

What the Time, Space, Knowledge Vision Offers Western Psychology

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I have been a psychotherapist for fifty years. During this time, I have facilitated over 60,000 therapy sessions learning of human cares, concerns, hopes and fears. During forty of these years I have been a student of Tibetan Lama Tarthang Tulku's Time-Space-Knowledge (TSK) vision of reality. I became fascinated by this vision and read the TSK books daily before going to work. It was as though I were developing bifocal vision. Out of one eye I was viewing as I had been formerly trained, and out of the other eye, I was seeing time and space in everything.

It became clear that our ordinary experience is a way of knowing time and space. From birth our human intelligence has been conditioned to see space in three dimensions--length, width, and height--and time in three dimensions—past, present, and future. Within this three dimensional realm, the wholeness of space and the unity of time are divided, and a self appears as separate from all things. Being separate from all we know proves to be a lived dilemma--how to belong in a world from which we are separated?

We spend a lifetime trying to resolve the problems that are the consequence of this basic sense of separation. Being small, relative to the world around us, we feel the need to be protected. However, this very protection separates us from the whole and produces a longing to belong. We become a prisoner of our protections. As a therapist I have grown increasingly uncomfortable colluding with this construct of a separate self. We want to be loved and accepted but we remain protected and insulated. The dilemma of how to belong and yet remain separate is pervasive. It seems clear that the notion of a solid, separate self requires reexamining and challenging.

We are central to the world we inhabit: that is the viewpoint from which situations and circumstances are known. We believe we know how things really are and we have practiced ways of dealing with them. We live the story as told about who we are and how we got that way. We go to therapy to get rid of our problems, but we want to protect, maintain and perpetuate our self.

As I began to look into the time and space present in therapy sessions, I noticed that people appeared differently from session to session. I stopped reading my notes from the last session because it in no way prepared me for how the person might present or what they might talk about. It appeared that the current mental-emotional state shapes how we see ourselves and how we see others. At different times of day, times of month, time of life, and in different contexts our mental-emotional state fluctuates and so our perception of our self and circumstance likewise fluctuates. Emotional states and mental attitudes are neither fixed nor frozen.

Over time people I interview do seem to become more consistent, but I wonder if this is a function of the stability of our relationship, or perhaps I have come to see them in a stable way. I wondered if the person I see appears anywhere else outside of our therapeutic interaction. Then I reflect on all my relationships. Could it be that the self-presentation emerges in the interaction, having no stand-alone existence?

And what of the relationship between mental-emotional state and the story being told? Did the personal history cause the current condition or was it that the current emotional-mental state contained these memories? Was the person's remembered past and their anticipated future merely a reflection of the mental and emotional space they are in at the time of the viewing? To examine this

possibility, I took a person's history upon intake and again upon discharge. What I found was quite interesting. History given upon discharge was different than upon admission. Had the past changed?

The TSK vision invited me to view mental-emotional states as a knowing space that can be expanded or contracted. I noted that constricted psycho-physical conditions are experienced as fear and anger. This seems to be a consequence of their protective function. Along with anger I include all its derivatives—irritation, annoyance, and resentment. And fear includes anxiety, apprehension, and avoidance. These constrictions appear to be at the heart of our reactivity. The knee-jerk tendency to protect and defend what we call our self.

More open emotional-mental states are experienced as ease, compassion, love, and joy. Noting this, I began what I called "open state training." This name came from the work of Larry Simmons, one of TSK's early students. Utilizing some of the space exercises described in the initial book, *Time Space and Knowledge*, I began presenting the idea that all perception is a function of position or stance – a way of knowing. Identifying stance and its function in perception was a breakthrough. The appearances of things and circumstances were no longer fixed, but rather a function of how they were known.

Recalling that Tarthang Tulku tells us the sky is always present overhead, we can practice breathing the openness of the

sky into every organ, tissue and cell – permeating any stance with space. Upon the exhale, we can breathe as if we could breathe out of every living pore. The net result is opening the emotional positions and mental attitude from the inside out. It has been said that in order to let go of something, we must open the hand that holds it. This is true also for emotions and attitudes. To let go of them we need to open the position or stance that holds them. This insight can be generalized to all constrictions of irritability, annoyance, impatience, and judgement.

In a more central manner this practice can relax self-preoccupation. So much of anxiety and depression are a result of self-preoccupation. When the “me in the middle” is noted, usually appearing as reactivity, we can note it on the inhale, releasing and smile upon the exhale. It is important that we approach our opening in a light-hearted manner.

Our own discomfort can become a signal that a particularly constricted way of knowing is in operation. With practice, breathing in the available presence of space relaxes reactive tendencies and allows a more open response. This of course takes practice. Our ordinary experience has been conditioned by cultural and personal stories. However, since we are always practicing something, perhaps we can practice a new way.

I encourage people to listen to a blue-sky guided meditation daily on my website or draw the more elaborate description

from the mountain retreat exercise in *Time, Space, and Knowledge*. There may be some benefit in hearing it spoken. This can be an 8 to 10 minute practice daily, preferably in the morning. Over time we can come to our experience less reactive, less self-protective, less ego-bound. In order to generalize the benefit of this practice I suggest that five times a day, for just thirty seconds, recall the morning practice and breathe the open space of sky into the body and mind. This is just an additional two and a half minutes per day. It has become clear to me that frequency of practice is more important than the duration of the practice. Five times a day, we can stop what we are doing and how we are being and open our current way of knowing to experience the liberating presence of space.



The TSK vision allows a more open and dynamic way of seeing. Nothing is fixed, frozen or established once and for all. The nature of our experience is dynamic – thoughts and feelings come and go. There does not appear to be a solid self in the center holding it all together. While we do exhibit habitual tendencies, it is useful to see these as tendencies or patterns rather than fixed identities. Anything we call “myself” is hard to change. However, tendencies and patterns can be combed out and opened by breath.

Psychological practice has recognized the body-mind connection and attempted to teach people more positive ways of thinking. It was believed by changing the valence of thought from negative to positive we might feel better. The problem with this approach is that it feels inauthentic. One thought feels more real than its opposite. TSK offers a penetrating insight that helps relieve us from mental tyranny. This occurs in the recognition that all thoughts are without substance and all thoughts are impermanent. This insight reduces the gravity of thought and its tendency to grab hold of and dictate our life experience. There are ways of knowing thoughts as passing clouds or writing on water. These ways of knowing open thought’s density and allow us to see the nature of thought.

The TSK vision is an open and fluid view of reality. At the center of everything is a generative space. Nothing is separate

from the space that infuses appearance. Instead of self at the center, we can open self and find space at the center, relaxing defensive reactivity and allowing spontaneous harmony and ease.

Because TSK is a cosmology that tells the story of time and space as a generative ground that allows all appearance, and because TSK is an epistemology that examines how knowledge knows time and space, thereby contouring reality as known, TSK has much to inform psychology.

The intelligence that we are can learn new ways of knowing. The dilemma of a separate self wanting to both protect and to belong is resolved in the recognition that we are never separate from time and space that surrounds and permeates our being. TSK is a centerless way of knowing that relaxes all edges and boundaries. Being never separate, we can come to know intimacy as our true nature.
