to look at both kinds of thoughts.

Airi found that thoughts connected to sensations were lighter and more malleable. I don't think we dealt adequately with that in the phone call, but it would be an interesting topic to explore online.

After the practice, Linda brought up the question of the connection between thoughts and emotions. The nature of this link is very fruitful to examine. Do thoughts trigger emotions? Do emotions give rise to thoughts? Are the two even separate? Is there such a thing as a thought without an emotion? An emotion without a thought?

Finally, Bruce suggested that there was at least one kind of thought that seemed useful in the practice: the *reminder-thought* that makes you go back to sense experience. My question here is whether the realization of having drifted away comes first, followed by the thought, or whether the thought is the carrier of the realization. Or is this even the right model?

I didn't say much about the idea of thought-forms in the phone call, so let me give an example I was thinking of recently. I've been up at Odiyan, the Nyingma country center. Odiyan has several dogs, whose job it is to guard the ducks and other waterfowl, and they have been trained to know that there are certain places they can't go. It's as if there is an invisible line that can't be crossed. That invisible line is a good example of a thought-form in space.

Space has been carved up, and freedom has literally been taken away. Notice that this happens without language: *the concept itself shapes the thought*. Of course, it's not just animals. For instance, we may train ourselves *not* to think about certain parts of our lives. As the current idiom has it (new idioms often have knowledge close to the surface), we “don't go there.”

Week 3

Conference Call 3 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

Let's start by discussing “The Orange Ball” practice. The basic idea was to visualize an orange ball, globe, sphere, etc. It doesn't matter too much how you think of it, except the idea should be as open to change as possible, not one fixed thing. You should actually play with this orange ball, and the reason for doing it is because the orange ball is a simple thought form in space, it's our model. The act of seeing the ball is an act of thinking, it's like imagining your mother, you think of your mother and an image of her comes into mind. And once you call to mind the thought of the orange ball you're free to play with it.

Take a few minutes now and visualize an orange ball... (A few moments of silence)

All right, what did you notice?

Tina – *It seems to get easier to keep the orange ball in focus.*

Hayward -- *The ball moves by itself without my seeming to intend it.*

Yes, isn't that true of thoughts in general? We can't really control the arising or passing away of a thought.

Tina – *The idea of not being able to control thought, would that be a limit on thought?*

It seems like it might be. Why don't you experiment with the image of the orange ball? See if you can control what thoughts arise and pass away.

Michael -- *I imagined throwing orange paint on a grey ball.*

Soudabeh -- *I tried moving the ball and it changed to a basketball, then it changed to ping pong balls, and my focus was changing to orange M&Ms that I ate. I asked myself how could I imagine an orange ball and different ideas just came to me.*

Back in the 1970s, I was given this assignment at the Nyingma Institute and I remember at that time there was a gas station whose logo was a large orange ball, and as a promotion they were giving little orange balls away to stick on the end of your car antenna. So there were little orange balls waving around everywhere I went. It was hard to get them *out* of your mind! (Laughter)

Did anyone go inside the orange ball?

Tina -- *I did, at one point I became completely surrounded by orange.*

So, we have Soudebeah eating the orange ball, and Tina being eaten by the orange ball! (Laughter)

Karin -- *Looking at a real orange ball, I am always involved in stories about that ball - who gave it to me, how it feels in my hands, what the practice is about, etc.*

Bruce -- *I moved back and forth between the feeling of "thinking" the ball, to having the ball just being there by itself. I noticed the latter was like "objective" reality, which I am subject to; and the former was like a creative, subjective engagement (moving, holding, changing the image). I wondered about both of these movements in relation to substance. Is substance what is objective, or is it the "liveliness" of presence? I also noticed thought primarily showing up as verbal commentary, simple images, or complex dream-like scenes. There was also a background "hum" of unarticulated meanings, or sometimes compelling "gestalts" of meaning that were global but not verbalized and which were very slippery (easily lost).*

Pat -- *What's not a thought? How is an itch not a thought? I can direct my thoughts about a sensation. If I feel a weird sensation, I can be 'afraid' that something is wrong or can back off from that thought and just feel.*

Linda -- *It seems to me that there is a sensation, then a feeling tone, or "coloring", and then it can gel into a "thought".*

Well, one of the things that should have resulted from working with this practice is an appreciation for the creativity of mind. Keep working with this exercise if you like, but **my main interest for this practice is that the act of visualizing an orange ball is an example of a simple thought, and you can see how richly detailed some thoughts can be. In a memory, for instance, there can be so much going on in a situation you remember, it can be hard to recall all that's happening let alone describe its details in words.**

Yesterday, I experimented by putting an orange ball in the corner of a memory, essentially trying to have two thoughts at once. I'm not sure it really worked, because it turned out to be *part* of a memory with an orange ball stuck on, rather than two separate streams of thought merging at once.

A friend of mine is a psychology professor, and he told me about an extreme case of a woman who could keep many different strands, or streams of thought, going at the same time. She was a bank teller who while counting money, at the same time, talked to the other tellers while they were counting. For her, it was just natural to count and talk at the same time, but for her co-workers it was distracting and annoying for they couldn't maintain their focus. At home, the woman was also able to keep three television sets going at the same time, and from her description, she wasn't skipping from one show to the other, she was actually watching all three, at the same time. As it turned out, this woman had psychological issues, which were eventually resolved, but one of the things she complained about after she was cured, was that she had lost the ability to focus on simultaneous streams of thought.

I brought this up because I think there are real possibilities for the way the mind works. Tina raised the question earlier, if we can't control our thoughts, is it a limit on the mind? It's a good question to explore, and I mention this because it might well be possible to develop, or have the capacity to do, several things at once.

Let's do another little practice now, which refers to a question asked in the orientation: What kind of thoughts do you have? At the risk of putting ideas in your mind, if you ask people that question sometime they will say I had a voice in my mind that said something, or they might say I had an image of something, and at another time they might say I was just thinking, it was unformulated. There are all sorts of possibilities. That's what I want you to look at. So in this practice of observing your thoughts, ask yourself, what form does a thought take in your experience?

(A few moments of Silence)

All right, what did you notice this time?

Linda -- *I noticed memories tended to be images. I noticed feeling in the body as a kind of shaping, tone or coloring.*

So you could be saying a characteristic of thoughts is that they tend to take over awareness? For instance Pat mentioned he felt an itch, so how is that not a thought? Certainly describing the itch to your self is. And the initial impulse or sensation, could that be an *undescribed* and perhaps more subtle thought? If it is, you can see how there are continuous events going on, that possibly experience could be seen as continuous *streams* of thoughts.

Orientation Memo 3 –

We are looking for the best ways to investigate thinking and thoughts: their arising, their nature, their impact on our lives. Last week we discussed two different kinds of thought. The first is the *thought that takes us away from present (perceptual experience)*. When this kind of thought happens, we get lost in the thought, we wander off, we daydream. But these ways of describing things are a little misleading. We are not so much the one who does something, for example, get lost in a thought, instead, we are more often the one to whom something is done. It seems more accurate to say we are kidnapped by the thought, or pulled into its orbit the way a star pulls a comet into its orbit -- what the reading refers to as the thought's *gravitational pull*. Thoughts happen, and we respond.

The second kind of thought is *when we think 'about' something that is happening*. We walk out the front door and think about how cold it is; we see someone wearing a dress, and think about its striking color. The difference between this kind of thought and the first, is that the second kind of thought may not take us somewhere else contextually, it does however, tend to keep us away from the immediacy of the experience. The thought comments on the experience, and while the comment is *'passing through'* our minds, it takes over, leaving no room for the experience itself.

The reference in the reading to the field communiqué is more obviously related to the first kind of thought, but it applies to both. In both cases, a new thought seems to establish a *'field'* that determines what is real. You could think of it as a *"thought of the whole."* In the first case, the thought of the whole marks a radical shift in what is happening in our experience. In the second case, more like what we might call a *"simple, ordinary thought,"* the thought affirms what is happening and gives it a slightly different flavor. But in affirming what is so, it also amounts to a kind of thought of the whole.

For instance, I might say to myself, "It's too hot in here." This is a simple thought, one that takes shape in words, and it affirms the basic structure the way things are: me, here, in this room, feeling discomfort, etc. But suppose I don't notice that thought, but instead find myself having a fleeting image of the sun burning down on a desert, perhaps with a slight sense of having been walking through sand that shifts underneath me and makes forward progress difficult. This is the more global kind of thought. In that moment, the field communiqué shifts in fairly fundamental ways. Still, both are thoughts.

These are some reflections meant to suggest the kinds of things you might look for in your own thinking. We want to be looking at the nature of thoughts, at whether they take form in words, images, or other ways. As I've mentioned, we may have to do this retrospectively. That is, I may realize I've been lost in a thought. Now it is finished, and I can look back on it and get a sense of its content, but also of the form it took: of the thought of an action. That is the basic practice.

In the phone call, I also asked you to do a different practice. *Imagine an orange ball*. You can do this with eyes open or closed, and the ball can change in size, color, intensity; in its relation to you and location in respect to you. The basic idea is that the imagined image of a ball is itself a kind of thought, and by doing this exercise, you are taking more active control of your thoughts than we usually do.

In the reading for this week, notice the discussion at the end about the difference between thoughts and direct experience. Rinpoché says:

"There is another difficulty. To rely on the immediacy of 'no thoughts' separates experience as it is thought from the 'no-thought experience'. Making this distinction actually hardens the substantiality that thought has set in place. Moreover, as a marked-out realm distinct from thought constructs, the 'no-thought' realm has again been identified and designated. Seen as a goal to arrive at, the realm of no thoughts is itself a thought." (See appendix 2 - week 3)

Is Rinpoché saying that there is no such thing as direct experience? Or is he saying that if we do contact experience directly, we have no way of going into that experience without making it the object of a thought? Or is the point something different entirely?



Figure B³

Thoughts may arise like bubbles in a stream of water, but we are intent on entering the thought's 'bubble world'. From within that world we can no longer ask where the bubble comes from or goes to, nor can we challenge the substantiality of what appears within the bubble. The pronounced content of the thought refers to and affirms other related content understood as being situated 'elsewhere': the content of the previous thought, the existents present in the preceding moment, the preceding moment itself; in fact, the whole lineage of the present arising. Patterns of engaged images yield familiar projections, which are pronounced into daily life. This projected and measurable familiarity confirms as known what is not known at all. DTS p.53-4

Week 4

Conference Call 4 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

Since the readings for this week are only three paragraphs on page 56, (see Appendix 2 - Week 4) we'll discuss them as we do practices. We discussed previously that thoughts tend to take over awareness, and cover over space, and so regarding our attempts to *open* awareness and *uncover* space, Rinpoché says:

"Whether we choose to affirm what thoughts pronounce or attempt to bypass thought entirely, we seem to arrive at impenetrable barriers. "

There are two possibilities being pointed out; the first is to "*affirm what thoughts pronounce*", and the other is to *do away with thoughts and go to another level* that has more to do with the immediacy of experience. The first option isn't really a choice in that it's just what we normally do. We just accept what we think, what pops up, what thoughts pronounce. There's an amusing bumper sticker that I see around from time to time that says, "*Don't believe everything you think!*" That bumper sticker could represent a moment of transition; we do actually have a choice whether or not to believe what we're thinking. It's a choice we don't normally think we have. Instead we keep choosing the same thing, to accept the content of thoughts -- *what thoughts pronounce*. The second alternative, *to bypass thoughts, to go directly to experience*, **is** a choice.

I'm reading a book now called, *Buddhist Modernism*, and one of its points is that Buddhism draws, among other things, on the romantic tradition in the West, with its tendency to place less emphasis on the rational mind. Or we could come at this point in another way; there is a poem by Walt Whitman, *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer*,⁴ which ends in a rather romantic view that goes beyond the structuring and measuring of thought:

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

And so this represents the second choice (as some Western Buddhists might do). In this case, the poet decides to bypass the astronomer's thoughts, and *rational arguments* about the stars, and in the romantic tradition, simply go directly to the night sky to experience the stars first hand, in the moment, where he finds truth and nourishment.

But Rinpoché is saying both of these activities, to "*affirm what thoughts pronounce*", or to *do away with thoughts and go to another level* of immediacy, have problems. He goes on to say:

"Suppose instead that we simply paused to notice thoughts as thoughts—the simple phenomenon of thinking. One moment we are watching a bird fly by or enjoying a cup of tea, and the next there is a thought. How does this happen? At one level there may be explanations; at another, it is just so. Thoughts simply 'pop up': sheer appearance, sourceless.

He is pointing out that it's not the *content* of the thought we're interested in here, but the *act of thinking*. And that is what we want to explore for the next few minutes. Let yourself settle into your own experience and watch thoughts pop up.

(After a few moments of silence)

Who would like to say something?

Robert - *I was struck by the sourceless aspect of the thoughts, of some emotional things that are going on in my life, and these thoughts just pop up.*

Earlier in the reading Rinpoché says at their beginning thoughts are dimensionless, they have no place to be locatable, they pop up. Maybe you're feeling that, where the emotion comes up after the thought has taken form.

Karin – *Thoughts pop up but there is also a readiness in the mind for these thoughts to arrive and respond.*

Yes, it's good to make that distinction. In one of the books Rinpoché describes a frog sitting on a lily pad in a pond waiting, a readiness to reach out with its darting tongue when an insect comes close, or for instance, when a cat sits in the grass waiting for a mouse. The mind does seem to have that quality of readiness to respond.

These fields of inquiry are vast. For instance, I noticed something. I found myself in a sort of stuck place, and the thoughts wouldn't quite take form, but it had an orange, thick quality, and had a grip on me. This was a little different from having them just pop up. You could try these practices over a period of years and still experience interesting discoveries. Next, Rinpoché says:

"In its initial arising, its popping up, thought appears to be dimensionless. Even if a transition to dimensionality follows at once, there must still be an instant when the arising thought is not yet committed to its content; when it remains free to take virtually any form at all."

Before the thought is a thought *of something*, it's just a raw thought possibly, before it has had a chance to take form, perhaps with a limited range of possibilities, and one of them might be a raw or bare thought, and another an inkling of sensual input from one of the senses. And then we might have an instant of readiness, as Karin mentioned, and then begin to move either toward fleshing out the thought, or instead toward having a sense experience. One might argue with this and say, if it's a thought, then it has content, how can there be an indeterminate thought without content? But that's not what Rinpoché is pointing to. You could draw the obvious parallel of a thought to a stem cell, ready to take any form at all, any direction. It may help to think of it that way.

All right, let's take another few moments to practice observing thinking. Allow thoughts to pop up, and this time with a greater sensitivity, to the fact that thought, as thought, is not *spoken-for* in terms of its content. For instance, if you have a Kindle for reading, and you press the button to change the page there's a moment of blankness before the written page pops up. That's what you're looking for in this practice, that moment of blankness.

(After a few moments of silence)

That's a pretty challenging practice. Anyone have anything to say?

Hayward - *I had an unusual experience in this openness before a thought. Somewhere in the book it mentions "blank availability" (p.54). And in this space there was a sense of vulnerability, and anything could have come in at that time.*

That's interesting, so is it fair to say, your mind was available to be taken over, or is that too dramatic?

Hayward - *It was openness, an availability for knowing that was available or known.*

Ah! That sounds more positive than what you said a moment ago. Did it feel positive or was it more negative?

Hayward - *It depended, if I opened to vulnerability, it became an open possibility.*

You let yourself be vulnerable, so it's as though there was kind of an initial fear, and then overcoming it by opening.

Hayward - *Yes.*

One question you could ask is, why do we make this commitment to the content of thought? You could say it's a habit we've been trained to do. But you're pointing to something more psychological, or even deeper, perhaps underlying our commitment to the content of thoughts is *because* we're afraid. We need to have some content, some substance, because it's tied to our need to be, our drive to exist.

Michael - *Regarding the image of the frog on a lily pad, and the readiness for, or waiting for the thought to pop up, you might consider the lily pad as a foundation for thought, a source from. Thoughts may pop up, but they seem to be coming from a source of worry or a familiar place of concern.*

That's interesting, another way to look at it is you may be accustomed to a limited number of possibilities, and within the bubble of that limited field, thoughts pop up from that familiar, contextual bubble. This goes back to Robert's comment, having a fear or concern, which influences a pool of possibilities, and related thoughts arise from it. Michael is describing that context more like a place from which thoughts arise. That could be, it's an interesting question for further inquiry.

The last paragraph Rinpoché says:

"We have grown accustomed to thoughts that establish a world and are themselves established, defined exclusively in terms of their content. But in this initial moment, the thought is unestablished, and the world is unestablished with it. Could we stay with the freedom of this being unestablished, savoring its flavor?"

The point here is the thought comes up with a content, and we can allow for that content, that is, allow for the world that's been established by the thought, without being committed to the fact of its being established. If we can do that, what does it do to the thought's emotional content, the foundation or *source from* that several of you brought up today? Rinpoché is turning that around, and saying *the thought reaches backwards to establish its own ground* -- you have a thought that is an articulation of a ground, and it forms the content of the thought, -- maybe that's where we want to look, at that possibility. Can there just be a sheer readiness; can that openness persist as the thought takes form? And when the thought refers back to something deeper, maybe that referring back is just a part of the thought, or maybe not. You might say no, if I'm having a similar recurring thought it must relate back to a *source from*, something that's of elevated concern in my life. The important thing is to observe.

Take a few minutes to explore this experientially, to see if we can get further insight into the idea of what it would mean to leave the world that thought establishes, *unestablished* without rejecting it.

Since we're running short on time now, work with this on your own in the coming week.

One final thing, we've talked about two different types of momentary experience, one that Rinpoché describes, "**enjoying a cup of tea, and the next there is a thought**". These are kinds of *discrete events*, you might say, in the stream of consciousness. The other way of thinking about thought that he describes in the third paragraph are, "**thoughts that establish a world**", or a whole realm of experience. That would be the thought that situates you – you are enjoying the taste of the cup of tea – but there's also an on-going thought that *I am here*, in these surroundings, having gotten here by certain circumstances, etc. Some of you may find it easier to look at this second type of thought as you observe thinking, and what it might mean to leave the world that thought establishes, *unestablished* without rejecting it. The whole point is to investigate thought. We have the luxury of this nine weeks course in which to do that.

Orientation Memo 4 –

The reading for this week is especially short, just 3 paragraphs on page 56. Next week we finish the chapter, and the week after that we move to a later part of the book.

The reading in the first paragraph Rinpoché points at two alternative attempts to open experience that lead nowhere: 1) affirming the truth (the substance) of what thoughts proclaim to be the case, and 2) trying to shut down the thinking process entirely. The problem with the first alternative is that it gives us no way to understand thoughts themselves: thoughts become a zero-point, which means they disappear from view because we are lost in them. **The problem with the second alternative, which came up during our phone call this morning, is that it may not even be possible to connect to experience that is not already shaped, identified, or named by thoughts. And even if it were, we would have no way to make sense of this experience or report it to others or ourselves.** All this was covered in the previous reading, but it is useful to reflect on it.

The challenge posed in the text is understand something about how it is that thoughts just 'pop up'. And the way to do that is to investigate the thinking process, to notice just what it is that goes on when we are thinking. That kind of active investigation is central to how we are proceeding, and I encourage everyone to do it. I have suggested before keeping a journal as a way of intensifying this possibility.

We have been using two ways of investigating. One is the 'orange ball' exercise. As I suggested in the phone call, the reason for working with this exercise is that '*visualizing*' the ball is something like the '*simplest-possible-thought?*'. You can control that thought, or else you can just let it go and unfold on its own; you can experiment with it in any way you like. People had some interesting ways of doing that they described during the call.

The second way of doing this is to notice thoughts coming up and see what they are like as they come up. When we tried this during the phone call, people had several interesting observations to make. As a starting point, I asked what it is that counts as a thought: an image, words, something more diffuse. The discussion seemed to show that any simple answers to this question fails to capture the complexity of a thought.

Is the point here to arrive at a satisfying theory of what constitutes a thought, and how thoughts arise? No, not at all, **we are interested in the freedom that space offers, or** (a different formulation) **the richness of experience not shaped in advance by our thoughts about it.** If we don't learn to experience thinking '*from the inside?*—if instead we either accept or reject them—those alternatives are not likely to be available. But if we know what it is to think (you might say, '*thinking inside the box?*'), that knowledge will take us in the direction we are interested in.

Week 5

Conference Call 5 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

We've spent the last several weeks looking at '*thought forms in space?*', and we are exploring how thoughts arrive, what the significance of thought is, and also, our barriers to experience, that is, how we're bound by the gravity of thinking. The gravitational pull of thinking seems overwhelming; we seem to be always thinking. One of the things Rinpoché says is we almost can't help but think, we are committed to using the mind in this manner, therefore, we had better learn to think in the most effective possible way. That does not mean thinking the best possible thoughts, but having a different *relationship* to our thoughts.

Let's take a look at the reading for this week (see Appendix 2 - Week 5), and the notion that Rinpoché points to -- thoughts affirm themselves as zero, and basically it "*is a false affirmation, for zero in its nature cannot be affirmed*". And in that

same way, you cannot affirm a *thought*. What you *can't* affirm is not the content of the thought, for that is exactly what we try to do, over and over, we have thoughts, and then we accept the validity of the content of the thoughts, as the reality of what's going on. Thought is all about affirming its content. An analogy might be when you are watching a movie; the movie screen is there, and because it's there it makes what appears, appear possible, but it doesn't affirm itself as being the screen. The screen is not showing up as the background so much as the flickering content, as foreground and background. Like that movie screen, thoughts are a background for other thoughts. But this can be a little misleading. Thoughts are not so much the background as the *enabler*, the way a blender is to a milkshake, without the blender, no milkshake. Thoughts select what goes in, and are the ingredients of the milkshake.

Rinpoché talks about thought being a zero point, and says:

"Thought presents its content without establishing what is presented... There is nothing to be established, for to establish we would have to proceed point by point, and then we would miss the point. Previously a claim to have established was pronounced; now it calls forth a response. We could say it is pointless to continue making pronouncements, but making *this* claim means we have already continued. In fact, we cannot help but continue." p.57

Some of you have a background in meditation and Buddhism, and you might raise a question when Rinpoché says, **"In fact, we cannot help but continue."** Do we really have to operate our mind in such a way that we're always thinking, that we can't help but make *pronouncements*? I think when Rinpoché says this, he means in ordinary mind, the way we normally think, one could approach it from an absence of thought, however, it's not an easy thing, and it requires a commitment to meditative practice that can take months and years. In Buddhism, for instance, meditative stages are laid out pretty clearly, and with dedicated practice you may eventually reach a stage where thoughts will stop. However, while not discounting the validity of meditative practice, it doesn't seem to be an option for most people. It certainly is *not* what TSK is about. But, if we focus on the way the mind ordinarily operates, which is what TSK asks us to do, that is, look into how we are here, in this situation, and we are constantly thinking about what to do next. If we're focused in that ordinary way, we have little choice but to keep thinking. So Rinpoché suggests we see it differently, and not make a commitment to the content of the thought:

"Thought presents its content without establishing what is presented. Nothing arises, yet this non-arising appears. There is no *need* for this to be so, but this is how it is. And since it is so, it is vitally important to 'point out' that it is not so at all." p.57

The idea that thoughts establish is just a claim that we buy into, we drink the cool-aid by unquestioningly accepting this unarticulated presupposition. So Rinpoché asks, **"Then how can we respond more appropriately?"** The answer is, by not accepting what thought claims to be the case, and that can be accomplished, he says:

"By activating appearance as symbolic: appearance as zero and zero as zeroless. In this modality, thoughts become the symbols of their own arising." [p.57]

We're going to practice this in a moment, but before we do I wanted to comment on the use of the word *"playful"*, when Rinpoché suggests we approach thoughts in a playful way. The term *playful* does not mean that we aren't serious about our observations. As an analogy, suppose you're on vacation with your family and you are playing cards. You're involved in the game of cards; counting pairs, the number of diamonds or spades, who's turn it is, the rules swimming around in the background of the contextual world of your card game, but then something happens, something real, not a game, something totally outside the contextual world of the game, and into the larger context of your life. So one moment you were involved with one context that you dropped, and the next moment another, and taking the thoughts *playfully* means you are not committed to them, you're ready to drop them in the next moment, perhaps there's a little regret, perhaps you were about to win the card game, even so you give it up. And this idea of no emotional commitment to the thought, being ready to allow it to drop, means there is no strong tie-in with identity either. So that's what we want to practice observing playfully, to let thoughts arise without commitment.

(After a few moments of silence)

Does anyone want to describe his or her experience?

Robert – *There's a sense of opening. The thoughts came, and I entertained them without any attachment to their realness or validity.*

Yes, I think that sounds like a good description of this practice, entertaining them in a way that also allows them to move on.

This week I happened to look up the words *entertain* and *amuse* in the dictionary. They actually have very different roots. *Entertain* suggests, to harbor, putting up guests, showing hospitality, holding attention. The root meaning of *amuse* has to do with a blank or dullness, to stare stupidly. Earlier regarding observing thought, I mentioned the word

playful might be a tricky word, which in this case doesn't mean not being serious about our observations, but just *not committing to their content*, and now I'm saying in this context, the word *entertain* perhaps suggests holding our attention as we focus on thinking.

Soudabeh – *During the practice I felt more present and alert.*

Yes, that makes sense. The thing about our ordinary thoughts is that they are different today than they are tomorrow; there are different experiences and different concerns of different times. But in any given moment there's a type of ordinary thought that cycles through our mind, they are so repetitive as to be an invitation to go to sleep in a sense, to *not* notice what's going on. You tune out as if you were on auto-pilot. So what Robert and Soudebeah said points to the idea that if you go with the thought without establishing anything, then you are undermining that sense of being amused and going to sleep, that dullness.

Bruce – *I also struggled initially with no commitment to thought, but then recalled Jack's comment last week about not believing what we think. It shifted my focus to a kind of aesthetic appreciation of what was arising without concern about the truth factor. Images became more pronounced and animated, and I noticed they became subtly convincing in a different way.*

Not quite sure about the convincing part, but I think *aesthetic appreciation* is a nice term. Again, the notion of *playful* has relevance here; you appreciate what happens without regard for the meaning of it. I was reading something funny in an article about how astronauts deal with waste when they're in low gravity space. In the old days, they would jettison all their bodily waste outside the spacecraft. And in subsequent interviews many of the astronauts commented on how beautiful the sparkling stream of urine was in space, in its golden luminescence lit by the sun. (Laughter) So that's an example of *aesthetic appreciation*, entertaining a thought without perhaps committing to its repugnant meaning. (More laughter)

Robert - *What about linking no commitment to the idea of not owning the thought?*

That seems right to me, it's something that needs exploring as you practice. I think no ownership and no emotional attachment to a thought are significant here.

Bruce – *When I said I noticed thoughts became subtly convincing in a different way, I meant not being committed to them in the form of stories and words.*

Yes, that makes sense; I think there are lots of ways of being committed.

All right, in this next practice, which I will discuss further in the Orientation Memo, I want to discuss a little here first in case there are any questions. We want to allow thoughts to arise without commitment. That's the basic practice, in order to understand more about the thinking process. It seems to me, we could say there are three levels of thinking; one is like watching cars go by on the freeway, or thoughts go by in the sky like clouds, and not being committed to their passing. And perhaps that's the most straight forward way to observe thoughts. The **second** way is the thought comes along and you *do* get committed to it, its gravity pulls you in, perhaps they might be worrisome, for instance. But then, you have the opportunity to reflect back, and get a brief glimpse into how you got caught up in the thought. Exactly how that works is interesting to explore, and that is also a way of investigating thought. The **third** approach has to do with different layers of thought, or as Bruce mentioned, about getting committed to images and other forms. It could be that you become committed to a feeling, for instance, perhaps not caught in a label or name, but a feeling none the less. And the question becomes can you see that feeling as a thought you are committed to in a more fundamental way? You are looking into how it is that this moment is structured, because if you are entertaining a thought, there is a kind of background structure affirming or establishing something. Here *I am* entertaining the thought, or simply there is a thought, and if it's a feeling, *I have* a feeling, or there's a feeling without me taking ownership of it. Is there a *zero point* of thought or *an establishing thought* for that experience? That's where to look. This kind of inquiry, once it gets going, can have a tremendous impact.

Orientation Memo 5 –

In this past Sunday's phone conversation, several people raised the question of the relation between thoughts and a more feeling-based (or affective) kind of experience as their base or foundation. Some people had a sense of the feeling as rich and positive, others were more aware of something possibly fearsome. Others linked it to be a '*readiness*' to have the thought. This is an interesting and important question, one well worth pursuing.

One way to think about the connection is that thoughts give form to an inchoate feeling. In effect, they crystallize it. Once the feeling has been thought, it has a name, and we know how to react to it. It may help us come in contact with the feeling; on the other hand, it may be a way of covering up the feeling. Since a couple of people commented on this that have a background in psychology, let me cite a book by a therapist that has interesting things to say about this: Donnel B. Stern, *Unformulated Experience*.⁵

There is also a different way to conceive of this, which is that the thought comes first. This goes against our usual understanding. The idea is that **as the thought takes form, it establishes the feeling that it then presents itself as naming.**

This second alternative may or may not be true. But it fits well with Rinpoché's suggestion (p. 56, see Appendix 2 - Week 5) not to look for explanations for why a particular thought arises. Explanations are themselves a kind of thought, so explaining the thought in terms of a more fundamental foundation in feeling may not help that much. And at a deeper level, the seemingly undeniable sense of a realm of feeling that underlies thought may itself be the product of an establishing thought.

The pages we read for this week are very playful, but they are playful for a reason. We want to see if there is a way to engage thoughts—and their contents—without establishing anything. The way proposed in the text is playful and symbolic: to put it in language like that found in the reading, that's the point.

Week 6

Conference Call 6 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

We spent the first five weeks of this course on Chapter Seven of *Dynamics of Time and Space* called, *Thought Forms in Space*, and now were moving to part four of the book, Chapter Twenty-five for the remaining weeks to take a closer look at *Freedom for Knowledge*. (See Appendix 2- Week 6) Part four, the section we are going to look at now is set up as a kind of manual for the part of the book we've already looked at as it relates to thought.

I want to go through the first two paragraphs and see what they offer in terms of guidance on how we can investigate and question the relationship between thought and experience. And in the third paragraph there is a practice introduced, and I'd like for us to work with that practice a little bit, and then reflect and comment on our experience. All right, the first paragraph says:

"As human beings, we have a wealth of experience that we can draw on to activate knowledge. Yet often we seem to ignore experience in favor of the surface contents of our thoughts, the identities disclosed to the senses, and other structures we impose on what arises." p.245

So the model here is that we have two different possibilities, there's knowledge available through experience, and through thoughts, identities and there imposed structures. You could say, perhaps more broadly, all those thoughts that establish the world we ordinarily inhabit, is a thought-out world. So there are thoughts in the sense of what we usually think of thoughts, that is, their surface content, and there are thoughts in the form of identities, thoughts that serve to identify what we are thinking about, labeling and naming, and finally a catch-all of all other structures we impose, such as underlying assumptions, or a more global perspective within which the first two types of thought interrelate. So here are these three ways in which thought is said to appose experience; opposed in some sense because the immediacy in our experience is being *mediated* by our thought-out world.

In the beginning of the second paragraph below, Rinpoché says we have a *preference* for the presupposed:

"Beneath this preference for the presupposed, a strong tension or fear operates, a sense that if we let go of the accustomed, we ourselves will disappear. Motivated by a naked wish to survive, we conduct forward a driving restlessness, never allowing ourselves to sink into our own being." p.245

The point is whatever comes up, in every moment, the experience is fresh, but we tend not to go to that freshness, instead, we have a *preference for the presupposed*, the familiar patterns and structures we are used to, what has already been thought out, and labeled. And then Rinpoché mentions there's *a strong tension or fear*, and while it may not be as clear here, in other places in the book he points out that the fear comes because we know we are structuring, we know we're not really in close contact with experience, there's a disconnect while we try to establish a familiar connection. And there is this underlying concern that if we did contact experience we might lose not only the identity of things we engage, our sense of the way things are, but even our own identity. We stay on the surface because we fear there's nothing underneath the surface.

These two paragraphs by Rinpoché suggest three possible ways to practice. And by the way, a fruitful thing to do when you read these books, is even when you're reading a single paragraph, always ask yourself how might I make a practice out of what I've just read? Maybe a better way to say it is to ask, how can I investigate this experientially? So the **first** of these three possibilities for ways to practice is can we actually discover in our experience that we are on the

surface of experience, are we caught up in the presupposed, or caught up in thoughts, identity and imposed structure? And that is more or less what we've been focusing on.

The **second** possibility for practice suggested here, which is closely related to the first, has to do with this idea that we encounter each moment of experience in terms of what we presuppose. And the question would be to look at the presupposed, and ask as each moment arises, how do we shape it? How do we turn it into what we already know to be the case? This is a particularly good form of inquiry.

The **third** possibility for practice derived from the quoted paragraphs comes from the notion that there's a tension or fear operating, which manifests as a kind of restlessness. You could look for that in your own experience.

We're going to continue to work with the first one, and the next paragraph sets that up.

"As a counter to this view, consider the possibility that there is nothing to disappear."

Rinpoché is saying, *as a counter to this view*, what if we don't accept the model he's put forward in the previous paragraphs, and we would like an alternative, and so here it is. In relation to the fear of letting go of the familiar, and a resulting loss of identity, he says; *consider the possibility that there is nothing to disappear*. What if there is no identity to disappear, what if there is only the activity of naming, labeling going on? And then he says:

"This is not a claim about existence or non-existence, but rather an observation about the way we structure appearance." p.245

With this alternative view, there is no *claim about existence or non-existence*, and that what we take as existing exists as a construct, as a thought, as a label we are applying. The essential point here is that it's not that we want to figure out a way to look at reality, and tear the mask off to show there's nothing there underneath. That's difficult; for one reason, what you tear off and expose is usually not nothing, but another mask. But what he's really saying, and what we want to look at is the way we *structure* experience. We are interested in the structuring, the labeling, not the content, but the thinking, the naming and identifying.

"The more clearly we see how appearance is dictated by thought, the more we realize that on the other side of that dictation, or perhaps within it, there is nothing doing the dictating. The expression itself carries its own message: The communiqué communicates itself forward." [p.245]

There's a kind of dilemma here that needs to be identified. In the first paragraph of the reading Rinpoché sets up a dichotomy between experience and surface contents of thinking, identity, and the structures we impose. And in the third paragraph he says underneath experience there's nothing but appearance, and nothing to disappear except perhaps structuring, and perhaps to be aware of the structuring if we can. The world we inhabit is not a substantive world, however, that doesn't mean it's an unreal world. It's just that the realness we count on is still just a particular form of appearance. So in order to look at thoughts as not being substantive, we must look at thoughts in their arising.

Tina – *Rinpoché is not saying our world is not real.*

That's right, he's saying *real* is not what we think it is.

Tina – *When I think of a tree, it's not that I think it into existence.*

Well that's interesting, because when we see the object that we recognize and think as tree, their appearance arise together. The question is, how can you see appearance as simply appearance - without any substance to it? You watch thoughts arise, as just thoughts, as the outcome of thinking.

Linda -- *If some enlightened person really saw this clearly, would he see it appearing and solidifying and disappearing and losing solidity at the same time?*

Yes, I think so. As it appears you recognize it's simply appearance appearing, rather than a label we assign to something solid underneath. And that's not some insight only an enlightened being can have, it's just a kind of flip we can make, as Rinpoché uses this analogy elsewhere in the book, like turning things on edge, and changing your perspective.

So how can you see appearing as appearance, do you have to be situated somewhere else? If you do, then there's a problem, because it seems like you have to be situated in something real that is not appearing in order to see what is appearing. That doesn't seem right. The alternative is to see appearing *within* appearing, that is, in the very act of appearing you are aware of a way of looking that does not catch you up so much in labels, you experience in a kind of *unformulated* way. It's like biting into an apple, and there is the taste of apple, and there is labeling that comes up after that with related judgments or appreciation, and there is also the immediacy of unformulated experience. That's one way to do it, and we will look at that next quarter. You need to be careful that when you do this you don't turn the unformulated experience into substance.

Even in what we're doing now, whatever level you get to, there is still this appearance activity, and even the richness of experience is appearance. So what approach should we take? The alternative is to look for the appearing as a doing, look at the first sentence in exercise one on page 247. (See Appendix 2 - Week 7)

"As thoughts and sensations come up, look within each arising moment for the quality of awareness it carries."

Yes there is experience, content, labels, and a presupposed construct, and fundamental to all of that is the awareness that makes all of it possible. So whatever arises, including content, look within the experience for the quality of that particular awareness. So, let's take about five minutes or so to practice this.

(A few moments of silence)

Who would like to comment on their experience?

Linda – *Looking at the quality of awareness underlying the construct, I keep encountering a layer that has the color of fear, and a kind of aggressiveness, or maybe a better word is willfulness. It feels like if I were to poke it with a pin it might all unravel, but there's no hand to hold the pin.*

Well, what needs to be unraveled presumably doesn't really need to unravel, because it hasn't been put together. You're describing something like what Rinpoché describes about that quality of tension. You say it has an aggressive or willful quality and that's interesting.

Michael -- *I noticed that I could have thought, but didn't have to join in so to speak, I could let it go.*

David -- *I felt an opening, expansive, freeing newness.*

Yes, I like that. The point is that if you say, "*I won't look at the content of my experience, I'm going to focus on the awareness that the moment carries*", there's a very strong tendency to split things up between what is known, and the one who knows. You assign awareness to the one who knows, and when that happens, it seems you turn away from the content of experience, toward the *experiencing* and the *experiencer*. And that's not quite right. That's one of the presuppositions we are used to and prefer, because it helps sustain the structure of a self at the center of experience.

What I noticed while doing the practice was that the quality of awareness is inseparable from the quality of the experience. If the awareness is somehow deeper or more alive, or as David put it, *opening, expansive, freeing and new*, that means the *experience itself* is more freeing, expansive, and new. One of the reasons I'm sharing my reflection with you is that I started thinking, isn't it a little boring to look at just the awareness and not the content? The image that came to mind was a movie projector, and if you only look at the light being projected and not the images on the screen it would get boring, just repeating flickering lights over and over again. I realized in that experience, awareness is that *opening, expansive, freeing newness*.

Continue to work with this practice for next week.

Orientation Memo 6 –

We are looking at the stream of thinking. As we have been exploring, there are two ways to do this: through setting aside time during the day to let thoughts arise and see what you can see, and by watching thoughts arise during your daily activities. Both are important, and each supports the other.

At the end of the phone call for this week, I suggested three different ways to look into thoughts and thinking:

The **first** is to 'entertain' the thought (to play host to it, we might say), without getting caught in it. The thought passes by, or it drops in, stays a while, and then moves on. You are aware of it, but not 'committed' to it, not drawn in by its gravity. Although the thought occurs 'to' me, I am not identified with it.

The **second** happens when we 'emerge' from the thought. Unlike the first situation, we get lost in the thought. The classic example here is when we are driving along a well-known route and we realize we have not noticed our surroundings at all; instead, we have been caught up in a fantasy, a daydream, a replayed memory, a worry, etc. In this case, we still have the option of looking back at the thought we just left, a little like looking back at a dream at the moment we wake up. We may notice something important and characteristic about how thought exerts this hold on us. Perhaps what we notice is the feel of being involved, engaged, or committed. Perhaps we have a visceral sense of the gravity of the thought.

The **third** is to reflect on, or experience the present situation that you are experiencing right now, as itself being a thought. For instance, I am typing right now, and there is the sound of a vacuum cleaner, the warm air of the room, heated by the sun outside the window, and some scrabbling sounds made by a squirrel that lives outside the window. These are all background experiences; they are not really the focus of the experience. But is there a sense in which they are the outcome of a thought, the 'thought of the whole'? This came up in our phone call with regard to feelings. If a

thought doesn't fully form, and if instead, I notice how I am feeling (in terms of physical sensations, perhaps, or emotions, or something more subtle), how much of this feelings is due to my 'inhabiting a thought'?

Perhaps these distinctions will help in your investigations.

Finally, since we have a two-week break now, and since I want to encourage you to use this time to investigate your thoughts and thinking as you go about your life, here is the list of questions I posted at the beginning of the course to review and reflect on.

What counts as a thought?

Does the self own thoughts? Generate them? If not, where do they come from?

What is the relation between thoughts and the world we experience as real?

What is the relation between thoughts and emotions?

What is the link between the thoughts we have and the decisions we make? Between thoughts and the actions we take?

Can we control our thoughts – either their frequency or their content?

Why don't we do what we think we want to do?

What is the relation between thoughts and time?

Week 7

Conference Call 7 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

I encourage you during the week, *not* to make use of Rinpoché's concept of a 'source-from' understanding,⁶ and allow instead, for knowledge that is 'prior' to appearance, prior to all pointing out.

One of the reasons I wrote the book, *When It Rains Does Space Get Wet*, was to make connections so that people could follow a theme out, and in connection with that, we included a CD of all the TSK books, with the idea of being able to do searches on words and phrases to see what Rinpoché said on specific subjects. So you could do a search on 'source from' to see what comes up. Of course you can also look in the reference section of *Dynamics of Time and Space*.

Michael - *I noticed that you didn't have to make some exotic transformation to face a deeper dimension of your experience. So, not looking for something outside your realm of experience, or 'source from', seems like a useful insight.*

That's good, an interesting insight. I think you're right, that's one element here. The question he raises again and again in the TSK books is why isn't our experience more rich, and alive, and why do we have the sense that if only we could find some other source, level, or dimension of experience -- somewhere else, then we could do away with the sense of frustration, incompleteness, and dissatisfaction. Rinpoché repeatedly says it's right *in* experience, *not* elsewhere. So the question is, how do we find that *within*? That is the theme I want to explore today.

Linda - *The idea of 'within' seems to point to someplace else too, it seems to me.*

Well, Rinpoché is saying any ideas that point you away from immediate experience would be pointing to a *source from*, a somewhere else, such as reflecting back or projecting forward. TSK says there is an accessibility, an *availability* that comes with appreciation and knowing in immediate experience.

Hayward – *Instead of source from, how about 'as'? We might say awareness as experience.*

That might work; it seems to have a nice quality of not taking you anywhere else. I would want to work with it a little more. It kind of relates to something Rinpoché said in a previous week, that we find ourselves *on the surface of experience*. It's good to be playful with language and to explore other possibilities. I remember when Rinpoché was giving me notes because, as I've said before, he just dictates these books; it's always an oral transcription. When he first started talking about *from* and *to*, it was just so striking to me, here's these little words *from* and *to*, that we never think about, and he is making something very important turn on that distinction. And so I think in TSK that's a great way to approach things.

Tina – *If you say source from isn't that an absolute, and therefore a limit that can be questioned?*

Yes, I think that's right, and it helps point out, if you say there's a *source from*, it's not only setting a limit, it's also putting something *off limit*. It's like saying here we are in our experience, but that experience has a source, and we can't experience that source, because if we go off and try to experience the source, then now *that's* our experience, not the source, just the search for it. We never really arrive at source, only search. So Rinpoché is pointing toward the *source from understanding* way of knowing as *not* being particularly fruitful.

I want to contrast that with something that Rinpoché says in the reading on p.247, as follows:

"It also seems possible to engage knowledge more directly. Instead of insisting on perception, we can develop visions of knowledge. Instead of relying on thoughts, we can cultivate the lightening of awareness. Instead of making knowledge into a servant, we can see it as provider.

There are questions we can ask and observations we can make that encourage the mind to embody knowledge as the inwardness of an unfolding inquiry. How did our present situation develop? What is the past that gave rise to it? What are the specific structures and attitudes that bar us from greater knowledge? What happens when we do not own what is known? When we do not abandon direct experience for wishes, fears, and expectations?"

That is an alternative that Rinpoché is suggesting. You're not on a *source from*, and you're also not on the surface of experience, you are arising at it inward, there's an inwardness. And I think that Linda's point is important here, that even if you say *from within* it suggests a journey *from - to*; here we are on the surface of experience, and we have to go *within*, but Rinpoché is trying *not* to suggest that. The experience has an inwardness, but saying *has* suggests possession, and that's not quite right.

Tina – Rinpoché says there's the "**inwardness of an unfolding**", so that suggests as we look inward there's an opening at the same time.

Yes, that's a good point, and then he asks some questions as ways to inquire inward that facilitate that "**inwardness of an unfolding**": "**How did our present situation develop? What is the past that gave rise to it?**" The first question seems to invite us to name a source; we're here in our present situation and it developed from somewhere else. And more specifically the next question asks what path gave rise to it? And it's true, both questions could be asked in a *source from* way. But I think what he means is there is an inwardness to experience that brings in the past, that is, the past is inwardly available, it's in the experience now, so you don't go looking outside now. That's the point, and it becomes clearer as you read further into what he says.

He says in the "**inwardness of an unfolding...the specific structures and attitudes**" are available within current experience. The next sentence is an example of that; "**What happens when we do not own what is known?**" Owning something seems like an example of a structure or an attitude that bars us from greater knowledge.

So if we look within experience or let experience unfold inwardly, without changing the experience and just allowing it to unfold, but it may be that we could encounter an obstacle such as an ownership claim. Then he asks, "**What happens when we do not own what is known?**" That is a good question for you to explore individually. The last sentence in the paragraph, what happens, he asks: "**When we do not abandon direct experience for wishes, fears, and expectations?**" That sentence clarifies the point that you're not leaving experience, when we look at the past, obstacles and ownership, we're still staying within experience. An important way of thinking about this is TSK is never that interested in explanations, because explanations are invitations to depart from experience. To explain is to lay out, like carving up experience, or to breaking it down.

There's an image from William James that I like that goes something like this: the problem with psychologists is they want to study the stream of consciousness, but the way they do it is to go to the stream and fill their buckets, and take them back to their laboratories and analyze the water in the bucket, when what they should be doing is lying down in the stream.

The point is explanations are things that take us away from experience by carving it up, laying out and dissecting it, and they do not allow us to remain in direct experience. You ask a *source from* question whenever you ask for an explanation.

I find a dilemma with TSK, because it's very difficult to write a book, it seems to me, in which you're introducing a *vision*, as TSK puts it, without offering explanations. The place where explanations tend to come up is when you say, well, how did you get to be in the state you're currently in, or how did we get locked down in this limited understanding of space or time? It seems like you need to do that so you can explain what to do about it. But that's *not* the approach that you want to take from a TSK perspective, because you really want to *stay within direct experience*. So the trick, you might say, is to use suggestive language, not stating that *this is the way it is*. But what if you were to let the language guide you in a certain direction in the same way when you say, consciousness arises, then there is this, and then that, etc., and it looks like an explanation, but as Rinpoché has said, don't state anything as though it were a fact, don't offer explanations.

Tina – You could explain in an open-ended way.

Yes, you could offer a *way of looking* at it, but the next step is going back into the immediacy of the experience. So, how do you do that? This all comes up in the reading; it's what Rinpoché is exploring. How can you go to this inward unfolding of experience so that you don't leave the direct experience in favor of something else? How do you penetrate, (to use a spatial term) beneath the surface level of experience? The surface of experience is what we encounter when

we're relying on the thinking mind, which is what labels, explain, presuppose, and manipulate experience, turning it into something other than direct experience.

Linda - *In your explanation you are answering a wondering I've had about "inquiry". I never understood the position of inquiry as you are using it, because to me, the experience of inquiry was "I wonder" with the immediate barrier of I. You are describing the experience of inquiry with an observational position or quality of awareness.*

Yes, *quality of awareness* is a good word that I will seize on, because it relates to what we will look at next. The exercise is:

"As thoughts and sensations come up, look within each arising moment for the quality of awareness it carries. Be sensitive to the way that awareness transfers from one experience to the next." [p.247]

You may notice that we are not saying that 'I' have a certain kind of awareness or understanding, but rather, the experience, each arising moment, he says, has a *quality of awareness*. It's not something that anyone owns. And so this inward inquiry into the unfolding of experience has to do with the quality of awareness. We're not trying to define the terms *quality of awareness*, but go to a place where we can investigate that is *not* the content of the experience. If you go to content, then you are at the level of labels at the surface of experience.

As a footnote, when we rely on seeing, we can only see the surface of something. For instance, if you see an orange, you see the surface, the peel, then if you slice it open, then you see the fruit of the orange, but you're still seeing the surface. Seeing in that superficial way, if you will, is what leads us away from the inwardness of experience, and it's what thought and explanations do. You could say if all we have is looking in this surface way of seeing, then we can never get to the juice of experience. And we don't want that, instead, we want to see in the way this practice is asking us. One way to look at it is awareness is inherent in the situation, and in a sense, awareness here is a kind of broad cover term for everything in experience that is *not* the content.

The second sentence of our practice above says. **"Be sensitive to the way that awareness transfers from one experience to the next."** Maybe another way to say it is there is a kind of *shifting* quality to awareness, and one moment is different from the next. Regarding the word *quality*, we use the word in two different ways. We can talk about something being low, or high or medium quality, in a kind of quantitative way, in a sense ranking quality. That is *not* what we're doing here. The other way we use the word quality is to describe something almost indefinable. You might say the quality of experience or of a painting perhaps, the *atmosphere* is such that it's a kind of indefinable thing. That is where we want to look today. It is a way of looking and engaging inward

Now, let's take a few minutes to look at the quality of awareness in light of our discussion about it, including the second sentence about the way awareness transfers, or perhaps shifts from one experience to the next.

(After a few moments of silence.)

Would anyone like to say what he or she noticed?

Michael - *I liked the way the two sentences employ the words, sensation, awareness, and arising in time. And the second sentence invites us to use sensations to explore and find awareness in life and time.*

That's good, and it reminds me that our next nine week course this spring, our theme is *the feel of sensing*. And that exploration of the senses will build on what we're looking at now.

Robert - *Focusing on the quality of awareness seems to bring an opening between perception and my reaction, and brings a sense of freedom or maybe just a release of tension.*

Yes, Rinpoché talks about how our usual tendency is to abandon direct experience for our wishes, fears and expectations. So focusing on the quality of awareness does seem to bring more openness and appreciation for immediacy.

Linda - *What a nice morning! In the moments I am able to rest in awareness, the quality of awareness does not seem to change. Instead it is sensory perceptions; thoughts, etc., appear in time. The quality of experience becomes joy. What a nice morning.*

Again, Linda feels joy and appreciation coming from immediacy.

David - *On the porch looking peacefully out on an open field. So all of the experience has that fresh, calm, open feeling that occasional thoughts enter, pass, and evolve. (Anxiety in this situation doesn't arise the way it might at other times of the day.) Noticing the new buds on the tree branches, spring is coming... That thought seemed to hinge on the felt quality of newness. Cars in the distance are like the passing of thoughts in an open new quality, continuing...*

Again, something similar; a fresh, calm, open feeling, and newness.

Bruce - *I explored content and awareness, the awareness-quality of content. Feeling thoughts as "surface," I stayed with the judgment of "surface" and savored and deepened :-> into the awareness-quality in| as "surface".*

The *awareness quality of content*, yes, content and quality are not in conflict, it just that our tendency is to focus on one or the other. I think the rest of what Bruce says is right too. You don't have to stop thinking to be aware of content, thinking or awareness.

Rinpoché asks, "**What are the specific structures and attitudes that bar us from greater knowledge?**" Here he says structures that bar *further knowledge*, but we're focusing on the *structures and attitudes* that affect *the quality of awareness*. So continue with this exercise.

That's it for today. See you next week.

Orientation Memo 7 –

In this week's phone call, we ended with a short practice based on the first sentence of Exercise 1 of *Dynamics of Time and Space*. We will focus on this exercise (and its commentary) in a couple of weeks, but let's start with its practice now and continue to explore it.

The sentence upon which we are focusing says, "*As thoughts and sensations come up, look within each arising moment for the quality of awareness it contains.*" Let me repeat a point I made in the discussion that followed the practice this morning, and that seems to me central: our usual assumption is that when we look at awareness, we are looking away from the content of the experience and toward the subjective pole of experience (the one that is aware.) However, the instruction is very carefully written to avoid that dualistic understanding. As the text says, **awareness is found within the moment. It does not belong to anyone.**

There is another important clue contained in this short sentence. **Awareness can have different qualities, and the suggestion is for us to be sensitive to those qualities.** Several people commented in the chat session that doing this exercise made experience seem richer, more open, more alive, etc. This greater aliveness seems to me to be the same as a quality of awareness with which we are not ordinarily familiar. Focusing on the quality of the awareness does not mean that we lose sight of the 'object' of awareness, so that experience becomes gray, or perhaps 'chaotic (Tina's comment), though that may also happen. Rather, **it adds new depths and dimensions to the experience.**

The paragraphs we read for this week makes use of the concept of a 'source-from' understanding. You may want to look at the main discussion of this concept in the text, which is found on pp. 188-190 (chapter 18). (See Appendix 2 – Week 7 – Supplemental Reading) The discussion there offers some valuable theoretical insights. As an *alternative* to a 'source-from' understanding, chapter 18 suggests a knowledge that is 'prior' to appearance, prior to all pointing out. As it says, the prior can become primary. The natural question is how this 'prior' knowledge relates to the quality of awareness, and also to the several questions and possibilities introduced in the few short paragraphs that make up our reading for this week. As usual, Rinpoché manages to fit a vast array of possibilities into just a few words and sentences.

Week 8

Conference Call 8 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

We've been working with Exercise 1, in which Rinpoché asks us to look at the quality of awareness. I have a kind of working model in my mind: the content of our experience is where we ordinarily focus, which is where we try to figure out what's going on. You could argue that where human beings are constantly encountering other beings, and situations trying to figure out how to deal with them. That's what we have to do, we have to *take into account* what's going on around us and be able to identify it, and react and respond to it. So that's what we usually do and where we put our energy.

Then, you might say there is a second level that is not the content of experience in the sense that it's more the *background* of experience. In the reading for today, Rinpoché points to underlying structures, specifically, *I'm the one who is having this experience*. That may be a central one, but it's also shorthand for a lot of things that are going on that we take for granted. Philosopher, John Searle, says something similar to this about *background*, using the example, when you walk into a restaurant and you say, "I'd like a steak," you make a lot of background assumptions; that you and the waiter understand each other, he knows it's to be cooked not raw, he knows you want meat not a wooden stake, that it should be served on a plate, that you intend to pay for it, and so on, with many more things going on that need not be specifically discussed. So that gives you a sense of this level, which is also the level at which we notice *this experience belongs to me*.

And there's also a related level that Rinpoché doesn't mention here, but does elsewhere, that I think is important, and that's the *level of reactivity* you might say. We respond to what's going on, but it's not that we first have the experience and then we respond to it, but rather, the response is built into the experience; so liking or disliking are obvious

examples, judging in different ways, connecting and associating, and the situating of the immediate experience in a structure that makes sense out of everything. I often call it *the sense making* part, the story part that serves as the background of the story, and so this is related to that second level experience

And the third level of experience that Rinpoché is talking about here is the *quality of awareness*. I think this is particularly interesting, and I don't know anyone else that talks about this. Once you look at it, it makes a lot of sense, and it gives you a new dimension in which to investigate your experience.

So, it's not the background, it's not simply that we are aware, it's important to be aware of our awareness, or to be knowing fully aware. It's that with the content and the reactivity we manifest toward experience as it unfolds, from moment to moment, there is an impact on the nature of awareness. To reiterate for a moment, as we talk about the quality of awareness, we are not talking so much about high or low quality of awareness as if ranking it, instead, it's that awareness comes in different flavors, depending on what it is we are aware of. And it may be that the more familiar we become with this quality of awareness the less important these differences become. Perhaps a better way to put it is the more familiar we become with this quality of awareness, we go to a level of awareness that doesn't change so much.

But the way to investigate what Rinpoché is suggesting is that we be aware or sensitive to what's going on in each moment. And that's why I like to mention that second level, which is not something that Rinpoché is really emphasizing here, because if you look around the room, let's say, and you see the wall, then a lamp, and then a window, then outside, that may not give you enough content to make you aware of the shifting quality of awareness, but if you are aware of this intermediate level you can observe *how you react* to each different thing you engage -- what is its meaning to you, what is its significance, what is the quality of liking or disliking or judging? It's when you become sensitive to this global presence that this exercise begins to offer its richness. There's a little clue to that in the following sentence on page 247:

"A perception or thought goes forward, carrying awareness; then a second perception or thought recollects and passes that awareness on."

It's the word *recollects* that I'm interested in here, because it points in this direction. The word *recollect* can mean to bring to mind, and can also mean re-collect, to assemble all the pieces again. For example, you might be working on a jigsaw puzzle and you tip over the table, and you then *re-collect* all the pieces and place them back on the table again and start over. Rinpoché is saying each moment *re-collects* from the previous moment, and to me that suggests a kind of global dimension of experience. In each new moment, all the pieces have to fall into place, so you can sustain what's going on.

Then he asks, **"What is the quality of this experience?"** It's when you are aware of all the things that are going on. We have several words to use, *re-member* assembles members, *re-mind* is when something just pops up, when you recollect something you have to make an effort, and a related word here is recognize, which is to *re-cognize*. You could say first you have to recognize what's going on then re-collect all the pieces, or you could say that first you re-collect what's going on; taking everything that has been assembled in the previous moment, and you pass it on re-collecting it. And then, because you've done that, you're able to recognize what's going on. That would be an interesting question to explore. Of course, the main thing to notice is that all this happens very quickly and sort of silently, or *beneath the surface of our experience*. So, in order to become aware of the quality of our experience or awareness, there needs to be a greater sensitivity to that.

The other thing I wanted to say is *that in itself* is a kind of transition, what Rinpoché is really looking at in this exercise, in the second paragraph on page 248, he says, **"As awareness become more refined, a sense of inner knowledge enters into each experience."** The notion here is that within everything that's going on, and in particular, as we become aware of that *within*, or perhaps better said, we become aware *within the within* of experience, as that happens we tune in to that sense of inner knowledge. As Rinpoché says, it's not a matter of being here or mind conducting awareness, or mind conducting mind, it's got a kind of purity to it. So, to return to our theme for this program it's exactly *not* thinking about or of things, rather, it's a knowing that doesn't depend on those structures.

So that is an orientation to the practice we've been doing for a couple of weeks, and I'd like to do that practice now in light of what we've just discussed.

"As thoughts and sensations come up, look within each arising moment for the quality of awareness it carries. Be sensitive to the way that awareness transfers from one experience to the next." p.247

(After a few moments of silence)

Anyone have comments or questions? Not right now?

Perhaps I'll start by providing a little background. I've been organizing activities during a particular busy time right now at the Mangalam Center, Berkley, and last night we had a public talk, and there was a Dharma teacher from the *Theravada* tradition, and before he gave his talk he told everyone to just sit for ten minutes without giving further

directions. So I decided to do the TSK practice we just did, and then further reflected on it as I did it again today. The thing about doing it last night was that I was so much in the mode of running the operation that the quality of awareness was low, if I can put in those terms, perhaps better, it was a very narrow awareness, I was in the mode of, "Is this going right, is that going right?" I couldn't seem to get out of that little corner I painted myself into.

Tina – *Is Rinpoché pointing out the nature of mind?*

In so far as that's a technical term in the Buddhist tradition, I don't think it's that helpful here to try to connect that up. I do think it's fair to say that Rinpoché is pointing out *awareness*, and the term *mind* just adds another layer of complexity, perhaps. He's pointing out in a specific sense, maybe *pointing out* isn't even the right term, because he's not saying look here. He seems to be more suggesting a way for us to investigate ourselves, with a very strong focus on *inwardness*, the quality within the experience.

Bruce – *The first thing I was thinking about was your exercise of cracking open thought that I recall from one of your essays. So I'm sort of seeing the metaphor of being at right angles, which then switched into a pattern of waves and the wetness of waves, and that kind of opened up and let me see into the wetness of thinking and my health.*

When you say the *wetness of thinking*, is that the thinkingness of thinking?

Bruce – *I guess it was the qualitative feel of the thoughts, their content or specific directedness.*

Yes, I think that's a valid distinction that we've talked about before. And one way to look at that is the word *thought* is the past tense of the word *thinking*. The thought is something that has been completed, named and identified, re-collected if you will, and that's why it's not very fruitful to go to the content of a thought, but the *thinking* of a thought is something quite different. That has more to do with the *withinness* of the thought.

The next exercise in the book is called *Time of Thinking*, DTD, p.250, which asks us to rest in the activity of thinking.

Since Bruce brought up something I've written about, this idea of cracking open a thought, I'll mention something else Rinpoché proposes as an exercise you might like to try, and that is *to hold a thought*. When you become aware you are thinking something, try holding on to that thought as long as you can, and see what happens.

Next week is our last week, after which we'll move on to the next section on sensing.

See you next week.

Orientation Memo 8 –

In the past two weeks, we looked at the first two lines of instruction for DTS Exercise 1. Now let's look at the third sentence: "A perception or thought goes forward, carrying awareness, then a second perception or thought recollects and passes that awareness on."

Notice that the assumption here is that we are always involved in perceiving (sensing) or thinking. In other words (and this relates to Bruce's chat during the phone call), we find the 'inward unfolding' of experience 'within' moments that on the surface are fully used up by the content of the perception or thought.

As Rinpoché suggests, this process can develop on its own. A similar (rather subtle) point comes up in the commentary, when Rinpoché writes, "Look carefully for the judgment: 'Conceptual activity is no longer occurring'."

As came up briefly in the phone call, there is a close relation between awareness and knowledge. Rinpoché makes the connection like this (248): "As awareness becomes more refined, a sense of inner knowledge enters into each experience." The rest of that paragraph gives a lot of quite specific guidance, so I'm sure we'll discuss it in next week's phone call. Notice also the comment in the commentary that the aim is not to find new knowledge.

Week 9

Conference Call 9 – Lecture by Jack Petranker

This is our last session for this unit in which our focus has been on *thinking*. In keeping with that, I've also been thinking about how to summarize the basic theme we've been exploring, and so I could say we've looked at understanding the difference between *thoughts* and *thinking*. We've also *made friends* with the process of thinking, making it an opportunity for inquiry, rather than just a distraction from focus and attention.

To prepare for this week you were asked to read Exercise 2 – Time of Thinking, and its Comment (see Appendix 2 – Week 9 Assigned reading). The exercise says; *let thoughts arise in the mind*. I don't know about you, but I am one who thinks a lot, and when I see an instruction like that, to me it just means relax and let happen what usually happens. That doesn't mean that if you were doing meditation thoughts might not cease, in fact, one of the things it says is that *if you*

don't hold on to the content thoughts become less dominant. But my main point here is that the way my mind works I may do a lot of thinking, but other people simply don't.

I've previously mentioned a friend of mine who teaches at the University of Nevada, and in his research provides people with beepers, and when they are beeped they must write a brief statement about what was going on in their minds just prior to the beep, and then within twenty-four hours he talks to them to get them to recall more detail. That's his experimental method of exploring their stream of mental events. I find it interesting and important work, because you realize, among other things, that people are really different, and one of the differences that struck me was that some people when reporting what's going on in their minds, very consistently report perceptual or sensory experiences. That's the main focus for them. In my case, I might report a thought and an observation or two, and there are some who might report they were noticing the traffic light reflecting off the rain on the sidewalk. If you beeped them again they might say I was noticing the feel of a piece of paper I was holding in my hand. It's all very perceptual.

The point I've made several times is when Rinpoché says *stream of thoughts*, he makes it pretty clear that it includes perception, that thoughts and perception are not different than the stream. One way of making sense of that is a *perception* is not something that is separate from the thinking process. This is one way to think about this, in order to perceive something you have to *recognize* it, and recognizing it means introducing a conceptual element. So you perceive something as what it is, and that *as what it is*, is like a thought, but perhaps not the usual kind.

I'm making this point because I don't want anyone to be puzzled when they see the instruction, *let thoughts arise in the mind*, and you say, but I don't have any thoughts right now, just perceptions, so I guess I can't do this.

Bruce - *As Francisco Varela says, perception is as imaginary as imagination is perceptual.*

That's nice, I hadn't heard that before, but it's true. When we imagine something we perceive it in what is sometimes called the mind's eye. And so you could say, when we perceive something, we're also imagining it.

Let's do the exercise now:

"Sit comfortably and let thoughts arise in the mind. Instead of depending on the content of the thoughts for knowledge of what is happening, let yourself rest in the activity of thinking. At this level, there is no need to report back on what is thought or to craft the content of thoughts into new and ongoing stories. Just stay with the thinking of each thought." p.250

So the focus is on the thinking of the thought instead of the content of the thought. That's the short way of saying it. (After a few minutes of silence.)

Would anyone care to talk about what he or she noticed?

Michael – *I found it interesting how TSK draws you into an appreciation for the characteristics of life, and challenging the self, and you can become more aware and acquainted even appreciative of natural proclivities and ways of living. You can stop being selfish, anxious and still recognize the self as an entity that we need for ordinary life, and the same for thinking. I like the way TSK brings you into that way of relating to the activity of your own mind.*

Yes, I think TSK is very much that way of finding the immediacy and beauty in the ordinary, the wonder in it. Regarding this practice just now, what led you to reflect on that?

Michael – *The mind was quiet, and I was trying to survey how I was feeling happier and calmer, and how the practice reflects the Nyingma teachings, and how I have benefited from that, and that I'm not like some others around me who are anxious all the time and don't have an effective way of dealing with it.*

Yes, that makes sense and is a good point. One way of understanding meditation and the various practices related to it, might be to say you want to be more in touch with the immediacy of your experience, and quiet the thinking mind. There's certainly something to that and that's one way to practice. As Rinpoché does say in this exercise if you focus on *the activity of thinking rather than the content*, then thoughts will quiet down, because they don't have as much of a job to do anymore. We simply don't depend on them the same way. However, the other side of that is in almost every circumstance the vehicle for communicating knowledge is thought, such as speech or writing, and also nonverbal levels, but so much of it *is* conceptual, so that's our starting point. It goes to the third suggestion in part 'B' that says, **"Practice understanding what is being said without relying on the words."**

It might seem like a paradoxical instruction, because you might say, "Well, it's the words I must understand in order to understand what is being said." That's true, but that understanding comes along for the ride – if you're tuned in to the *saying* in the same way that you're tuned into the *thinking*, then the content of the *saying* comes along with the activity of saying it. So, let's try that. Right now as you're listening to me speaking, the instruction in the exercise is to, **"practice understanding what is being said without relying on the words."**

The comment to Exercise 2 begins:

"The models that govern ordinary knowledge are conducted by thoughts. As thoughts stream through our minds, we sort them in various ways. Some thoughts are available as tools. Others take over our awareness completely, so that we fall into the world that they create." [p.250]

What about this distinction between words and understanding, which is very much like the distinction between thoughts and the activity of thinking?

Soudabeh – *Do you want us to comment on the exercise?*

Not yet, right now I want your reflections on the instructions I just read; your understanding of what I just read from the words, and your understanding without relying on the words. In some ways, I think, it's almost the most natural thing to understanding without relying on the words. Suppose someone was not using words we understood, perhaps a foreign language, and we had to rely on the inflection of their voice, or gestures. Another example might be where one person asks another, "What do you want to do?" And the response is, "Unh-mm." You understand, in that context that's enough. Having pointed that out, however, I don't think that's what's being said here. In one sense the words are the necessary vehicle for understanding, but we don't pay attention to them, for example an e-mail program is the vehicle for sending and receiving messages, but if it's working properly you don't give the vehicle a lot of thought, your focus is mostly on understanding what's being conveyed, or what you are conveying.

Michael – *That's what I find. I was sitting with my eyes closed while you were reading. You mention a stream of thought and I'm in a stream, you mention tools, and see something useful going by, then I may be swept away with the images in water. It's sort of like washing; you don't think of the steps, you just go through with it. You look up hearing a raven in the branches above.*

Yes, that's good. Another example I found interesting, I'm fairly bi-lingual, having spoken German up to the age of about three, and later when I remembered my parents talking about something I didn't really know if they were speaking English or German, but I certainly knew what they'd been saying. I could tell someone what he or she said, but not the language they used, so that obviously meant I didn't know what words they were using. So, meaning comes in differently, and I think that's part of what's being said here.

I think Michael was saying something a little different, that the meaning for him was very imagistic and quite worthy of exploring.

Bruce - *I liked how saying 'yes,' essentially, to the activity of thinking helped calm and quiet thinking and introduce space, which gave rise at the end to a question: how much of the busyness of my normal mind is founded in resistance or saying 'no'...?*

Quite right, Bruce had the experience that Rinpoché points to, the way that allowing for thinking helps calm and quiet the thinking mind and introduces space. There's another dimension to that, Rinpoché refers in his commentary; the fact that this helps us return to the multidimensionality of experience.

Rinpoché uses a phrase in *Love of Knowledge*, that thinking is *single-minded*, which is related to what he says in the commentary to this exercise about *beads of thought*, the way one thought follows or leads to another in a linear way, where we narrow down available experience just to the content of thought. This can be confusing because our thinking has content, and our content has different dimensions. For instance, if you're daydreaming, the daydream may be very rich; perhaps you're on a tropical island somewhere, you may have a vivid sense of blue sky, sun, white sand, blue-green ocean and gentle breezes. You might say that's not one dimension, but it is really, as thoughts it's a pale substitute for real experience. When you become aware of the activity of thinking, as Bruce said, thoughts calmed down and there was space, and space and dimensionality are closely linked.

Hayward – *When thoughts quiet there was space and then when thinking starts again it feels as though space becomes banded, and there's a linear movement. Space becomes constricted, and there's movement kind of left to right, so I become aware of the constriction and the movement.*

That's interesting, it seems to me fair to say, thinking becomes constricted by content, and that's what Rinpoché means by *single-minded*, this narrowed single thread of thoughts that you follow. On the other hand, the movement, you might say, has more to do with the ongoing, activity of thinking. That constrictive movement may be what you notice in doing this exercise.

In order to make the distinction between the *activity of thinking* and the *content of thought*, you should be able to make a contrast, to be able to say at this point, I was caught up by thought as a tool, or perhaps I fell into a thought and lost myself. Either way, we need to have a sense of what that's about in order to contrast it to this other possibility of space, or openness, or multidimensionality.

I want to suggest one way to do this exercise, since it can be difficult to get free of the focus on the content of thought, sometimes it helps when you become aware you've been lost in the thought, you can *look backwards* into that thought to see if there's something you can find that is *not the content* but the *activity of thinking*. That's something to look at.

It's useful to return to the second part of Bruce's last comment, in which he asks himself the question how much of the *busyness* of my normal mind is founded in resistance or saying 'no'? In other words -- saying no to this activity or stream of thinking. That may be an interesting way to look at it. What Rinpoché is saying in affect, the busyness of the

mind is a response to, or the same as, relying on the content of thought, but when we rely on the content, we are in affect saying 'no' to the rest of our experience, and that experience may be the activity of thinking. That may sound complicated or convoluted, and I don't mean it to be so. It's really quite simple. It's asking us to do something new, and that's what TSK is really good at. Asking us to do something we didn't even realize or consider we could do, but it's like finding a new dimension in something we've been doing all along, not that we've got to go somewhere else.

All right that's it for *thinking*; next class will focus on *sensing*.

Orientation Memo 9 –

The focus for this week, the final week in the program, is DTS Exercise 2 and its commentary. We are already familiar with the basic suggestion here: instead of focusing on the content of thought, as we usually do, we can focus instead on the activity of thinking. It is a question of shifting from the past tense (the has-been thought) to the present (the 'am thinking').

In the phone call, I suggested it might be **helpful to identify an intermediate level** between **the content of the thought (or perception**—remember that Rinpoché treats them as more or less identical) on the one hand, and **the activity of thinking** on the other. This **intermediate level** could be said to consist roughly of **the 'background' of the thought**: the one who is thinking, the reactions and judgments that come up as each thought or perception is identified, recognized, or 're-collected', etc.

Also in the phone call, I suggested **another exercise**, presented by Rinpoché **in one of his non-TSK books**. **When a thought comes up, hold it as long as you can. In this way of practicing, you keep the content of the thought at the center, but (paradoxically) in doing so you de-emphasize that content. It would be interesting to ask yourself if taking this very different approach to thoughts and thinking parallels or supports the exercise suggested in the text.**

In the reading, Rinpoché asks why we accept the invitation of thoughts to enter their world. He ties this tendency in to a lack of knowledge. This theme of knowledge is one that we saw in the last reading also. Awareness that does not center on thoughts is presented as having a natural attunement to knowledge. On the other hand, a focus on "the structure of substance" (251) seems opposed to knowledge. Of course, this goes against our usual way of understanding, since knowledge is usually considered to be knowledge of this or that substantial 'thing'. But we have come far enough in our exploration to understand why this 'standard' model confines and limits us. It is the aim of the TSK vision to undo those limits.

Finally, notice the link made in the commentary between *thinking* and *time*. We have already looked at this in terms of shifting from past to present. But there is more to the **'time of thinking'** than this. Let this be a topic for your explorations in the coming week.

Appendix 1 – Student Excerpts

Dancing in Magic...

All the stories that we tell, we live locked in their truth...

We pride ourselves on what we know and claim to have the proof...

We speculate that we'll exist beyond this space in time...

All the while missing experiencing, tasting now's' sweet wine...

Wrapped up in a 'self that knows' we live life in thought's cage...

Never are we really free to dance...fully engage...

Trapped by thought we suffer on, restrained by our belief...

It's always in a future time we think we'll find relief...

Knowledge is not bound by what we think we think we know...

Time and Space can open making room for free to go...

Vision of beauty wondrous, rich with joy and intimacy...

Allowing me to dance in magic, setting Being free...

Starlight Dancing... Tina

Tina -- What Is Not Thought?

...This 'idea' of what is thought initiated so many thoughts, so then I turned the question around and asked myself *what is not thought?* The practice was very helpful to see how I can and do get distracted, and also how thoughts can be repetitive concerning whatever sensation that I am focusing on, but it is very difficult to focus on just one sensation or sound or visualization. The mind is amazingly aware of an infinite amount of things, or so it would seem. No wonder it gets so crowded in there... There seems to be nothing that is not thought, including all that is sensed. Everything has a commentary that goes along with it, and sometimes that commentary can be frustrating. All the labeling and interpretation that is going on seemingly without recognition, however, focusing on the mind and thoughts has helped me to see just how busy it is...

Comment --

Michael -- Hi Tina, I appreciate your post and—like you—am feeling that “There seems to be nothing that is not thought.” It really does feel as constant and inescapable as breathing. This morning I thought of another comparison for the role of thought—that of digestion. I remember in school reading an essay by Sir Francis Bacon in which he compares the process of learning to digestion: first we taste something, chew on it a bit, then swallow it, and thereby begin a process where the new item of knowledge finds its place among everything we have learned previously. This sounds a lot like how the field communiqué incorporates each new fact within its own body. I wonder if trying to be aware of thought is like mindful chewing, and trying to empty the mind of thought is like fasting. I just know I don't miss many meals when it comes to thinking! —Michael

Karin -- Emotions and thoughts

I want to agree with Tina's description of “What is not thought”. Looking at emotions and thoughts it is hard for me to find a difference or: Where does the emotion start and end – where does the thought begin? It seems to emerge together from different places in the body. Getting aware of it there is a sense of knowing that I do not have to be caught up. This again is a thought. But it can bring me back to immediate experience, if I allow relaxing in it.

Michael -- Does the Mind need to keep thinking?

A shark needs to keep moving in order to remain alive. Otherwise it would die for lack of oxygen. I wonder if the human mind needs to keep thinking in order not to sink to the bottom of its ocean. Like radio waves, which convey the desired message onto a regular pulse, I wonder if part of thought is like a regular pulse modified by sensations, emotions, etc. One of the men who collaborated to devise the science of cybernetics (from which computers have evolved)—Warren McCulloch—presented (if I remember correctly) the activity of thinking mind as the confluence of pulsing waves going one way in the brain which are then modified by the brain's variable activity moment to moment. I wonder if our sense that the brain is always generating thoughts may refer to these kinds of characteristics, and that irrespective of anything consequential or provoked by experience, our minds are regularly sweeping (like the constant rotations of a boat's radar) just in case there is a shoal or floating log ahead.

David -- "Think of an orange ball..."

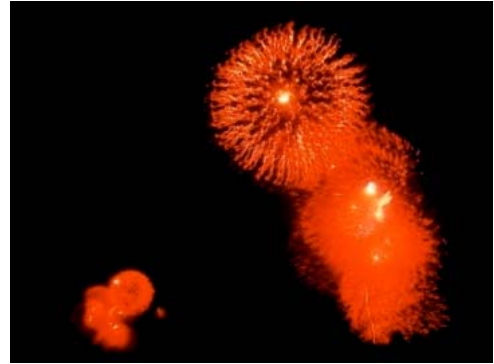
From memory I used the ING Insurance company orange ball, remembering how I saw it in TV commercials, "Touch the ball" they said, and the assumption was stop worrying, your financial problems had a solution with ING Insurance. Then I thought of song lyrics, on old videos, "Follow the bouncing ball," except I imagined the ball was orange. I continued playing with the image seeing the ball as the Sun, a bright, hot orange star. I remembered photos of a comparison of Stars or Suns as to their relative size and mass. Pumpkins popped up, fields of them, smiling and frowning, toothless orange balls, cue balls; Christmas tree balls, and marbles, the color of baby carrots.

Figure C ⁷

But there seems to be another way or level to see the orange ball that differentiates the image of the orange ball from the thoughts *about* types of orange balls. The image is not clear; it's grainy, spacey, and hard to hold or to grasp. It's as though I can't seem to get a handle on it, it slips away into darkness, or *spaceness*. While I can remember all kinds of orange balls, picturing an orange ball that isn't already a thing, I'm left with the essence of *orange-color* and *sphere shape* to conjure up. It's hard to do. It's mostly space.

Later, I returned to this exercise imagining Mandelbrot fractals, consisting of nothing but orange balls, repeating and repeating, in massive numbers as if foaming up out of an orange ball container. But again, the image wasn't clear; there was lots of space, blank areas of darkness. What I could see would arise and fade like *orange fireworks in the night*.

And, there's other *stuff*, other *fireworks* going on in space, distracting, sounds, touch-feeling, visual stimuli, smells and tastes, even attitudes like grumpiness, or feeling good. It's hard to hold the orange ball. It's easier to work with it as an idea than an image. I think that's because the idea seems to move and keep referring, while an image is an attempt to freeze the thought... Hard to get a focus, and freeze the image, I fight to try and stop time. Perhaps with practice I can slow things down or calm down enough to get a clearer image, but it's difficult when I seldom ever try. Maybe that's worth seeing, and that there is a difference between the object and thoughts about the object — one happening now and the latter looking back and referring to memories about it.



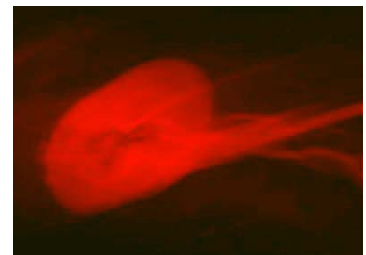
Comments –

Michael -- Telling myself "Don't think of an orange ball," helped. A little orange ball, like a lacrosse ball, bounced in from the periphery. Like the injunction to not think of the purple elephant in the room, it can help put the mind into the kind of non-intentional mode which is so welcoming of whatever thoughts are bouncing around hoping to distract us. The sentence in last week's reading about how thinking maintains the world like breathing sustains the body is really interesting. It suggests that we would just suffocate if we could really stop ourselves from thinking. A better approach might be to think-in, think-out, letting the mind be nourished by awareness of the thoughts passing by?

David – While visualizing, the orange ball I noticed something about Space that dovetails with what Rinpoché said about the structuring of thought. In my visualization there was orange and a spherical shape, but there was also a lot of blank space, at times when the image was not clear. This 'black' space was curious. The more I watched it seemed to be like a placeholder space 'within' and around my concept of orange ball. This space seemed to allow for more form, more detail regarding the orange ball, because there were times when it appeared there was more orange ball detail, and less space within that image. In other words, there seemed to be a relationship between available space and the visibility of substance. Rinpoché says:

"Like the space that allows for physical objects, thought apart from its content presents itself as wholly lacking in substance—a blank availability. But just as with physical space, this 'no thing' is in fact the opposite pole of 'something': the indispensable prerequisite for substance to arise." pp.54-5

David – The orange ball reminds me of a conversation I had with my cousin, a teacher of Art History who recently got her PhD. She's very smart. She asked me how I like my iPad. I said I did, explaining some of the things I did with it, when I didn't want to lug my laptop around. She then explained all the reasons she would *not*

Figure D ⁸

buy one, mostly because it wasn't as good as a computer. That was her mindset, her orange bubble (ball). She was convinced of her argument against the iPad. That is fine, many people have that opinion. But the point I noticed was the mindset, the context, or read-out she accepted as fact, and therefore, did not go beyond the bubble of that context. You might say she was stuck in it.

She could have entertained the possibility that maybe the iPad was something different from a computer. Perhaps it could be seen as an appointment book that does hundreds of additional things, including act as a limited computer. But she would not venture past the context she created and held *as the way it is*. Her orange bubble was fixed. :-)

Then, it dawned on me how I contextualize all the time, making solid orange balls when they are really mostly a kind of space.

David – I've been grateful for the two week break for the chance to read the book Jack recommended by Donnel B Stern, "*Unformulated Experience*". Reminding me of Rinpoché's term '*focal setting*', Stern talks about *selective attention* often used for defensive purposes saying:

"Focal attention which helps separate the wheat from the chaff in everyday experiencing, can also be used to keep something out of awareness. If one's focal attention is never trained on this 'something', one is never aware of it; and if one is never aware of it, it remains...unformulated... One simply does not notice what one does not wish to know."

"Selectively *inattended* experience, along with all the implications this experience might have had, were it articulated, are never elaborated, never transformed into an experience in syntactic mode. In turn, this fact means one can never reflect on the material. Anxiety is prevented, of course, but the strategy is equally effective in the prevention of learning." p.59

"The refusal to formulate – to think – is a different solution to the problem of defense than repression, which is a matter of keeping unconscious thoughts that already exist. Instead of positing the intentional removal and continual exclusion of content from awareness, as the repression analyses does, lack of formulation as defense means never allowing ourselves to interpret our experience in the first place...one's freedom of thought, and 'offending' experience is never created. p.63

In a sense this is obvious, what we don't focus upon we cannot experience, in the way we usually reflect upon and articulate to ourselves in thought and language. So I've been looking for ways to demonstrate this to myself, which can be difficult unless you know what it is you don't want to know. While it can be obvious when you don't want to think about something painful, for example, the death of a loved one, or the anxiety over having to do something you want to avoid, it's not so obvious when undeveloped experience passes by unexamined. Therefore, the need for inquiry into experience and the practice of widening focal settings becomes clear.

I think this relates to the practice of '*Think of an Orange Ball*', in which we focus on the creation of new experience. Widening the focal setting on visualization keeps returning me to the present moment, but the space of the NOT orange ball seems to be significant in my experience. While placeholder space is there for more detail for context to hold, the focus is also at the edge of the future. Stern says, "*the ambiguity we always face in the next moment*" (p.30), what he calls "*unformulated experience*", perhaps what Rinpoché might describe as the "*edge of the future infinitive*", where at least some of the present is '*given*' by past structure, and '*made*' out of the on-rushing future. In this ever arising Now, "*language and experience actually shape experience*".

Bruce -- Thinking and Thought

I've enjoyed returning to this inquiry into the nature of thought. Here's my phenomenological report so far:

This morning, watching thinking as it arose, I noticed that "thought" most often shows up for me in two forms: either as an interior commentary that is actually more "felt" than "heard" (as a quick, very subtle, skittering play across the muscles involved in the articulation of speech, like little nerve impulses in the tongue, mouth, lips, and throat, that don't cause actual movement but feel like the "points" that speech movement would proceed from if I allowed my thoughts to emerge into full speech), and as a subtle play of fleeting images, usually visual, but sometimes also auditory or felt/emotional. The running "commentary" form of my thought is not exactly audible, in the way that some imagined sounds occasionally clearly manifest, but the play across the muscles of articulation gives a "felt-sense" of the sound of speech, of my "voice."

As I watched thinking, I noticed I was both watching thinking, and thinking about thinking at the same time, or nearly the same time, in an interesting little Möbius loop — maybe a very quick flipping back and forth between types of noticing and "engagement." Paying attention to the "commentary" part of my thought by slowing it down, and following that subtle play of pre-articulation, I was surprised at one point by a sudden feeling of "clearing" — thinking "vanished" for a moment, and there was a flashing feeling of fresh clarity. A little later I noticed thinking more in the

form of arising images. For instance, seeing a fence, I was reminded of watching that fence a couple years ago while doing a similar exercise, and I saw a brief image of a photo I had associated with that practice overlaid on top of it. I also noticed a brief sequence of images at one point that moved quickly, telling a story more compactly, than the “commentary” form of thinking could. I noticed my “position” along the course I usually follow when walking, I associated that immediately with the time, and an image of a cup of yoghurt I planned to eat before the end of my break came to mind, and knew I had to pick up the pace if I really wanted to do that! There was little or no verbal thought involved, just a quick series of fleeting images that carried a whole story and impelled a decision (walk faster!).

Walking back, I tried visualizing the orange ball Jack mentioned. I’ve done visualization work before, so it was pretty easy to call an image to mind. I noticed that as soon as I did so, it began setting off all sorts of echoes of association: Davidu and his ING ball came to mind, various images of bindus (on the foreheads of Nisargadatta Maharaj, Hariprasad Chaurasia, my wife’s puja statue), my son’s basketball, and a brilliant sun radiating solar flares. These associations flickered at the edges of the orange circle, which itself was “superimposed” in my mind’s eye over the scene of the parking lot where I was walking, and sometimes they momentarily eclipsed it (catching me up in their own content). There was a subtle difference between the present, sustained “thinking out” of the orange ball and the “thoughts” that arose automatically in leaps of association, and David Bohme’s distinction between (lively) thinking and (past-based, recording-like) thoughts, between feeling and felts, seemed a useful one to me. I’m not sure I fully understand what the difference is, though. Thinking seems “light” and connected to a creative sense of subjective presence, whereas thought seems like something I am “subject to.”

Comments –

Tina – When I first began trying to imagine a big orange ball, it was just crazy! I mean, I continually got ‘lost’ in the erratic patterns of my thinking. One thought seemed to lead to another, and then there was just this ‘blankness’ where I seemed to get lost beneath awareness, and then thoughts that did not relate to each other at all which seemed to come out of nowhere. I began noticing the incessant buzz of thinking, and found it impossible to visualize an image of an orange ball! I also found it difficult to focus on such a directive. My mind would wonder, who knows for how long, when I would suddenly remember that I was suppose to be trying to conjure up this orange ball...LOL...it was hilarious really, but I kept trying.

The second time I tried to do this, it seemed a little easier. I began seeing flickers of orange, but they were dancing all over the blackness of my imagination, and I still for the life of me could not make them stable. There were a few small oranges that were darting in and out of the darkness, and I could not make them larger, or hold them in place. There was also an orange horizon, so the color was coming in much stronger this time. I was reminded that as part of the practice, that this might be what Jack was trying to get us to notice: how difficult it is to establish anything solid within our imagination, and also, how difficult it was to focus on such a thing for any length of time.

By the third time I practiced this, there were flashes of itty bitty orange spurts all over the place, but again, they would not be still! It also seemed as if the orange was coming in just to tease me, as if to say: “HA” you have no control and I do!!! It was dancing all over the place still, but showing up more often, and then...bam! There it was, if only for a fleeting less than a moment...a large planet like object that darted in, a dull orange as if to taunt me concerning my ability to make it otherwise...but as soon as it was visible, it was not, and at that moment it was like what was visualized moved in such a way that blew my mind, as if the gravity of awareness was outside of it’s normal self, if that makes any sense at all...LOL

Bruce – Tina, don’t worry about visualization being crazy and unmanageable at first. I could completely relate to your image of “pieces” of the desired image appearing erratically all over the place, or just in little glimpses. That’s what I used to experience too, when I first started, and it still happens sometimes. I’m not sure if you’ve seen it before, but I recall that Rinpoché has an excellent description of visualization practice in his (non-TSK) book, *Gesture of Balance*. I recommend checking that out, if you haven’t read it before.

Tina – What is not thought? (revisited)

If we don’t think it, does it really exist within *the flow of experience*? Could it be said to be *really true* in that respect? In other words, if what is really true is *our experience in relationship to whatever is arising within awareness*, then does that not make everything we experience, real, only b/c of that fact (that it is arising within the awareness of our flow of experience)? While *whatever* might be happening behind and through all the many layers of processing that our manifestation of human being is...is it really true in relationship to our experiencing? Unless I think about breathing, I am not aware of experiencing it...not saying that it is not happening, that is a different thing altogether, although, we might consider how it could be happening without our awareness of it, and that might reveal a deeper layer of thought...just thinking...

If I am not thinking about the pain I am feeling, am I in fact feeling pain? How solid are these structures that we believe exist?

Comment –

David – Hi Tina, I've been reading the book Jack recommended by Donnel B. Stern, "*Unformulated Experience*". I found this passage interesting, and it may relate to your post. He gives numerous examples that underpin his statement. He says on page 15:

"The process of recognizing a relevant agglomeration of stimuli as an instance of a particular category and as a certain kind of experience is fundamentally linguistic. That is...the possibility for any experience even *existing* as "an experience," including...experiences we refer to as nonverbal...are based on language. At the root of our experience, there is only the always already made. And yet the ubiquitous effect language has on us is no more visible to us on a day-to-day basis than our own eyes. We can not step outside language any more than we can experience stimuli outside the range of our senses..."

If we pay close attention, there is often a sensation of something coming before language. Whatever this is, it cannot be worded, though sometimes after the fact, we feel that it was there. We often have the sense that the words we use "fit" the shape of what we wanted to say, or do not fit. There is always vague meaning-shape, a protomeaning...that precedes what we say and by which we gauge our success in expressing ourselves."

He goes on to talk about the nonverbal in the verbal. Fascinating! I think you would enjoy this book. I am!

David – Hi Tina, You mentioned to me that TSK has given you more clarity, and you are more able to articulate your understandings. I agree practicing TSK requires a certain amount of calm space to observe, which in turn, results in a degree of clarity in experience, and that knowing opens more space, for even clearer knowing. It's gradual, but over time it seems to broaden our perspective about who we are and life itself. In a sense we grow instead of shrink into narrow structures of thought and living. I don't mean I'm great at this, just that I've noticed it too.

Related to this, Rinpoché questions how we normally take thoughts at face value, establishing points, and asks, "*how can we respond more appropriately? By activating appearance as symbolic: appearance as zero and zero as zeroless. In this modality, thoughts become the symbols of their own arising.*" [p.57]

I thought this relates to something Donnel Stern says in "*Unformulated Experience*" about the verbal in the nonverbal:

"We know only one means by which we can create critical distance: symbolic representation. It is only our capacity for symbolization that makes possible interpretation and the adoption of perspective. It is only symbolization that makes possible knowable experience. To grasp or interpret (or construct or know) experience requires that symbols be related to one another... Meaning depends on the relation and differences '*between*' symbols, not on fixed identifications of symbols with entities." p.7

He goes on to give an example of seeing a tree. Designating the thing as a tree is meaningless unless we know what it is not; it's not "*grass, corn, bushes, shrubs, hammers, houses, clouds, and so on.*"

You could do a meditation just on language, about how as a system of symbols, it's shared, how we are born into it and must learn it, and the history of all the voices that came before, we learn the social innovations we are immersed in, we grow in societal symbol sharing of values, customs, and so on. And deeper still, you could observe your own dreams, the creation of your own symbols and multiple meanings. Observing the symbolic nature of thoughts really does open beyond content and fixed position and identity, don't you think? :-)

Tina – What is not thought? (revisited)

While appreciation, presents a more 'pleasant' and 'open' experience, is it not just 'another' structure that 'could' prevent knowledge from opening?

Don't get me wrong, I love the joy of being, but I am reminded of what Rinpoché says about second level time, space, and knowledge, that it is still 'conditioned', I mean, it is a lot more enjoyable than the suffocating experience of 'linear time', true enough, but it is still limiting, right? In a sense, it could be considered as a re-conditioning of linear time, and yes, a freer way of being and knowing, but still limited.

And too, this idea of 'Being', is a more expanded and open version of awareness, where the focal points of 'I' are relaxed, but is not this idea of 'Being' just another 'from to' space to 'come from'?

It seems to all rest on 'appreciation' as well, and sometimes, it would seem, that we have to 'work hard' to be able to appreciate the simplest things, especially when 'real life' isn't necessarily 'flowing' in a way that allows or opens to this idea of appreciation. Just some thoughts. It was a very good class.

Comment –

David – Hi Tina, You said, "...*appreciation, presents a more 'pleasant' and 'open' experience, is it not just 'another' structure that 'could' prevent knowledge from opening?*"

I think appreciation is part of the structuring process, but *must* structuring prevent knowing? Isn't structuring part of the '*making meaning*' process, and therefore also knowledge? Isn't the difference between 1st and 2nd level time, the latter is more open with more possibilities, ease of being, and vitality for life? **Isn't 2nd level knowing being aware of the structuring without getting lost in the content that we continuously engage in?** If you look at the 1st paragraph of DTS p.190, this is that subtle but fundamental switch he's talking about. (In my opinion)

As you say, "*a freer way of being and knowing, but still limited.*" Yes, but I'd rather live with expanded awareness than cramped, and uneasy, wouldn't you? I don't know anyone whose experience is continual 3rd level time and knowledge. Of course, I'm no guru. :-)

"*It seems to all rest on 'appreciation' as well, and sometimes, it would seem, that we have to 'work hard' to be able to appreciate the simplest things...*"

Isn't it the truth! Read DTS p.192. All is not lost! :-)

Tina – Noticing anew...

The practices that we did during the class have really helped in opening experience, *through* thought. As I allow the thought to arise without rejecting it's content, usually a feeling or an emotion will arise with that thought (side by side like this weeks reading suggests), but instead of rejecting it, say if it were to be considered an unpleasant or negative feeling or emotion, I relax into the thought, and the gravity or pull of the emotion or feeling changes. In other words, it does not have that same 'feeling' even though I am staying 'within' the thought. What was felt, is freed up, and expands into other, so that what I am noticing is noticed anew. There is more space available for joy, bliss, and even ecstasy. It resonates with Rinpoché's idea of *unknowing the known to know anew*.

Soudabeh – Journal entry...after meditation sitting practice...

Reading sentence by sentence and following the prescribed...using *The Joy of Being*, page 44: Awakening Feelings...starting the sitting meditation practice...

Following the instruction and lingering after each sentence, to feel it in my bones in my experience...experience becoming more powerful as things unfolded...of melting into the feelings (as the prescription suggested)... my feeling was initially of a discomfort/fatigue, mild pain in the center of my back, where my shoulder blades meet, as I let go and melted in that pain... slowly a serenity that kept shifting in intensity... and approaching "much bigger than the pain" arose... so pronounced as it unfolded, that the pain was almost powerless and further melted into the tranquil feeling that was arising...then (following the prescription suggested) it was so easy and possible to allow thoughts come and go as they pleased, and not get pulled into them...as if they were doing their silly dance... while the calmness' presence was so powerful and pronounced that no thought had a chance to complete or linger...its story...Just as the sounds also arouse and disappeared while the quiet silence was always in the background, silent, yet its presence undeniable and the center of the stage...

Thank you Rinpoché.... It became possible to experience the communication of 'field communiqué' with all of its assertion of substantiality (through the thoughts and sounds...) yet simultaneously, with the pronounced presence of calm (as surrendering and melting into the feelings that were arising and slowly shifting within my body and mind...

It became possible to rest in the self-sameness of all that was communicated in my experience in this short sitting practice...

Thank you Jack for deciphering, and guiding us through these teachings that are profound and are true treasure...

Michael – Thinking and Awareness

For the past several months I've been rereading the Skillful Means series alongside our TSK studies. I appreciate how these two different approaches reinforce a shared concern with living with awareness and purpose. This morning, on Page 42 of *Mastering Successful Work*, I read the following:

"*When we have not trained our awareness, we cannot separate ourselves from these endlessly repeating patterns of thought. Without being aware of our awareness, we have no access to a reality beyond the contents of what we are thinking. We cannot recognize or communicate anything other than what the shifting stream of thought allows.*" The passage then goes on to refer to how in this condition we cannot access or act upon a deeper inner knowledge.

Earlier this morning, reading the few pages we have been assigned in the past two weeks, I came up with the notion that—in addition to our thoughts and the substantial world to which they seem to point—there is a third factor: the person to whom these pages are being addressed. It is this person who sometimes doubts his own sanity and then counts on their being a real world in which to touch down. When we are most isolated, confused, moody, lost, we get up and go for a walk, wash the dishes, telling ourselves that we are thereby connecting with something more real than our own minds. In this context, I find the passage from MSW helpful. What is real is neither our thoughts nor the substantial world to which they claim to point. Awareness lies beyond and within the mind that is thinking and pointing, and it doesn't vanish when we dare to question notions such as substance, nor the obsolete habits that we mindlessly repeat.

Karin – The Way That Awareness Transfers

Be sensitive to the way that awareness transfers from one experience to the next, as it is recommended in Exercise 1, seems to have the quality of light. The experience is somehow connected to the heart and the breath. How can we maintain this quality in daily life?

Comments –

Tina – Hi Karen, in my experience, appreciation is key. Appreciation opens the joy of being, and within that there is knowingness applicable within the arising time and space...

Michael – Hi Karen. Along with the quality of light, and the pathways of heart and breath, which you mention, and the key of appreciation which, as Tina mentions can open the doors of time and space, I'm impressed when any spiritual teaching tells us to stay with the life we are living right now. I think that is what drew me to both TSK and Buddhism. Instead of saying – "Do these things and you will get to Heaven when you die", or "cross over to the other side and you will be free of all your daily problems", they tell us that there is nothing excluded from this very moment.

Hayward – The primacy of awareness

In doing the exercise suggested in last weeks class, it appeared that there was a primacy of awareness, a space "in which" content existed....Upon further reflection it seems that experience is a "form of" awareness, as though awareness is both the figure and ground of experience.

Michael – Direct experience and the three times

Jack emphasized, in going over the second full paragraph on Page 247, how it urges us to remain within direct experience. It is also interesting that these few sentences invoke the Past, the Present, and the Future. Specifically: A way to directly experience the **past** is to be in the present and to ask how we are affected by that past now (as opposed to getting lost in memory, regret, etc). A way to remain **present** in the present is to resist the urge to own the knowledge arising here and now. And a way to be present to the **future** is to resist the lure of wishes, fears, and expectations, all of which do their best to drag us off to a world that is not now, and never will be. The present is a window, but if we forget that direct experience is what allows us to look through it, then we will not be alive in time and in the experience that it makes possible.

Hayward – Why Not Explain

In today's class Jack said that TSK did not seek to explain, because an explanation would take us away from direct experience.

An additional observation is that explanations tend to be given within the context of the prevailing paradigm. If we truly want a new way of knowing, it makes no sense to explain phenomena in terms of the conventional paradigm we are seeking to challenge.

The word experience and the word experiment have the same Greek root. Seems we are being invited to do both.

Appendix 2 – Assigned Reading From *Dynamics of Time and Space*

Weeks 1 & 2 -- pp. 51-3

Chapter Seven

THOUGHT FORMS IN SPACE

Space and the freedom it offers are available at the center of present experience, just as it is. If we do not discover space in our experience, it is because this space availability has been covered over. To recover space ‘presence’, we must clarify the operation of the thinking mind, whose active naming and identifying structure a world in which space has disappeared.

Although thoughts often come and go as a kind of reflex, passing so quickly that they go unnoticed, if we take the time to focus on the stream of mental events, we soon observe that we are almost always thinking. We might well wonder why this should be so. After all, in terms of their content thoughts tend to be trivial and repetitive. They recycle the same themes and images, call up the same memories, and dwell on the same concerns. They react to whatever stimuli present themselves, leading nowhere in particular. As we go about our day, thoughts cycle through our minds like the background hum of a household appliance or a nervous gesture that we repeat almost unconsciously. [p.51]

The purpose of all this activity seems linked to the role of thoughts as the ‘carriers’ or ‘vehicles’ for the interpretive structures that give experience continuity. In thinking, we affirm certain connections and identities that allow us to make sense of what is happening. Apart from its specific content, a thought considered as an action aims to conserve and pass on the order given by the interacting presentations of the field communiqué. Just as breath sustains the body, so thinking sustains the world that we inhabit.

Before thoughts can carry and deliver experience, they must ‘box’ and ‘label’ it. To do this, they make use of the materials at hand — the customary and accepted, the world as it has been known in advance.

As each thought arises, its content is located or assigned in terms of past experience and future concerns. Grounded in a well-known history and heading toward a presupposed future, emerging properties are immediately referred to the certainties of identity, disclosing features similar to what has gone before.

In this world of substance and identity, there is no possibility of gaps. Each known thing has its appropriate place, and each new experience arrives ready to be situated within this presupposed order.

Even when our mind wanders idly, even when we resist or rebel against our circumstances, the thoughts that guide us confirm the situation in which we find ourselves. Though new patterns emerge and there may even be breakthroughs of various kinds, in each successive moment the outcome is the same: Everything once again ‘falls into place’. If a gap does arise, it is like a tear in the fabric of reality. [p.52] We speak of such events in terms of madness or nervous breakdowns, of identity crises or—perhaps—of genius.

Projected Familiarity

Thoughts structure experience by ‘building up’ reality. Together with their content, they communicate the substantiality of that content — a sense of persistent qualities and independent ‘presence’: a special kind of ‘mass’ that exerts its own gravitational pull. This gravitational force in turn shapes what appears ‘to’ and ‘through’ the mind in ways that structure the whole, conforming to the established order.

For thoughts to confer substance, must they possess substance? If substance arises only with the act of identification, this seems impossible, for there could never be an ultimate substantializing thought: Each thought in turn would have to be given substance by another thought. Experience confirms the insubstantiality of thoughts, which most often seem to flash into the mind from nowhere at all. Even when the content of one thought traces to the immediately preceding thought, there seems to be no clearly defined mechanism through which the first thought gives rise to the second: no way in which substance can be transmitted.

Yet the power of thoughts to establish substance—and the unfounded nature of what is thought about apart from the act of thinking — is accepted unthinkingly. We can trace this ‘unthinking’ acceptance to our previous commitment to the communiqué. Thoughts may arise like bubbles in a stream of water, but we are intent on [p.53] entering the thought’s ‘bubble world’.

Week 3 -- pp. 53-6

From within that world we can no longer ask where the bubble comes from or goes to, nor can we challenge the substantiality of what appears within the bubble. The pronounced content of the thought refers to and affirms other related content understood as being situated ‘elsewhere’: the content of the previous thought, the existents present in the

preceding moment, the preceding moment itself; in fact, the whole lineage of the present arising. Patterns of engaged images yield familiar projections, which are pronounced into daily life.

This projected and measurable familiarity confirms as known what is not known at all. What has been pronounced as real has its source in an arising that remains mysterious. We encounter this mystery in the wide range of questions we seem incapable of answering: “How does appearance originate?” “Why was I born in these circumstances?” “How does time move from one moment to the next?”

Ordinarily, we have no way of inquiring into these mysteries. Bound to the communiqué that thoughts communicate forward and the specific order they project, we live in a world of fixed boundaries. It would be different if we could question thought itself, but this does not seem possible. In presenting their content, thoughts refer their own identity to this content. In the act of establishing, they withdraw.

Like the space that allows for physical objects, thought apart from its content presents itself as wholly lacking in substance—a blank availability. But just [p.54] as with physical space, this ‘no thing’ is in fact the opposite pole of ‘something’: the indispensable prerequisite for substance to arise. Starting from the ‘zero point’ of thought, points take form as solid, and zeroless space disappears into the dichotomy of substance/nothingness. Gravity is activated and order imposed; substance proliferates, and the transitional constructions of multidimensional appearance give way to a reality that has already been established.

It might seem that we could cut through these complications by going to direct experience, prior to all thoughts. But is this alternative really available? We do seem to experience and act non-conceptually; for example, when we perform a habitual action such as walking without having to think about each step along the way. Yet even if such everyday ‘no-thought experiences’ are in one sense undeniable, they are also inaccessible. As soon as we focus on such an experience, we make it an object of thought and thus lose the experience itself. If we claim we can rely on the experience without describing it, this claim is again the product of thought.

We are caught in a dilemma: If affirmation of the ‘no-thought’ realm comes through the medium of thinking, the ‘translation’ from one realm to another risks losing or corrupting the original experience in ways that are undetectable. Though there may be awareness without thoughts, it is not clear how this awareness can be transmitted forward into the next moment in order to be known without thereby making it the object of the thinking mind. [p.55]

There is another difficulty. To rely on the immediacy of ‘no thoughts’ separates experience as it is thought from the ‘no-thought experience’. Making this distinction actually hardens the substantiality that thought has set in place. Moreover, as a marked-out realm distinct from thought constructs, the ‘no-thought’ realm has again been identified and designated. Seen as a goal to arrive at, the realm of no thoughts is itself a thought.

Week 4 -- p. 56 (3 paragraphs)

Freedom Without Foundation

Whether we choose to affirm what thoughts pronounce or attempt to bypass thought entirely, we seem to arrive at impenetrable barriers. Suppose instead that we simply paused to notice thoughts as thoughts—the simple phenomenon of thinking. One moment we are watching a bird fly by or enjoying a cup of tea, and the next there is a thought. How does this happen? At one level there may be explanations; at another, it is just so. Thoughts simply ‘pop up’: sheer appearance, sourceless.

In its initial arising, its popping up, thought appears to be dimensionless. Even if a transition to dimensionality follows at once, there must still be an instant when the arising thought is not yet committed to its content; when it remains free to take virtually any form at all.

We have grown accustomed to thoughts that establish a world and are themselves established, defined exclusively in terms of their content. But in this initial moment, the thought is unestablished, and the world is unestablished with it. Could we stay with the freedom of this being unestablished, savoring its flavor? [p.56]

Week 5 -- pp. 57-8

Without rejecting the content that appears ‘through’ thought, could we simply leave it as unestablished? Could we unknow the knowing of the known to know anew?

We saw before that when thoughts affirm their content, they affirm themselves as the absence of content: as zero. But this is a false affirmation, for zero in its nature cannot be affirmed. When zero appears (for example, when we draw its outline on paper), it does so only symbolically. Although we point, there is no place and no property to point to. The ‘zero point’ is pointless, and zero itself is ‘zeroless’.

For thoughts, this ‘pointlessness’ of zero is just the point. Thought presents its content without establishing what is presented. Nothing arises, yet this non-arising appears. There is no *need* for this to be so, but this is how it is. And since it is so, it is vitally important to ‘point out’ that it is not so at all.

This way of talking is not a trick meant to establish a particular point or point of view. There is nothing to be established, for to establish we would have to proceed point by point, and then we would miss the point. Previously a claim to have established was pronounced; now it calls forth a response. We could say it is pointless to continue making pronouncements, but making *this* claim means we have already continued. In fact, we cannot help but continue.

Then how can we respond more appropriately? By activating appearance as symbolic: appearance as zero and zero as zeroless. In this modality, thoughts become the symbols of their own arising. [p.57]

Freed from the responsibility for constructing a seamless whole, thoughts can become the agents of zeroless space. The dimensionalized structure they proclaim is flattened in a quite specific sense: *What appears and the operations to which we attribute its appearance arise side by side, together with the dynamics of their interaction.* We see that established dimensionality simply ‘pops up’ together with each arising thought. In such a flattened realm, where each point is ‘pointless’, thoughts no longer exert a gravitational pull capable of shaping appearance into substance.

When we abide in unestablished thought, we enter a space from which knowledge has not been foreclosed. No longer inhabiting conventional space, we have no where to go and no path to follow. Without departing from the known, we are free to be any way at all. We discover an inner ease that nourishes us and awakens unexpected capacities. Relaxing into a reality available on its own terms, we can recover a knowledgeability that has been foreclosed since before the beginning of time.

Zeroless thinking offers the prospect of freedom and beauty. Instead of thrusting toward the substantial, thoughts could reveal a zeroless world: appearance without substance and presence without source. Naturally joined to awareness and insight, they could evoke the remarkable power of appearance to assume virtually any form. Emerging out of the zeroless truth of their own (non-) arising, they could become the agents of a boundless space creativity. [p.58]

Week 6 -- pp. 245-6 (first paragraph) --

Chapter Twenty-Five

FREEDOM FOR KNOWLEDGE

As human beings, we have a wealth of experience that we can draw on to activate knowledge. Yet often we seem to ignore experience in favor of the surface contents of our thoughts, the identities disclosed to the senses, and other structures we impose on what arises.

Beneath this preference for the presupposed, a strong tension or fear operates, a sense that if we let go of the accustomed, we ourselves will disappear. Motivated by a naked wish to survive, we conduct forward a driving restlessness, never allowing ourselves to sink into our own being.

As a counter to this view, consider the possibility that there is nothing to disappear. This is not a claim about existence or non-existence, but rather an observation about the way we structure appearance. **The more clearly we see how appearance is dictated by thought, the more we realize that on the other side of that dictation, or perhaps within it, there is nothing doing the dictating. The expression itself carries its own message: The communiqué communicates itself forward.** [p.245]

Accepting this observation as accurate may have little impact on the back and forth dynamic through which we conduct experience and affirm its substance. No matter what we affirm on the conceptual level, in our being we feel obligated to meet certain standards: to conform to personal and cultural expectations. If we go along with the role that is offered—for instance the role of the seeker after knowledge—we accept the truth of the role; if we do not, we get caught up in guilt and anxiety and a fear of failure.

The drive activated in this way is self-reinforcing. Intent on perpetuating the surface of ‘appearance as substance’, mind reacts to any challenge by affirming a ‘source-from’ understanding. It may trace what appears into the subconscious or unconscious mind; it may pursue one of the countless connections and associations that thoughts evoke. Alternatively, it may lapse into blankness, disclaiming any knowledge of how to research or investigate inwardly.

Once we take on this way of being, we get more and more involved, like someone who begins to hyperventilate. The pathways of knowledge are saturated with hunger and desire and fantasy. Thoughts and senses all trend in a certain direction. We can only look from and to; we can only wait and wish, and then wait some more. In the end there is frustration or disillusionment, or else more anxiety.

It may be that these ways of knowing remain open to intuition and imagination, which can feed into the old patterns a certain degree of creativity. [p.246]

Week 7 -- pp. 246-7

Yet these ‘special’ ways of knowing operate within clear limits that isolate them from our usual patterns. It is like having our feet on the ground and our head in the clouds: Somehow the connection is missing.

It also seems possible to engage knowledge more directly. **Instead of insisting on perception, we can develop visions of knowledge. Instead of relying on thoughts, we can cultivate the lightening of awareness. Instead of making knowledge into a servant, we can see it as provider.**

There are questions we can ask and observations we can make that **encourage the mind to embody knowledge as the inwardness of an unfolding inquiry. How did our present situation develop? What is the past that gave rise to it? What are the specific structures and attitudes that bar us from greater knowledge? What happens when we do not own what is known? When we do not abandon direct experience for wishes, fears, and expectations?**

Once these questions become real in our experience, we can extend them into each situation. Each moment can become a gateway to the knowledge that is already available—within mind, within experience, within each structure that we conduct.

Exercise 1 Conducting the Vision

As thoughts and sensations come up, look within each arising moment for the quality of awareness it carries. Be sensitive to the way that awareness transfers from one experience to the next. A perception or thought goes forward, carrying awareness; then a second perception or thought recollects and passes that awareness on. What is the quality of this experience? [p.247]

Supplemental Reading pp. 188-190 (chapter 18)

Tracing the Source

The view that knowledge arrives from somewhere else is paralleled by the view that what we know has a source. Often the knowledge we aim at is simply the successful naming of this source, understood both in the sense of an originating entity and a particular location.

The limiting case for this model is the universe itself, for it does not seem possible to specify either a place from which the universe comes or an originating power for its appearance. The usual response to this difficulty is to seek a source in some other sense. For example, an originating power bigger than imagination, wholly unknowable, might transmit the message that originates the universe. Or it might be that the universe calls itself into being, through a mechanism that is again wholly unknowable.

In either of these two cases, a limit is placed on knowledge. From a bystander perspective, no other alternative seems available, for **while we can know what appears within the universe or trace processes of universal application, we cannot actually have knowledge ‘of the universe; that is, we cannot stand outside it.**

However, **the limitations on knowledge associated with a ‘source from’ model extend far beyond this special limiting case. Such knowledge can never really give an account of itself, in terms of either methodology or substance. [p.188] Whatever we designate as source must itself have a source, and this source in turn must have a source. In whatever direction we turn our inquiry, we arrive at the ‘zero point’ of origination, only to find that origination itself cannot originate. Perhaps we need to question the whole ‘source from’ perspective. Logic and reason may support the mind in proclaiming this fixed way of knowledge, but these two ordering principles also have no source. Whether we point to our perceptions or read the rulings of the rational, the claims we make lack underlying authentication. If we call on absolutes that offer the solution of certainty, we cannot account for their status as absolutes; if we offer explanations, we cannot fully specify or justify the theory of description or explanation in operation. We cannot say how far we have understood or assess the ultimate accuracy of what we maintain. We lack the knowledge that could evaluate knowledge.**

No Journey Knowledge

If knowledge is prior, the ‘source from’ model does not apply in the same way. We should be able to go beyond the zero-point of origination to a knowledge that is zeroless. However, this ‘going beyond’ cannot itself conform to the rhythm of movement that affirms and seeks out a ‘source from’; instead, it must be a transcending. At the same time, ‘going beyond’ must stay *within* ordinary appearance, for only within appearance can we stay true to the possibility of a ‘sourceless source’. [p.189]

In the going beyond of prior knowledge, we start from the zero point and move toward the limits of our experience. We expand outward and turn inward; we trace the lineage of the past and activate the possibilities of the future. Eventually we return to the starting point. But now the starting point is no longer a point of origination. We realize that there was nowhere to go, and that in a certain sense the journey never took place. The change is subtle, but absolutely fundamental. The quality of time itself is different, and the dimensions of space are not what we thought they were. It no longer makes sense to consider origins or departures from origins in the same way.

How can we know that such a journey truly evokes new knowledge? We may claim that our way of seeing has been transformed, but perhaps this different seeing is still an extension of our starting point. Likewise, the places we

have gone, the paths we took, the directions we discovered and explored may implicate the space and time dimensions within which we started. On one level, this must be so, for there is no escaping our lineage.

Yet this restriction need not concern us. If prior knowledge transcends a 'source-from' way of knowing, the world of our experience has never come into being. How can a non-arising lineage enact meaningful restrictions? If we were attempting to justify a *claim* of new knowledge, the 'source from' way of knowing would come into play, and our conditioning would undermine our efforts to go beyond. But no such move is necessary. Knowledge does not have to speak in these terms. It does not have to speak at all. [p.190]

Week 8 -- pp. 247-50 (Exercise 1 & Commentary)

Yet these 'special' ways of knowing operate within clear limits that isolate them from our usual patterns. It is like having our feet on the ground and our head in the clouds: Somehow the connection is missing.

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As you learn to touch awareness directly and discover its quality, **practice looking 'within' awareness to discover the knowingness it offers. Instead of trying to perceive awareness as you would perceive an object or reflect on it as you would reflect on an idea, simply practice engaging being. Be careful not to tell yourself what kind of experience to have or dictate its nature. You can swim in awareness; you can refine it as you embody it. The process develops on its own, without special effort on your part.**

As awareness become more refined, a sense of inner knowledge enters into each experience. Starting with this quality, extend the sense of being present as much as possible. **This act of extending does not take place in conventional time and space, nor does it depend on the structures of identity, language, or perception.** There is nothing specific to do or do better; no way to be and no one to be. There is nothing that needs to be simplified; no structure of 'depending on'; no restrictions as to how or what. **There is no 'being here now' or 'this present space' or 'me and my mind conducting awareness'. There is not even 'mind conducting mind' or 'awareness conducting awareness'.** [p.248]

You do not need to hire an agent to work on your behalf; you do not need to learn a better attitude or develop new skills. Simply practice toward pure experience, not governed by pronouncements or consensus or fixed juxtapositions.

Comment 1

This exercise may seem difficult to carry out initially, but eventually **the sense will come that you can go into it more deeply. At that point, look carefully for the judgment: "Conceptual activity is no longer occurring."** This concept of 'no concepts' can lead to a subtle stuckness that is difficult to counteract. Be ready to identify the structures that are still in operation; for example, the subject who conducts or the person who is 'making real progress'. Though these patterns are very subtle, they are also surprisingly insistent in their claims: a little like the small child who has learned a new trick and shouts to anyone in sight, "Look at me!"

The more you practice the exercise, the more you will recognize that the aim is not to find new knowledge or to succeed in doing what is asked. This way of structuring the exercise will only confirm the view that the knowledge we ordinarily operate with is incomplete.

Here the challenge goes deeper. **If you go closely into full awareness without preserving a realm of messages or concepts, you can conduct openness. In openness, the root of not-knowing as a limit on knowledge proves hollow. Openness itself becomes the source of knowledge, and knowledge connects with a pure, awakened awareness that does not belong to the subjective realm. There is a triple connection into space and time and knowledge: a wholeness of being that embodies the Body of Knowledge.** [p249]

Week 9 -- DTS pp. 250-52 (Ex. 2 & Commentary)

Exercise 2 -- Time of Thinking

A. Sit comfortably and let thoughts arise in the mind. Instead of depending on the content of the thoughts for knowledge of what is happening, let yourself rest in the activity of thinking. At this level, there is no need to report back on what is thought or to craft the content of thoughts into new and ongoing stories. Just stay with the thinking of each thought.

As you grow accustomed to looking with this attitude, you will find that thoughts calm down. The thinking mind is no longer obligated to construct a reality, and thoughts are no longer structured by the need to arrive at a specified destination. Thought residues seem less solid, their power less strong.

B. To deepen the quality evoked in the first part of this exercise, practice seeing without relying on the eyes. In interacting with others, practice understanding what is being said without relying on the words.

Comment 2

The models that govern ordinary knowledge are conducted by thoughts. As thoughts stream through our minds, we sort them in various ways. Some thoughts are available as tools. Others take over our awareness completely, so that we fall into the world that they create. [p.250]

When thoughts invite us to step into their world, losing ourselves as we would lose ourselves in a dream, why are we so eager to accept the invitation? Perhaps it is because we have no more encompassing knowledge available. Confronted with this lack, we rely on thoughts—even 'idle' thoughts and daydreams—as carriers of knowledge. Thoughts allow us to characterize what appears and standardize the knowable. What has been thought can be quoted, predicted, repeated, and made use of in accord with our wishes.

Having learned to rely on thoughts in this way, we have also learned to accept ongoing anxiety. Thoughts must succeed one another in sequence, like the beads on a necklace. The moment one bead does not follow the next, the necklace will break; beads will clatter to the floor and roll away, and our life will collapse into chaos.

Exercise 2 challenges that structure. It invites you to focus on thoughts as temporal events independent of their content. It is based on the premise that we can afford to let go of our dependence on thoughts; that a different way of knowing is available. Without some willingness to engage this possibility directly, the exercise will probably not prove fruitful.

If knowledge is differently available, thoughts do not have to take on the task of constructing the known. We are free to experience thoughts as events unfolding in time. Once we can specify the time *of* thinking *in* thinking, thinking offers its own feedback. It constructs and conducts in a way that is more truly transitional and less bound to the structure of substance. [p.251]

As we let go of the concern for continuity from one thought to the next, we can also abandon our ongoing commitment to narration and linear temporality. We can move into greater intimacy with what is presented, touching what is actual in the experience of thinking and making direct contact with awareness.

In intimacy, lines of communication form. We are not confined to linear or circular structures, but can return to the multidimensionality of appearance. Feedback invites a new sense of the whole.

When thoughts unfold from one to the next, inviting us to lose ourselves in the endless progression of their content, the world becomes linear. But in the time of thinking, other dimensions are available. There is the arising of the thought, the activity of thinking, the transition between thoughts, the one who is thinking. The depth of these added dimensions can become a doorway into an unexpected realm. A simple question may open the door: What is 'inside' the string of beads? Can we 'go' there? [p.252]

Inspiration



"Once our perspective is sufficiently open, all experience can be seen as the dynamic play of Space, Time, and Knowledge. The inherent beauty of appearance, which is the dance of -- Time, Space, and Knowledge, unfolds naturally before and with us. We can then directly experience our Being, which expresses itself as a dynamic and complete freedom. In this way we can discover what it means to be truly human."

Tarthang Tulku Rinpoché: TSK p. xxxi

The *'place'* to find new possibilities is
within the range of what is already going on.

My inspiration: Tarthang Tulku Rinpoché
My Teacher: Jack Petranker

End Notes:

¹ **Figure A:** Krystian Polak, Crows Nest, NSW, Australia, Image : *Water (4x)*

<http://www.microscopyu.com/smallworld/gallery/contests/2008/index.html>

² **Class weekly reading schedule** from '*Dynamics of Time and Space*': See Appendix 2 for quoted assignments.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Page</u>
1	51-53
2	51-53
3	53-56
4	56 (3 paragraphs)
5	57-58
6	245-246 (first paragraph)
7	246-7
8	247-50 (Exercise 1 & Commentary)
9	250-52 (Exercise 2 & Commentary)

³ **Figure B:** Bubble by Robert J. Baker – Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/robert-baker/4486183487/>

⁴ **Walt Whitman** (1819–1892). *When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer*, from *Leaves of Grass*. 1900.

<http://www.bartleby.com/142/180.html>

⁵ **Donnel B. Stern**, *Unformulated Experience*, (2003, Analytic Press, Hillsdale NJ)

⁶ **'source from' understanding** -- No matter what we affirm on the conceptual level, in our being we feel obligated to meet certain standards: to conform to personal and cultural expectations. If we go along with the role that is offered—for instance the role of the seeker after knowledge—we accept the truth of the role; if we do not, we get caught up in guilt and anxiety and a fear of failure. The drive activated in this way is self-reinforcing. Intent on perpetuating the surface of 'appearance as substance', mind reacts to any challenge by affirming a **'source-from' understanding**. It may trace what appears into the subconscious or unconscious mind; it may pursue one of the countless connections and associations that thoughts evoke. Alternatively, it may lapse into blankness, disclaiming any knowledge of how to research or investigate inwardly. Once we take on this way of being, we get more and more involved, like someone who begins to hyperventilate. The pathways of knowledge are saturated with hunger and desire and fantasy. Thoughts and senses all trend in a certain direction. We can only look from and to; we can only wait and wish, and then wait some more. In the end there is frustration or disillusionment, or else more anxiety. DTS p.246

⁷ **Figure C:** Fireworks on Both Sides of the Bay by agrude, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/agrude/730722287/>

⁸ **Figure D:** Yevgeniy Fedotov, Benjamin Britton, Stephen Lepke, Team 1 Spring 2010, An oblique slice through a stage fog vortex ring using a green 5 mw laser pointer, Photoshopped red.

http://www.colorado.edu/MCEN/flowvis/galleries/2010/Team-1/FV_popup1-18.htm

David F. Filippone is a long time student of the Time, Space, Knowledge vision. His teacher for the last five years has been Jack Petranker. David contends, "*Working with TSK, more than any other vision or model, has provided the tools and a path for discovering a world that was not what I had assumed. Awakening to how deeply conditioned the interpretive process actually is continues to be thrilling, and deeply revelatory.*"

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