



1-1-2001

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Recommended Citation

Capriles, E. (2001). Capriles, E. (2001). The meaning of self-liberation and some loops from The source of danger is fear. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 20(1), 53–66.. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 20 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2001.20.1.53>



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The Meaning of Self-Liberation and Some Loops From *The Source of Danger Is Fear*

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Self-liberation does *not* mean that a self is liberated from delusorily valued thoughts or delusory experiences; what it means is that such thoughts and experiences liberate themselves spontaneously. Their liberation may take place in three main ways. The paradoxical, inverted dynamics of *samsara* manifest as countless “laces” in which we tie ourselves up; understanding the functionality of these “laces” is one of the preconditions for them to self-liberate, the others being direct introduction and knowledge of the “treasure of instructions.”

I. The Base, Path and Fruit in the Dzogchen Teachings and the True Meaning of Self-Liberation

THE DZOGCHEN teachings of Tibetan Buddhism speak of Dzogchen as Base (Tibetan: zhi [gzhi]), Dzogchen as Path (Tibetan: lam [lam]) and Dzogchen as Fruit (Tibetan: drebu [’bras-bu]).¹ Dzogchen as Base is our original condition of *total* (chenpo [chen-po])² *plenitude and perfection* (dzogpa [rdzogs-pa])³—which, in *samsara* just as well as in *nirvana*, is the true condition of both the subject and the object, of both mind and matter, and in general of all entities.

In any given individual, this original condition may manifest three different ways of functioning: (1) *samsara*, wherein a deluded consciousness fails to apprehend the said condition *as it is*, and only perceives its own dualistic, substantialist fictions; (2) *nirvana*, wherein the condition in question is apprehended as it is and thus experience is characterized by total plenitude, while actions are marked by total perfection; and (3) a condition called “base of all” or *kunzhi* (*kun-gzhi*), wherein neither *samsara* nor *nirvana* are manifest—so that there is neither the perfect freedom inherent in

undeluded primordial cognitiveness nor the incompleteness and self-encumbering inherent in delusion.

It is when *samsara* has manifested that we need Dzogchen as Path, which consists of the repeated self-liberation of delusion in the unveiling of Dzogchen as Base, and which, if carried on thoroughly and uninterrupted until its final consequences, will result in the manifestation of Dzogchen as Fruit (which ultimately will imply the manifestation of one of the typically Dzogchen types of consummation of the physical organism).⁴ In short, Dzogchen as Path and Dzogchen as Fruit are but the direct unveiling of Dzogchen as Base—the difference between them being that the first is transient, whereas the latter is definitive.⁵

Now we can explain why it is misleading to speak of “self-liberation *from* delusorily valued thought,” “self-liberation *from* delusory experiences,” and so forth. It so happens that “self-liberation” means that, rather than being liberated by an intentional action carried out by the mental subject, delusorily valued thoughts and delusory experiences liberate *spontaneously, of their own accord*. Moreover, when self-liberation occurs, the illusion that there is a separate mental subject

perceiving an object, or acting upon it, and so on, dissolves like a feather entering fire: The self-liberation of delusorily valued thoughts, delusory experiences and so on, involves the instant disappearance of the illusory mental subject. Any attempt by the illusory mental subject to liberate such thought or experience would confirm and sustain the illusion that there is a mental subject separate from the flow of experience and from the myriad potential objects. Since this is a most essential aspect of the essential delusion at the root of *samsara*, it would bar self-liberation and sustain *samsara*. Thus the phrase “self-liberation from thoughts” is misleading insofar as it seems to imply that there is an inherently existing self, soul or mental subject that, as a result of its own intentional action, is liberated from delusory thoughts, experiences, and so forth. Such a misunderstanding is likely to give rise to the attempt by the illusory mental subject to liberate a delusorily valued thought, a delusory experience and so on—which, as noted above, would bar self-liberation.⁶

The above explanation has to be made more precise, as there is not one kind of self-liberation, but a whole range, divided into three main types, corresponding to three principal capacities. Whereas the first type/capacity of self-liberation depends on a previous intentional movement of attention that intends to apprehend the true essence of a thought that is already established as an object, the second type/capacity of self-liberation depends on an instant automatic reaction as the delusorily valued thought begins to arise. The third type/capacity of self-liberation does not involve either an intentional movement of attention toward a thought that is already established as object, or a spontaneous reaction as the delusorily valued thought begins to arise. In this last type of self-liberation, as the thought arises, it self-liberates, like a drawing on water: thought is not delusorily valued even for an instant; therefore, it never veils the “essence” or *ngowo* (*ngo-bo*) aspect of the Base, which is voidness (*shunyata*, *tongpanyi* [*stong-pa-nyid*], *wu*, *mu*).⁷

Though the first type of self-liberation is preceded by an intentional movement of attention towards the thought that is already established as object, and the second type is preceded by an instant automatic reaction of attention as the delusorily valued thought begins to arise, in neither of them is self-liberation *produced* by the illusory

subject’s intentional acts or spontaneous reactions. Self-liberation being *spontaneous* liberation, its occurrence shows most clearly that the subject *cannot cause it*, and that the obstinate attempt to do so does but increase the force and intensity of delusion. However, even this attempt will not prevent self-liberation, as the increase of the force and intensity of delusion may lead it to a threshold level at which, its *reductio ad absurdum* having been achieved, its *spontaneous* liberation becomes possible. In turn, this increase of delusion to a threshold level and its subsequent self-liberation will demonstrate even more clearly that the subject’s intentional actions or automatic reactions may not cause liberation.

The following lines may illustrate the first type/capacity of self-liberation:

As I look into the thought in order to
apprehend its essence
suddenly there is no one to look and nothing
to be seen,
as subject and object instantly, spontaneously
dissolve
independently of their will, like feathers
entering fire:
Thought disappears on the spot and there only
remains
the patency of inherently self-liberating
primordial cognitiveness.⁸

In turn, the second type/capacity of self-liberation may be poetically described in terms of the following lines:

Like snakes
tensions appear and dance in my breast;
like snakes
they uncoil and free themselves on the spot
in the radiant, limitless, unborn
and empty expanse.

To conclude, the third type/capacity of self-liberation may be poetically expressed as follows:

Silence roars and darkness shines
in the sparkling fullness of the void—
and if a thought arises
it is void
and therefore does not veil
the roar of silence
in the fullness of the void.

Since there is no longer an apparent distance between a subject and an object, (we) cannot follow patterns “down the river” as subjects who look toward an object, but simply “remain in the

source” beyond the subject-object duality. Like endlessly moving ripples in a spring, thoughts leave no traces and there is no mind to seek them: The “mirror” of primordial cognitiveness reflects whatever appears at any moment, but no imprint is ever left on its surface, as there is no observer to look into the mirror. Thus, there is no longer any “meditation,” but authentic, true self-liberation.

II. The Source of Danger is Fear

THE SOURCE of Danger is Fear is a manuscript consisting of successive sections, the materials of which came to me while I was in retreat in the higher Himalayas practicing Dzogchen between 1977 and December, 1982. Each section of the original manuscript has two parts: the first describes a “lace” in which we frequently tie ourselves up, and the second provides instructions for the practice of the Dzogchen *Upadesha*⁹ which may create the conditions for the “lace” described in the first part to undo itself spontaneously. The condition for this *possibly* to occur is that we have already been introduced to the state of absolute, nondual, undeluded Awareness¹⁰ that the Dzogchen teachings call rigpa (though even in this case the lace cannot be untied by means of a contrived action). It so happens that this text was written in the tradition of the *Upadesha* series of the Dzogchen teachings, which provides instructions allowing us to remain in the state of absolute, nondual, undeluded Awareness *to which we have already been introduced*.

It must be noted that some of the “laces” described are auto-catalytic systems—that is, systems involving positive feedback loops that cause them to grow exponentially from their own feedback. They are prevented from doing so by the effective work of repression (in case we prefer to use Freud’s explanation¹¹), or bad faith (in case we prefer to use Sartre’s¹²). This depends on a low bioenergetic input¹³ and the concomitant state of small space/time/knowledge,¹⁴ and it can curb the system’s tendency to increase its intensity toward a threshold level at which, having achieved its *reductio ad absurdum*, the system becomes liable to self-liberation. Contrariwise, the understanding of the functional structure of the “lace” described in the first part of any given section and the increase of the bioenergetic input

and the consequent enlargement of the individual’s space/time/knowledge may activate the process of *reductio ad absurdum*, just as the introduction to the state of rigpa and the knowledge of the methods outlined in the second part of each section may create the conditions for the system’s self-liberation—or, in other words, for the “lace” to undo itself spontaneously.

In this paper I shall not reproduce the second part of each section, but only the first one, that is, the one describing the “lace” in which we tie ourselves up. The reason for this is that the instructions contained in the second part are not to be publicly/indiscriminately broadcast, but only transmitted individually to authorized, capable practitioners, by an authorized, capable Master (which certainly I am not).

Time

A₁ We miss the now and its inherent bliss and experience uneasiness and discomfort as we run after thoughts which project a “better” future, evoke a “better” past or imagine a “better” present, and thereby indulge in longing or nostalgia.

A₂ The now is supreme bliss, which we miss, as we concentrate on thoughts about the future or the past
or on countless miscellaneous thoughts because we miss the now’s supreme bliss as we concentrate on thoughts about the future or the past
or on countless miscellaneous thoughts because the now’s supreme bliss eludes us as we concentrate on thoughts...
da capo sine fine...

Pleasure and pain

A₁ We fail to obtain lasting pleasure and constantly reap pain as a result of our obstinate attempt to attain lasting pleasure and avoid all pain.

A₂ We wish to obtain lasting pleasure and elude the pain produced by our attempt to obtain lasting pleasure and to elude the pain produced by our attempt to obtain lasting pleasure and to elude the pain produced...
da capo sine fine...

Boredom

A

When we are in repose
and experience no novelty or change
we project on our experience the concept of
"boredom"
and, as a result of the subtle rejection of our
experience
produced by the delusorily valued projection of a
"negative" concept,
we experience the uneasiness and discomfort
called "boredom."
However, in order to forbear our daily toil and
hardships
we need the incentive of aspiring to repose
and therefore we tell ourselves that we cannot
enjoy repose at present
because in order to do so first we must resolve
some problems,
and thus we engage in struggle
in order to win the repose
that we imagine will provide us with pleasure
and satisfaction.
However, when we "win" our repose
and experience no novelty or change
again we project on our experience the concept
of "boredom"
and thus experience uneasiness and
discomfort,
and so again we tell ourselves that we cannot
enjoy the repose
because first we must resolve some problems,
and therefore again we engage in struggle
in order to win the repose
that we imagine will provide us with pleasure
and satisfaction...

da capo sine fine...

Desire

A

By hungrily looking toward a supposed future
pleasure
to be obtained from a supposedly substantial
object
we miss the total bliss of nowness.
Then, when the desired future arrives
we are so possessed by the attitude
of looking toward the future and away from
the present
that we cannot at all enjoy the experience we
had yearned for.
Then we elude awareness of our frustration
and of the emptiness¹⁵ we have discovered,
by imagining that pleasure will be found in
the future
when we obtain another object.
Thus, the great bliss and plenitude of nowness
continues to be hidden as we look and rush
toward the future

and experience the dissatisfaction and
frustration
of being away from the now.

Fear, insecurity, suffering, and refuge

A₁

We are constantly searching for security
because we are fearful.
We are fearful because we search for security
instead of giving ourselves up to the insecurity
that life is:
if we gave ourselves up to insecurity we would
feel secure,
for we would have no fear of insecurity.
Escaping insecurity, instead, implies and
begets fear:
the more we escape, the more we affirm that
there is something to fear;
the more we affirm there is something to fear,
the more we fear.
Thus, we search for security because we fear
and we fear because we search for security.

A₂

We fear the terrible sensation that fear is
but the fear of the sensation of fear
begets the sensation of fear that we fear.

A₃

We try to elude our fear by taking refuge in
objects:
friends, lovers, groups, beliefs, identities,
positions.
Since these objects are breakable and unstable
by taking refuge in them we condemn
ourselves to the fear of losing our refuge:
we take refuge because we fear losing the
refuge that we take
because we fear losing the refuge that we take
because we fear...

da capo sine fine...

A₄

We fear that others discover our fear
but our fear that our fear may be discovered
is fear that may be discovered by others:
we fear that they may discover the fear that
they may discover
the fear that they may discover the fear that...
da capo sine fine...

Tension

A₁

The delusory valuation of thought at the root
of the belief in a self
is sustained by neuromuscular tensions,
vibrations, contractions and reverberations
which,
insofar as attention is occupied with thoughts/
objects
other than the tensions, vibrations,

contractions and reverberations,
are not felt to be unpleasant and thus may be
conserved.

In turn, insofar as they are conserved,
we are compelled to evade them
and, thus, to conserve them.

- A₂ There can only be tension when there is
rejection
and, whenever there is tension, consciousness
rejects it.
However, insofar as tension is not the central
object of attention
rejection of it is subtle and, therefore, tension
is slight.
Then, as we become aware of tension, our
rejection increases
proportionally to our awareness of it,
making tension increase and become more
unpleasant.
The more unpleasant tension becomes, the
more we reject it,
making it ever more unpleasant. This
autocatalytic system
may bring the unpleasantness to a threshold
level
at which the subject-object duality/delusion at
its root may collapse
and thus unpleasantness may come to an end.

Self-importance

- A₁ When we anguish about another's anguish
our anguish feeds the other's anguish
by confirming the belief in the extreme
importance of life and pain
which is the deepest root of anguish.
- At first, the immediate cause of anguish may
be an external situation;
once anguish has manifested,
the immediate cause of anguish may be the
presence of anguish itself.
- A₂ In the same way, consoling someone confirms
the belief in the extreme importance
of that individual, of his or her experience and
of his or her grief.
Since this belief is the deepest cause of grief,
confirming it may cause grief to increase.
- By trying to do something about our distress
we cause the aversion at the root of distress to
increase
and confirm the illusion of absolute importance
which is the deepest cause of distress.

Blaming others

- A₁ As soon as we experience guilt, fear, distress
or any other undesired emotion
we want to escape.
We fail to understand that undesired emotions
are painful
only when we regard them as undesirable and
want to escape.
- A₂ Worse still,
when, for any reason, we experience guilt,
we try to get rid of it
by blaming others for the "evil" for which we
feel guilty.
Thus we add to our guilt the guilt of blaming
others,
making our guilt increase and therefore giving
rise
to an even greater need to blame others.

Hatred

- A₁ Regarding some aspects of ourselves as
abhorrent,
and feeling that a self having such aspects
would itself be abhorrent,
we are compelled to deny them in ourselves,
project them on others, and abhor those others.
- Moreover, we can *only* abhor and hate others
if we justify our hatred
and elude guilt for it
by thinking that it is the fully cogent response
to the evil-doing and the supposedly evil nature
of the individual whom we hate.
- A₂ We evade awareness of the pain in our heart
that hatred is
by concentrating on the object of our hatred
and its supposedly evil character.
Since we do not realize the pain that hatred
implies,
we may continue to hate,
perpetuating the pain that hatred is.

Contemplation and uptight mindfulness

- A₁ In order to attain the state of Contemplation
—that is, to "rest" in the state of absolute,
nondual, undeluded Awareness—
and avoid being drawn away from this state
by distracting thoughts
an alert attentiveness is needed.
However, attention is precisely what
Contemplation must dissolve.

Being alert so that distraction will not carry you away generates tension.
However, tension is precisely what Contemplation must cut.

If you are not alert, thoughts will carry you away
and make you revolve in the wheel of *samsara*.
However, if you are alert, this will beget tension and aversion
and sustain the illusory perceiver-doer
which is the root of *samsara*.

A₂ When we begin to meditate¹⁶ we keep alert so that thoughts will not carry us away from nowness
constituting a “chain of delusion” that would cause us
to ceaselessly revolve in the “wheel of *samsara*”:
we are taught that we must “reCognize” the essence of thoughts
so that they will liberate themselves in the ocean of gnosis—
the state of absolute, nondual, undeluded Awareness.

Trying to do this, we give rise to a delusive “uptight mindfulness”
which is a function of the duality of subject and object
and of the delusory valuation of “the self” and “its thoughts”—
and which, thus, keeps us revolving in the “wheel of *samsara*.”

Self-consciousness

A₁ When we are carrying out an activity and worry about erring
our worry and self-consciousness interfere with our subjectivity,
causing us to blunder.

It is when fearfully we look down toward the abyss that we fall.

A₂ When we become the object that others watch and judge
and thus get self-encumbered,
for fear of others and of our painful experience we “hide our head in the sand,”
trying to minimize suffering by minimizing awareness.
This experience of rejection, however,
will last only insofar as we reject it
and evade full awareness of it.

Delusion, distress and here-nowness

A₁ The distress inherent in delusion may be taken to be inherent in leisurely here-nowness
and, thus, we may spend our lives evading leisurely here-nowness,
trying to fill our time with business and distractions
and thus generating the aversion to the here-and-now that gives rise to distress
and missing the plenitude, fulfillment and bliss inherent in plain here-nowness.

Conceptualizing the now as being boring, we reject it
and thus experience the pain produced by rejection,
which we believe to be inherent in leisurely here-nowness,
and that we reject, giving rise to further pain,
which we believe to be inherent in leisurely here-nowness
and which we reject, giving rise to further pain...

da capo sine fine...

A₂ And, in general, when we face situations with little variety or change
—whether in our daily activity or while sitting in meditation—
we project the ideas of boredom, dullness and heaviness
and thus reject our experience, experiencing the unpleasantness
that we call “boredom, dullness and heaviness” and believing that it is inherent in those situations
in which there is little variety or change.
By rejecting both the unpleasantness and the situation with which we have associated it,
we generate more unpleasantness,
that we reject, generating more unpleasantness...

Lacking

A We feel empty and try to fill this lack by contacting, acquiring and possessing valuable objects.
However, by trying to fill our illusory lack we affirm it as real and true,
sustaining it and making it grow in proportion to the “value” of the objects with which we try to fill it:
the more valuable the object, the greater our lack becomes.

Thus, by attempting to recover the original plenitude we lost
as we felt separate from the plenitude of the given,
we make ourselves empty and dissatisfied.

Others, pride, and value

A

We may also try to “fill the lack” with value projected on us by others
and, becoming the object that they prize, swell our heart with pride.
However, instead of granting us plenitude, this exposes us to the risk of being unrecognized
or of being unappreciated, despised or humiliated:
by making our heart’s fluctuations depend on the Other’s look
we condemn ourselves to anguish and anxiety and,
again and again, we must fall into the hell of self-deprecation, disparagement and humiliation.
A swollen heart is easy to puncture with the spear of a look or the arrow of a sharp phrase.
The more we strive to obtain a high value through the Other’s favorable look, the more we affirm ourselves to be lacking in value,
and so the more we need to be filled with the value the Other bestows on us and the more exposed to contempt and humiliation we become
—and so the more anguish we shall have to experience
and the emptier and more deprived we shall feel.

Favorable conditions

A₁

The esteem and respect of many is a source of pride:
when others admire and accept the entity indicated by our name
the mental subject establishes a “link of being” with that entity
and, accepting it, it accepts the totality of its experience and sensations
and thus experiences pleasure: as the Stoics knew well,
sensations are pleasurable when we accept them
and unpleasant when we reject them.
Thus, the others’ favorable look causes us to feel well.¹⁷
However, accepting whatever we are conditioned to accept,

conditions us to reject what we are conditioned to reject
whenever we meet it.
Therefore, pride causes *samsara*’s Ferris wheel to turn:
after we ascend, we shall have to descend and meet the distress which human beings call “hell.”

A₂

The Buddha Shakyamuni declared that, in *samsara*,
pleasure is but a momentary relief from pain.

This relief is pleasurable
because it allows us to stop rejecting our experience
and accept it, thus experiencing pleasure.
However, the pleasure thus obtained is transient, for it is not possible
to make acceptance permanent, shunning rejection forever.

Looking for pleasure is a source of pain,
yet we cover the embers with so many ashes that for a while we cannot feel the burn.
Thus, we consolidate our habit of clinging to the ember
so that sooner or later we shall burn our hand.

Worrying for others

A

When those who care for us worry about our vicissitudes
the true cause of their worry is not whatever we do
but the fact that they have taken refuge in us
—who are breakable and changing entities—
rather than in their own unbreakable and changeless essence.
Nevertheless, they often make us feel
that the cause of their sorrows is our behavior
—for example, our dedication to the spiritual quest—
and thus feel justified in inflicting themselves with suffering
and feel compelled to make us feel guilty
by letting us know that we are the cause of their sorrows.
If we believe them, we may experience guilt and worry,
failing to see that they have themselves caused their own sorrows
just as we are causing ours by inflicting guilt and worry upon ourselves.

If we have any responsibility for both their suffering and ours
it lies in our mistaken refuge and the delusory valuation that sustains it.

Illness and pain

A₁ By obsessively protecting ourselves from what we regard as the sources of illness we may give rise to the bioenergetic imbalances that beget illness. Thus, we may give rise precisely to that which we want to avoid.

A₂ Similarly, it is our rejection of "pain" that turns into pain what is but naked sensation:
the only pain is the one resulting from the making of pain a problem, rejecting it, and despairing about our inability to bring it to an end.

Good and evil

A As children, we are taught that, in order to "be good," we have to keep our nature under control and "behave"¹⁸—which implies that we are inherently evil and that this evil will manifest if we do not control our nature.

Even those of us who were told that we were "good" were repeatedly made to feel bad in order to discourage unwanted behavior patterns and make us try to feel good by adopting the "positive" identity others offer us¹⁹ and behaving as they want us to behave.

Nevertheless, since the condition of our "goodness" is the implantation of a monstrous *phantasy* (the monster that mother saw us as while punishing us) no matter how deep inside we bury this *phantasy* it will surface again and again soiling our "good works" with "evil."

Thus, by trying to make us be "good" "well-meaning" people implant the roots of "evil" in us.

Meaning

A₁ When we miss the ineffable, nonconceptual meaning there arises the need to endow our life and tasks with enunciable meanings and to put hopes in worldly aspirations. Then, we fear that if we lose these meanings and fail to realize these aspirations

the result shall be meaninglessness and despair.
We cannot see that the loss of false meanings and hopes is necessary for rediscovering the ineffable, nonconceptual meaning inherent in the state of absolute, nondual, undeluded Awareness.

Only this meaning may make us feel truly and completely full(filled) and realized.

A₂ Because we have lost the meaning beyond words we give rise to conceptual meanings; because we cling to conceptual meanings we have no access to the meaning beyond words; because we have no access to the meaning beyond words we give rise to conceptual meanings...
da capo sine fine...

Moralist teachings and relative practices

A Relative teachings and moralist practices may help beings of certain capacities to lead a less conflictive existence. However, an exaggerated emphasis on them may lead us to believe that rules and precepts are absolute and that their observance is ultimately important, thus increasing the delusory valuation that is the cause of *dukkha*²⁰ and making us more intolerant toward others. Whatever causes us to rise to heaven later on will be the cause of our falling into hell. As stated by Yung-chia Hsüan-chüeh:²¹

"Giving (*dana*) practiced with an aim may result in the grace of being reborn in heaven. This, however, is like shooting an arrow upwards: when the strength propelling the arrow is exhausted it will return to the ground and this will be a source of adverse *karma* for times to come."

By taking the way of heaven we fall deep into hell.

In a succession of toothaches and ice-creams which does the child want to have first? It is better to step down from the wheel

that carries us up to heaven and then takes us down to hell.

Yet the worst with moralism is that it may be used by “demonic” pseudomasters as a pretext for murdering truly Enlightened Masters.

In the name of purity, the greatest possible fault is committed.

Despise the passions?

A₁ Let us take the example of anger:
If I despise my anger
I shall give rise to anger against my anger.
Since anger against anger is also anger,
by despising anger I shall produce more of what I want to uproot.

The more my anger grows, the more I shall despise it;
the more I despise it, the more it will grow.

A₂ In general, it is impossible to despise our passions without despising ourselves,
for we feel responsible for our passions²²
(and, when we no longer do so, we are no longer prey to passions).

So, when we despise our passions we *become* a despicable self;
the more we despise them, the more despicable we become,
and the more despicable we become,
the more the passions that we deem despicable grow in us.

Purification

A If one tries to “purify oneself” through relative practices
—from the visualization and recitation of Vajrasattva²³
to practices of tsa/lung/thigle²⁴—
the assumption that there is an impurity to be purified
will sustain the delusory valuation of thought
and thus the duality and judgment which constitute the impurity.
Thus, our endeavor will be comparable to cleaning a pristine mirror with a dirty cloth.²⁵

If the bioenergetic input is high enough,
if one is subject to the supreme *samaya*²⁶ of Dzogchen,
and if one possesses the instruction,

self-liberation will disperse the clouds covering the sky and blocking the sunlight.

Contrariwise, the idea of an impurity to be purified sooner or later would become the door to hell.

Opening up

A₁ We fear opening up,
feeling that this would expose us to evil and harm
and, eventually, make us lose ourselves and ultimately be destroyed.
How little we realize that we can only be harmed
when, being possessed by delusory valuation, dualism and self-clinging,
and believing that we are ultimately real and important selves
to be protected and safeguarded, we close ourselves:
since the supposedly real and important “I” may always be harmed
we are thus condemned to terror, anguish and anxiety
and provide a target that is vulnerable to attack.

By opening up and attaining Enlightenment, instead,
we attain plenitude and stability that cannot be harmed
and are freed from fear, anguish and anxiety.

A₂ In the same way, we fear that if we open up an underground monster lurking in our depths may possess us.
However, the monster of *unconscious phantasy* is sustained
by our drive to check it and keep it under control:
by supposing that it is our deepest nature,
we keep it alive, producing unforeseen effects.

If we applied the instructions and opened up, the illusory monster
would dissolve in anoxic gnosis²⁷ free of subject and object
and we would be rid of inveterate impulses.

Uneasiness in meditation

A When we sit in meditation and look at our thoughts
we may feel uneasy
and think that this uneasiness is inherent in meditation.
Actually, it is the uneasiness of delusory

valuation and grasping,
which normally we fail to realize as such
because we are closed and our attention is
preoccupied
with countless projects and ideas.
If this uneasiness becomes evident when we
sit to meditate,
we may wrongly associate it with meditation
and openness
and thus be “instinctively” tempted to
interrupt our meditation
and keep clinging to and following overvalued
thoughts,
trying to escape from uneasiness
by clinging to its very source.

If, instead, (we) “reCognize” the essence of the
present thought
and thus “Enter” the State
uneasiness disappears in the plenitude and
bliss of the unborn.

We project the uneasiness of delusory
valuation
on openness and Contemplation
and thus keep from the latter
and cling to and follow overvalued thoughts,
reaffirming and reinforcing the source of
uneasiness.

Boredom in meditation

A In Contemplation, plenitude, bliss and
satisfaction are inexhaustible.
However, sooner or later, Contemplation is
interrupted,
we feel separate from the continuum of the
Base,
become obsessed with an object of desire which
we imagine
will provide us with plenitude, bliss and
satisfaction,
and, by developing a powerful yearning for it,
we maintain the state of illusory duality and
separation
which is lack of plenitude, distress and
dissatisfaction.
Thus, we compulsively run after our own tail
which, no matter how fast we spin, always
remains out of reach.

If the conception of an object of desire
does not spontaneously liberate itself upon
appearing
and we fail to apply the instruction which
allows its self-liberation
the uneasiness of delusory valuation and
desire will drive us
to interrupt our practice in order to run after
the object of desire.

Too many passions and delusions in Contemplation

A If, while we “practice” Contemplation,
passions and delusions arise uninterruptedly
and we experience anguish or uneasiness
we feel that these are justified
by the undesirable flow of passions and
delusions
which we believe is their objective cause.
However, in truth our uneasiness springs
from the delusory valuation of the concept of
“passions and delusions”
and the belief that these are inherently
undesirable.

Profound instructions

A When the “two lights”²⁸ shine and, failing to
“reCognize” their nonduality,
the “light of the son” fights the “Mother Light,”
or when a tremendous agitation possesses us
and we do not manage to cease struggling and
despairing,
we should apply the “profound instructions”
we have received.

However, the more we apply these instructions
in order to “resolve” the situation,
the more we affirm ourselves as different from
the latter
and the more value and reality we ascribe
to both the situation and ourselves;
therefore, the more we affirm and sustain our
delusion
and the more conflictive and unbearable we
make our situation.

Our attempt to resolve the situation
reinforces the situation we want to resolve.

Peaceful mandalas

A Our inability to somehow alter the impassivity
of peaceful mandalas
—the peaceful, undefiable immutability of the
ground—
seemingly begets irritation. Actually, the cause
of irritation
is the inveterate impulses of delusion
rather than the peaceful mandalas to which
we are reacting
and which we thus turn into wrathful
mandalas.

Wrathful mandalas

A If, when (we) are “resting” in the state of Contemplation and the bioenergetic input is very high, we feel subtly separate from whatever is happening the experience of the wrathful mandalas may take place: the flow of experience shakes us until the delusion of someone who is shaken and something shaking her or him dissolves in absolute, nondual, undeluded Awareness.

Ignoring that the agitation that we suffer is the skillful means of the True Teacher we may feel anguished and resist and try to escape, thus increasing the agitation: our most precious friend is perceived as our most dreadful enemy.

III. Social Laces

Ecology and survival

A Our terror of insecurity and impermanence leads us to invent technological “solutions” in order to eradicate all risks of death, illness, and all that we consider to be a problem. Thus, we produce pesticides, chemical fertilizers, antibiotics, drugs and all kinds of “sciences,” devices and machines —from nuclear energy to genetic engineering— that disrupt the ecological balance on which our lives depend both in the so-called “external world” and “inside our bodies.”

We try to destroy the “negative” side of the coin of existence —the side featuring death, suffering, illness, discomfort, insecurity, hard work, pain and so on— by constantly putting corrosives on it. Nowadays, corrosion has worn away so much of the coin that it is about to reach the side we wished to preserve —life, joy, health, comfort, security, leisure, pleasure and so on— and thus put an end to human existence.

By trying to destroy death we have come to the brink of bringing all life to an end.

Social change

A₁ The oppressive structures of society are internalized by all of us, molding our psychological and experiential structures. If we set out to transform society without having transformed our own inner structures we unavoidably reproduce those structures in the new order of things.

Therefore, what we mean to be a total transformation of society will be but a mere change of masters.

A₂ The internalized, aggressive and oppressive elements of society are integrated into the structure of our psyche. If we project those elements of our psyche on the ruling class and try to destroy them by destroying the members of that class our destructive and oppressive actions will make all the more powerful the negative elements of our psyche which we wished to destroy. Having destroyed the ones on whom we projected those elements, the latter’s underground presence will be felt again in our own selves and thus we shall be compelled to project them on new “others” who may also be destroyed as though they were those aspects.

The Enemy

A Fearing that the Enemy may destroy us we have almost achieved the destruction that we fear.²⁹

If we used the most powerful weapons that we have developed we would not only destroy our enemies, but would destroy ourselves. Moreover, in building those weapons we have released so much radioactive pollutants into the environment, that even if we do not use them our survival is uncertain.

Notes

For this issue of the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, I had originally written a very long and conceptually complex philosophical paper titled “The Meaning of Being: Steps to a Metaexistential Metaphenomenology of Mind.”

The first sections of the said paper discussed the meaning of “being,” both logically and phenomenologically, mainly against the background of the theses drawn by Aristotle, Pyrrho, Nagarjuna, Plotinus, Pascal, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre (less relevant to the aims of the paper being those produced by Kant, Hegel, Ayer, and others). In particular, those sections showed that, in Heidegger’s philosophy, being is a *phenomenon* that arises upon understanding the word “being,” as well as upon perceiving an entity as *being* (or as no longer being, as never having been, etc.). Heidegger’s being, therefore, is a most basic, delusory phenomenon of *samsara* rather than the true condition of all reality that the Dzogchen teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and Bön call the Base or zhi (*gzhi*). The idea was to make clear the true logical and phenomenological meanings of being, show Heidegger’s error in identifying Heraclitus’ *aletheia* with his own conception of being, and demonstrate that the German philosopher’s terminology is inappropriate to translate Dzogchen texts.

The last sections of the said paper presented a metaexistential metaphenomenology, according to which the experiences that existentialism and existential philosophies in general regard as most authentic—those featuring anguish, distress and so on—though being indeed more authentic than the pleasant samsaric experiences produced by the mechanics of bad faith (self-deceit), are actually the most basic manifestations of essential human delusion (which the Buddha Shakyamuni called *avidya* and Heraclitus named *lethe*). Actually, the state of utter authenticity is that which different Buddhist and non-Buddhist Wisdom traditions call Awakening or Enlightenment, which involves the self-liberation both of the phenomenon of being and of all experiences of anguish, distress, and so on.

The main point in the paper in question was that the ideal translator of Dzogchen texts is one who is perfectly familiar with self-liberation. Anyone else will be merely rendering personal fantasies about Dzogchen. Only those who are familiar with self-liberation (and thus with going beyond the experience of being that is one of the most basic delusory phenomena of *samsara*) can understand the Dzogchen texts on the basis of what I have called a “metaontological hermeneutics” (Capriles, 1999; related texts are Capriles, 2000c and Capriles, in press) and thus render their correct meaning into other languages. Therefore, the *first* condition for correctly translating Dzogchen texts (even prior to knowing the Tibetan language), is to actually practice Dzogchen and thus have a valid experience of Dzogchen as Path and therefore of self-liberation.

However, the original paper was philosophically complex and lengthy and therefore I finally decided to publish the present paper, shorter and poetical, instead.

1. Throughout this paper, the Tibetan words that are not within square brackets convey an approximate pronunciation of the original Tibetan term; the Tibetan words in square brackets provide the Wylie system transliteration of the vocable, which allows the Tibetologist to reconstruct the original Tibetan script.

2. Normally “chenpo” means “big” or “great.” However, Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche has noted that in this and some other cases the term is given an absolute meaning, as it is used to indicate something that, being total, cannot be bigger or less big, greater or less great. In such instances, the term is to be translated as “total.”

3. When a glass is full to the brim with some liquid, Tibetans say the glass is “dzogpa.” When an action is perfectly accomplished, they also say the action is “dzogpa.” In particular, the Base, Path and Fruit of Dzogchen are characterized by absolute plenitude and perfection; therefore, in the combined word “dzogpa chenpo” (Dzogchen), it is appropriate to translate the term “dzogpa” as “plenitude and perfection,” and to render the combined word as “total plenitude and perfection.”

4. These are: (1) the Rainbow Body (Jalü [*dja-lus*]); (2) the Body of Light (Ökiku [*od-kyi sku*] or Öpfung [*od-phung*]); and (3) the most highly accomplished manifestation of the Body of Light, constituted by the Total Transference or Powa Chenpo (*pho-ba chen-po*). For an explanation see Capriles (2000a).

5. Since both Dzogchen as Path and Dzogchen as Fruit are beyond the experience of normal sentient beings, only accomplished Dzogchen practitioners may explain the two said aspects of Dzogchen: Whoever is not perfectly familiar with self-liberation, upon describing it, explaining it, or speaking of it will but express fantasies about the nature of Dzogchen as Path and Dzogchen as Fruit. Moreover, since beings in *samsara* fail to correctly apprehend the condition of Dzogchen as Base, even in explaining the Base, those who are not perfectly familiar with self-liberation will but express the products of their own imagination.

6. In a text on the practice of the Dzogchen Menngagde (*man-ngag-sde*; Skt.: *Upadesha*) translated in the mid-1970s, the phrase “liberates itself as a snake uncoiling” (which referred to the delusorily valued thought) was mistranslated as “liberates himself like a snake uncoiling.” The translator had no experience of self-liberation and thus understood the ambiguous Tibetan syntax as meaning that *the skilled meditator liberated himself or herself from the thoughts and so on*, in a way that is analogous to that in which a snake whose body has been tied into a knot undoes the said knot.

7. For an explanation of the three aspects of the Base see Capriles (2000b). For a more detailed explanation see Capriles (2000a).

8. Primordial awareness is said to be inherently self-liberating because, when there is no delusory valuation of the “triple projection” and therefore the illusory subject-object duality does *not* manifest, all that arises in our experience is like the ever-moving ripples in a water source that cannot be followed: rather than being like the more stable ripples that form in a stream and that, as they go

down, may be followed by an observer standing on the banks of the river, that which arises in our experience is always changing and there is no separate observer to follow it. The point is that, since the ripples change so rapidly and since there is no (illusory) separate observer who may follow their change through successive moments, it is impossible to establish that they constitute a stable form and thus to delusorily perceive them as a substance. Thus, when the reCognition of the essence (ngowo [*ngo-bo*]) of thoughts results in the manifestation of the Dharmakaya (the so-called “Mind” aspect of Enlightenment), and thus the illusory subject-object duality dissolves like feathers entering fire, the ensuing nondual state, wherein primordial cognitiveness is fully patent, naturally liberates all would-be delusorily-valued thoughts. For example, if the illusion of a separate subject begins to arise, it spontaneously dissolves on the spot.

9. *Upadesha* is a Sanskrit word, whereas Dzogchen (*rDzogchen*) is a Tibetan word. In Tibetan, *upadesha* is *menngag* (*man-ngag*), and the corresponding series of Dzogchen teachings is *menngagde* (*man-ngag-sde*) or *menngaggyide* (*man-ngag gyi-sde*). I have used the Sanskrit term because, being the term used by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, it is best known to members of the Dzogchen Community. The word *Upadesha* means “secret oral instructions”; however, since many instructions of the *Upadesha* have become written, almost public instructions, I shall translate the term simply as “instructions.”

10. I use the word “Awareness” because of its Anglo-Saxon etymological meaning, which is “being true.”

11. According to Freud, repression is the action of subconscious mechanisms which keep ego-dystonic contents (i.e., contents which are incompatible with one’s self-image) out of the focus of conscious awareness.

12. According to Sartre, bad faith is a self-deceit which the conscious mind carries out knowingly and intentionally and which involves, in the same operation, deceiving itself about its own deceit, so that once the self-deceit is accomplished there is no conscious awareness that there was any deceit. Sartre uses the concept of *bad faith* to explain many phenomena which Freud explains through the concept of repression.

13. Sanskrit: *kundalini*; Tibetan: *thigle* (*thig-le*). It must be noted that the Tibetan term *thigle* translates both the Sanskrit word *bindu* (sometimes translated, in the context of Tantrism, as “seminal seed”) and the Sanskrit vocable *kundalini*. Tibetans chose to translate both Sanskrit words for a single Tibetan term because in Tantrism *kundalini* depends on *bindu* to such an extent that actually they may be regarded as being exactly the same thing.

14. For an explanation of this concept see Tarthang Tulku (1977).

15. This emptiness is not the voidness sought by the Buddhists, but the uncomfortable emptiness of the lack of wholeness and fulfillment inherent in the illusion of separateness.

16. When I use the noun “meditation” or the verb “to meditate,” I am referring to a function of mind—that is, of delusion—which involves mindfulness, attention and the subject-object duality. When I use the word “Contemplation,” I am referring to a state in which mind—that is, delusion—as well as mindfulness, attention, and the subject-object duality have disappeared and the state of absolute, nondual, undeluded Awareness is uninterruptedly manifest for a given period of time.

17. Naturally, if we are ashamed of pride, the first moment of acceptance will be followed by a second moment of rejection, which being rejection of sensation results in an unpleasant experience.

18. That is, to “be-having-ourselves,” which implies that the inner observer, that has assumed the values of society, has to check and govern us as objects.

19. This will be so provided that our parents or educators allow us to embody the kind of identity that they and society deem “positive.” If they do not allow us to embody a “positive” identity, we shall have to assume an identity socially regarded as negative and, therefore, we shall have to obtain from people generally regarded as evil the approval and admiration that we need in order to function. This, however, does not mean that we become “good” or “evil” due solely to the influence of others during childhood; genetic propensities may partly explain why the same parents react differently to each of their children, helping them adopt a specific role in life. Thus, there is a determining influence of karma from “previous lifetimes.” For a brief explanation, see my paper “Beyond Mind: Steps to a Metatranspersonal Psychology” (Capriles, 2000b); for a more detailed explanation, see my books *Qué somos y adónde vamos* (1986) and *The Direct Path* (1976).

20. *Duhkha*: dissatisfaction, lack of plenitude, missing the point, recurrent suffering. This is how the Hinayana Schools characterize *samsara*.

21. See Yoka Daishi (Yung-chia Hsüan-chüeh)/Taisen Deshimaru [1981].

22. Often—and even more so when we are Dharma-practitioners—we may feel that the passions are alien forces trying to possess us, and thus we fight against them (begetting further passions). Since while we fight against the passions we experience them as alien forces, we neither feel responsible for them nor identify with them. However, once we fall prey to the passions, we feel responsible, at least for having yielded to them, and we identify with them, for we are acting them out.

23. In Tantric and Dzogchen Buddhism, Vajrasattva, the “*vajra* being” (i.e., the “immutable/indestructible being”), is the embodiment and symbol of the Sambhogakaya, containing all *zhitro* (*zhi-khro*) or “peaceful-wrathful” deities. In the outer or lower Tantras, the figure of Vajrasattva is used in combination with the famous Hundred-Syllable *mantra* as a most important purification practice. In the inner or higher Tantras, Vajrasattva is the pivot of the visualization-transformation version of the practice of *zhitro*, as all the relevant deities are contained in him. In the Dzogchen

Upadesha, the zhitro—which in this case does not involve visualization or transformation—is a means to catalyze the process of self-liberation of delusion, so that *samsara* and the propensities for it to manifest are most rapidly neutralized without any effort whatsoever on the part of the practitioner.

24. *rTsa/rlung/thig-le*.

25. This is the point in the story about the poems by the Ch'an Buddhist Masters Hui-neng and Shen-hsiu when the 5th Patriarch, Master Hung-jen, was to name a successor.

26. *Samaya* means "commitment." Hinayana Buddhism is based on keeping vows that are lost at death. Mahayana Buddhism is based on the training of *bodhichitta*, which requires the practitioner to go beyond all limits (including vows as well as the drive to protect his or her own individual existence) if this is necessary to benefit beings and lead them to Enlightenment. Tantric Buddhism is based on *samaya* or commitment, which involves a series of duties that vary according to the Tantric vehicle involved, but which in general require that the disciple has a pure vision of the Teacher (the *vajra* Master or Vajracharya) and fellow students (*vajra* brothers and sisters). Dzogchen also has a *samaya*, but in this case the *samaya* does not involve keeping specific precepts, as it may be subsumed in the four "mepas" (*med-pa*) or "there isn't," which are the negation of the four main points of the *samaya* of the inner or higher Tantras—for the *samaya* of Dzogchen may be expressed succinctly in terms of the teaching Tilopa gave Naropa on the banks of the Ganges and that was codified as the *Mahamudra Upadesha*: "The highest *samaya* is broken by thinking in terms of precepts."

The point is that trying to keep precepts necessarily involves the delusory valuation of thoughts that establish what is permitted and what is forbidden, as well as an activity of the apparently separate observer that is to keep the precepts. The Dzogchen teachings do not permit or forbid any particular actions: they just require the practitioner to be beyond delusory valuation, transcending the apparently separate observer in the continuity of the inherently self-liberating state, and thus being beyond the acceptance and rejection that are necessary in order to keep precepts.

27. (a) I call this *gnosis* because it is a function of cognitiveness/awareness and because certain Gnostic trends called *gnosis* the cognition of the absolute; (b) I add the adjective *anoic* because in the unveiling of such *gnosis* the mind (*noia*)—implying the noetic-noematic (subject-object) duality, delusory valuation, and other experience-shaping, delusory mechanisms—is disconnected.

28. The "two lights" are the one called "Mother Light" and the so-called "light of the son" referred to in the following line of the "lace." They manifest as a seeming duality in some yogic experiences of thögel (*thod-rgal*), or of the indivisibility of thögel and tekchö (*khregs-chod*) in the

nyingthik (*snying-thig*) and especially in the yangthik (*yang-thig*) practices of the Dzogchen Menngagde (*man-ngag-sde*; Skt., *Upadesha*), as the patent manifestation of dualistic delusion. The apparently separate, delusory mental subject is associated with the "light of the son"; when the illusory subject in question dissolves upon reCognition of the single Nature, so that only the so-called "Mother Light" remains, it is said that the "light of the son" has "integrated into the Mother Light" (though actually nothing integrates into anything, as the point is that the illusion that there is a "second light" simply disappears). This is the type of integration that is characteristic of the thögel and yangthik practices of the Dzogchen *Upadesha*.

29. Actually, we have done so not only because of fear that the enemy may destroy us, but because we want our social or racial group and our nation to be privileged and become the masters of the world. Of course, most of us refuse to accept that we want this and thus we justify our own country's massive construction of weapons and its aggressive policies with arguments about the danger represented by an aggressive enemy. Citizens of what used to be "the two superpowers" did this, and so do those of the other, less powerful States.

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