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# Buddhism and Transpersonal Psychology

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In the debate between Freud and Romain Rolland the latter asserted the infants' oceanic feeling to be saner than the adults' limited sense of self, and that mystics recover the oceanic feeling without losing the learning achieved during socialization. Freud retorted that the oceanic feeling involved a sense of shelterlessness, and whoever went through derealization was psychotic and needed to be cured. However, the feeling of shelterlessness comes from the fledging sense of separation, and although derealization is a dangerous process, when it develops unhindered the result is greater sanity. So, Buddhism and TP agree in valuing transpersonal and holotropic experiences, but TP must learn from Buddhism to distinguish between kinds of holotropic and transpersonal experiences, and attribute different value to them: the formless realms of the highest tier of samsara, the neutral condition of the base-of-all in which the precious human possibility is squandered, Awakening, different types of nirvana...

**Keywords:** *Buddhism, Dzogchen, Tantra, transpersonal, holotropic, formless realms, samsara, nirvana, Awakening, base-of-all (all-ground), rigpa, experiencia ilusoria (nyam)*

Even though it does not posit a God, Buddhism is a religion, for it offers common people a system of beliefs and even of worship. However, its central goal is healing the human psyche. According to Buddhism, the human psyche is affected by, (a) unawareness of its true condition (which according to higher Buddhist systems is that of the whole universe); (b) a delusion which causes the relative to be perceived as absolute, the conditioned as unconditioned, the impermanent as permanent, the dissatisfying as providing satisfaction—and which produces the illusion of inherent separateness, the absolutization of the personal dimension, and a fragmentary perspective; and (c) denial of humanity's true condition and of their unawareness and delusion. These three—ignorance of, delusion regarding, and denial of the actual condition of human life—in Buddhism constitute the Second Noble Truth, and are the cause of the First Noble Truth, namely that, in our ordinary state of mind, life involves inherent dissatisfaction and suffering.

The delusion referred to in item (b), above, is a translation of the Pāli term *avijjā* and the Sanskrit *avidyā*; it results from charging the thoughts in terms

of which we perceive reality, with an illusion of absoluteness, truth, value and importance that the world that the senses perceive lacks—so that the problem is *not* that which the senses present to us, but that which we project on them. Belief in that reality causes one to feel inherently separate from the rest of the universe and from purported “other selves”; it gives rise to belief in oneself as inherently this or that kind of person, and to a personal, fragmentary perspective that sees the world as made up of separate things. This way of life results in ceaseless dissatisfaction and recurrent suffering (Pāli: *dukkha*; Skt.: *duḥkha*; this is the First Noble Truth), generates violence and evil, and, collectively, cultivates extreme social contradictions and the deadly ecological crisis that threatens to destroy the human species and many other forms of life.

From this perspective, the condition that mainstream psychiatry and psychology calls normality, that ego-psychology views as sane, is a detrimental pathology that needs healing—actually, the very continuity of the human species depends on it. Over a millennium before psychiatry and psychology established delusion as the measure

of psychosis, the Buddhist philosopher Candrakīrti equated delusion—although differently defined—with insanity (e.g., Chöphel, 1985). The healing of this delusion may be deemed religious in the etymological sense of the term, for it allows one to recover awareness of their true condition, and this may be loosely seen as re-connecting (*re-ligare*) with it. However, in the everyday sense of terms, healing the psyche is more of a psychological than a religious task. On the other hand, Buddhism's *critical* outlook (in the *Kālāma Sutta* / *Kālāmasūtra* and other sermons the Buddha taught his followers to question all dogmas and teachings, and accept only what *proves to be correct and true* and *to be for one's good and that of others*) is philosophical and scientific rather than religious.

The aim of Buddhism is *nirvāṇa*, which in nearly all Buddhist systems involves the complete dissolution of the personal (not in the sense that the individual loses their distinctive traits, but in that *the sense of individuality and personality has dissolved*) and is fully transpersonal and holistic—and, according to higher systems, constitutes the absolute truth and excludes perception of the relative condition (which on its part does *not* mean that the sensations that make up the phenomenal world disappear<sup>1</sup>). Hence among outlooks in psychology and philosophy most consistent with Buddhism is the transpersonal. Since many transpersonalists have borrowed from Buddhism and/or declared themselves Buddhist, it is necessary to discuss the relation between Buddhism and transpersonal theory.

However, the above is far from implying transpersonal psychology and Buddhism to be the same. Another central principle of Buddhism is that whatever is conditioned / produced / contrived / compounded<sup>2</sup> is impermanent and marked by suffering—or at least subject to the eventual occurrence of suffering—and that many conditions that transcend the personal, fragmentary perspective and that “spiritual people” wrongly take to be free from the above-mentioned unawareness-*cum*-delusion-and-denial are conditioned / produced / contrived / compounded and involve one of more of the above-mentioned aspects of *avidyā*. Since transpersonal thought does not distinguish between

the transpersonal condition of *nirvāṇa*, which does not involve any aspect of *avidyā*, and transpersonal states that involve one, two or all of these aspects, it does not properly identify the absolute sanity that consists in the nonstatic *nirvāṇa*<sup>3</sup> of the higher Buddhist vehicles—the essence of which is not its transpersonal character, but its being utterly free from *avidyā* and its being unconditioned / uncontrived / unproduced: it is this that distinguishes the nonstatic *nirvāṇa* that, as higher vehicles acknowledge, realizes the nonduality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, from produced / conditioned / contrived transpersonal states involving *avidyā* and hence belonging to the cyclic, vicious existence Buddhism calls *saṃsāra*. And if so far transpersonal thought has been unable to even identify absolute sanity, even less so could it discern the means to achieve it and thus eradicate the cause of suffering, violence, evil, social contradictions and the ecological crisis that threatens to destroy our species.

Buddhism divides *active saṃsāra*—which has as its pivot the illusory subject-object divide and involves the vices listed above—into three main realms, the lower being that of sensuality,<sup>4</sup> the middle that of form,<sup>5</sup> and the highest that of formlessness.<sup>6</sup> Each has correlative absorptions in this life, which in the latter's case are four;<sup>7</sup> since these four exclude the figure-ground divide, their objects seem infinite, and when the subject identifies with them, the illusion is gained of having healed the separateness inherent in the subject-object divide. Hence they are transpersonal and holotropic, yet are produced / conditioned / contrived and involve all aspects of *avidyā*—thus being insane, impermanent and unable to forestall the reappearance of coarse suffering, or to put an end to evil, personal and social conflict, and ecological destruction. Chán / Zen<sup>8</sup> and Dzogchen contemplate a more subtle condition not involving the subject-object divide characteristic of active *saṃsāra*, yet comprehending the subtlest type of *avidyā*, which is the *unawareness* of our true nature. This condition—which the Dzogchen teachings call neutral condition of the base-of-all<sup>9</sup>—technically pertains to *saṃsāra*, yet in a sense it lies between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, for neither of the two is active and nonetheless either may activate itself from it. However, unless *nirvāṇa* arises from it, it offers no

ultimate benefit: states of the neutral-base-of-all followed by formless states may induce faith in the possibility of transcending normality's fragmentary perspective, but their recurrence cannot eradicate the source of *saṃsāra*.

Transpersonal psychology does not distinguish those different types of transpersonal condition, among which only the nonstatic *nirvāṇa* of higher vehicles is, (i) utterly free from all aspects of *avidyā*, thus constituting the absolute, true sanity that consists in a total lack of unawareness and delusion (a criterion of sanity corresponding partly to Korzybski's [1973], and partly to those of specific phenomenological trends in psychology and psychiatry), and (ii) unconditioned / unproduced / uncontrived, thus being neither transitory nor liable to suffering. Therefore, it irreversibly resolves the "problem of life." Moreover, each and every time this *nirvāṇa* manifests, thoughts liberate themselves, neutralizing *avidyā* to some extent, and hence after a sufficient (usually very high) number of such occurrences, *avidyā* is neutralized and *nirvāṇa* is never again interrupted by *saṃsāra*: this is the supreme, irreversible Awakening<sup>10</sup> where personal, delusive states arise no more and perfect selfless activities manifest.

Concerning the bifurcation between the views of transpersonal development in terms of self-disidentification (Assagioli, 1976 [e.g. p. 69 ff.]; Clark, 1977; Almaas [in Davies, 1999]; Agosin, 2002–2012; Louchakova & Lucas, 2007; MacDonald, 2009, n. 11) and in terms of self-expansiveness (Friedman, 1983; Friedman & Pappas, 2006; Pappas & Friedman, 2007), it must be noted that, though self-disidentification may have a function in the initial stages of some spiritual paths and even in the initial stage of inner / higher Tantric practice (as illustrated by the inner Tantric practice of illusory body<sup>11</sup>), *nonstatic nirvāṇa* goes beyond it, for it *dissolves the mental subject that one feels one is* and that, in *saṃsāra*, successively identifies with one's body, one's body-shape, one's personality and all else one may identify with, making one *feel one is* the body, body-shape, personality, etc.—and since self-disidentification asserts and sustains the mental subject, carrying practices based on this principle too far on the path would forestall

the attainment of *nonstatic nirvāṇa*. The ascent to and through the formless realms, contrariwise, does no more than to *expand one's false sense of self*, endowing it with a feeling of power and greatness, and making it far more pleasant, thus increasing delusion instead of eradicating it, and therefore being censured by Buddhism—except if it is used as a platform for applying instructions for dissolving the mental subject. (However, as I suggested elsewhere [Capriles, 2012], some forms of self-expansiveness—especially those involving identification with nature—*might* have desirable ecological and social effects.)

As to transpersonal authors, Stan Grof (1985) posits three realms where pathologies may arise and be resolved, which are the biographic, the perinatal—involving four Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs)—and the transpersonal. Grof says perinatal states may be transpersonal and have an important healing function, yet the BPMs he posits and most of the transpersonal, holotropic experiences he discusses are not *nirvāṇa*. Indeed, experiences induced by psychedelics or holotropic breathing are usually instances of the neutral base-of-all immediately followed by formless experiences, whereas *nirvāṇa* can hardly manifest in perinatal experience (its initial occurrences *normally* arising in the context of authentic spiritual practice). Hence Grof's system cannot gradually neutralize *saṃsāra*, stabilizing *nonstatic nirvāṇa*. Moreover, unlike *nirvāṇa*, what he views as sanity is a fragmentary / personal rather than a holistic / transpersonal condition—even though it involves not taking personal boundaries as absolute. Yet his therapy might help resolve troubles in the transpersonal and perinatal realms that either disturb people or block their progress to Awakening—just as other therapies might do in the biographic realm. Furthermore, his viewing sanity as excluding regression agrees with Buddhism. His concept of COEX systems and some other contributions of his own seem much to the point.

For Michael Washburn, the infant has an incipient Ego which, due to what Washburn (1994, 1995) has called the *act of primordial repression*, becomes dissociated from what he calls Dynamic Ground—which is by the same token an energy

potential, both sexual and spiritual, associated to the lower base of the trunk, *and* an unconscious *topos*<sup>12</sup> of the psyche. The process of healing, which involves *regression in the service of transcendence*, must restore the wholeness disrupted by this dissociation—yet the duality Ego / Dynamic Ground must persist after wholeness is recovered. To get in touch with a condition precedes dissociation that is more whole and harmonic than whatever resulted from the latter, may be psychologically healing to a significant degree, but is not a path to awakening: the ideal fruit Washburn envisages, with its Ego / Dynamic Ground divide, falls short of nonstatic *nirvāṇa*, which involves the eradication of the subject-object duality on which the sense of ego depends (as it requires that a *mental subject* identifies with thoughts manifesting as *object*)—thus being within *saṃsāra*. It is great that he recommends traditional forms of meditation transmitted in Asia, yet his way of classifying the different types of meditation does not respond to what, from the Buddhist and Dzogchen standpoints, should be the criterion for sorting them out.

For Ken Wilber (e.g. 1995, 2007)—who quit the transpersonal movement, renaming his system as “integral”—during ontogenesis the individual must develop a series of successive structures through rather predefined stages, building a person and a host of qualities. He has placed a strong emphasis on the difference between the prepersonal and the transpersonal, for in his view the latter manifests in the higher stages of ontogeny and phylogeny, being unlikely to arise before the personal is fully developed. Though he pretends to agree with higher Buddhism, he contradicts it by viewing final sanity as a personal, fragmentary condition where the personal and fragmentary are not taken as absolute, and progress to Awakening as a *building of structures* one over another (though building a new one often requires doing away with elements produced in previous stages)—which in Buddhist terms makes of his “Awakening” a *conditioned, produced and contrived*<sup>13</sup> condition that as such pertains to *saṃsāra* and hence is impermanent, detrimental and subject to suffering. His phylogenetic evolutionism contradicts the Pāḷi Canon and Theravāda School’s<sup>14</sup> *partly* degenerative view of

spiritual phylogeny, and even more frontally that of higher vehicles, which is outright degenerative, though it posits a final regeneration (which I assert to be made possible by the *reductio ad absurdum* of delusion brought about by its ecological, social and psychological consequences). His passion for equating mystical states and developmental stages in mutually incompatible traditions makes him posit baseless equivalences; for example, what was formerly his “ninth fulcrum” (Wilber, 1995)—or, in Wilber V, the penultimate stage on the cognitive line of development (Wilber, 2007)—involves a disinterested witness (*sākṣin*), yet he makes it correspond to the *dharmakāya* of higher vehicles, which *excludes* the subject-object duality and thus forestalls *all witnessing*—interested or disinterested. He has also equated the *dharmakāya* with the *nirodhasamāpatti* of the Pāḷi Canon and Theravāda School—which, according to higher vehicles, rather than *dharmakāya*, is a deviation from which *saṃsāric* rebirth ensues (the point being, not whether one tradition is right and another wrong, but that Wilber mixes incompatible concepts).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, he has claimed that his Gelug Vajrayāna schema of development—which he borrowed from a Lama accused of heinous crimes, against which the Dalai Lama and others of the greatest Tibetan Masters have warned<sup>16</sup>—applies equally to all vehicles, when in each vehicle development unfolds in distinct ways.

As to the ascender / descender debate and the so-called structural-hierarchical and dynamic-dialectical paradigms (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998; the first terms in each dichotomy designate Wilber’s position; the second, Washburn’s and Grof’s), neither side fully agrees with any form of Buddhism: the descending / dynamic-dialectical paradigm claims that spiritual development involves regression, which no Buddhist path features (though it may fortuitously occur when the spiritually immature apply Buddhist methods, it has no function on the path and has never been regarded as a factor in it), whereas Wilber’s ascending / structural-hierarchical paradigm produces conditioned / produced / contrived conditions that as such are impermanent, not definitively free from suffering, and *saṃsāric*. Moreover, both sides prize seemingly unitive states

that involve one or more aspects of *avidyā*, yet are far worse than our normal condition, for one derives pride from believing one has uprooted dualism, when one's achievement is unauthentic, conditioned / produced / contrived, and as such impermanent and liable to suffering.

If the Buddhist paths are neither ascending / structural-hierarchical nor descending / dynamic-dialectical in the sense of the debate that pit Wilber against Washburn and Grof, what are they? They are *mainly* descending, though in a sense different from that used in the debates, for in them regression is a fortuity and a deviation, and since we are born with *avidyā*, obscurations and impediments,<sup>17</sup> and unable to manage life, what they seek lies at the opposite extreme of birth—or of the intermediate state between death and rebirth,<sup>18</sup> for that matter. They are [meta-]phenomenologically descending, which means they involve *seeing through*, (1) all that was built throughout ontogeny (including what Jung called the *persona*, which is constructed over and against what he called the *shadow*, and the latter—which is *not* a remnant of purportedly violent instincts of our animal ancestors); (2) the obscurations and impediments accumulated in phylogeny through countless lifetimes; and (3) inborn *avidyā*. Neither of the parts in the debate and, to my knowledge, none of the major transpersonal theorists and/or practitioners, has a similar approach.

The Theravāda's *Atthasālinī*, attributed to Bhadantācariya Buddhaghoṣa, illustrates the Buddhist (meta-)phenomenologically descending path with the *apacayaḡāmi* or *demolishing* meditation (Guenther, 1964):<sup>19</sup>

While healthy attitudes and meditative practices confined to the three [*saṃsāric*] worlds [which are that of sensuality, that of form and that of formlessness] build up and make grow birth and death in a never-ending circle and are therefore called building-up practices, it is not so with this meditation. Just as if a man were to erect a wall eighteen cubits high, while another man were to take a hammer and to break down and demolish any part as it gets erected, so this meditation sets about to break down and demolish death

and rebirth that have been built up by healthy attitudes and meditative practices confined to the three worlds, *by bringing about a deficiency in those conditions which tend to produce birth and death*. This is why this meditation is called "the tearing down one" (*apacayaḡāmi*).

In the passage, Descent is presented as an active struggle and there is no mention that, (1) the process must be spontaneous, for Awakening cannot result from *action*, as otherwise it would be *conditioned / produced / contrived*, and (2) demolishing is achieved by *seeing through* the conditioned *into* our original, true, unconditioned / unproduced / uncontrived condition—which necessarily involves the dissolution of the subject-object chasm. These points are made in the sudden Mahāyāna, the *Sahaja* Vajrayāna and Dzogchen, which have direct methods for *dissolving the subject-object duality* and *directly realizing the true, unproduced / uncontrived condition of both the individual and the whole universe*.

The Buddhist path also involves Descent in a sense I call (meta-)existential: we must meet the suffering<sup>20</sup> we had eluded throughout our lives and *See through* it and the duality at its root, *into* our original, nondual nature, so that this suffering and duality instantly dissolve—and constantly repeat this until the propensities at the root of these two are neutralized. In particular, the stages described in Dzogchen (Longchen Rabjampa, 1975, p. 490; Guenther, 1984;<sup>21</sup> Capriles, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012, etc.), resemble a journey through Grof's BPM-2 to BPM-3 followed by constant repetition of the transition from BPM-3 to BPM-4—yet the latter transition is from *saṃsāra* to nonstatic *nirvāṇa* and, in the long run, it neutralizes all delusive propensities until Buddhahood obtains. Note that also Grof's comparison of the present situation of humankind with a BPM3 before transition to BPM4 is partly congruent with the Dzogchen teachings' description of the unfolding of the *cosmic time cycle*<sup>22</sup> as following the same pattern in the spiritual evolution of humankind as a whole and in an individual's experiences of the realm of form in higher Dzogchen practices (Padmasambhava, 1973).

Wilber has posited a sequence of incarnation going from *dharmakāya* in the intermediate state immediately following death,<sup>23</sup> to *sambhogakāya* in the subsequent intermediate state of the true condition of phenomena,<sup>24</sup> to *nirmāṇakāya* in the intermediate state of becoming,<sup>25</sup> to incarnation. In Buddhist terms this is imprecise, for in those who are not advanced on the path, *avidyā* prevents realization of the *dharmakāya* in the state immediately following death, producing a momentary experience of the neutral base-of-all instead (if the individual created the cause for rebirth as a god of formlessness and secondary conditions allow it, as the *mental subject* arises, it may apprehend the seeming totality appearing as object in terms of a concept, identify with it, and take birth in the realm of formlessness). Likewise, in such people *avidyā* usually prevents recognition of the *sambhogakāya* when non-Jungian archetypes arise in the state of the true condition of phenomena (if the individual created the conditions for rebirth as a god of form and secondary conditions allow it, birth in the corresponding realm may follow). Finally, in the same people, as a rule *avidyā* prevents recognition of the *nirmāṇakāya* in the state of *becoming*—and thus birth in one of the six realms of sensuality ensues.

Another difference between Buddhism and transpersonal systems is that many of the latter—whose creators often came from the psychedelic movement of the nineteen-sixties—fell into Alan Watts' (1962) error of claiming that psychedelic substances could *induce* episodes of *nirvāṇa* without the individual undergoing the training required in traditional paths. This contradicts Buddhism, according to which *nirvāṇa cannot be induced or produced*, for it is unconditioned / unproduced / uncontrived—this being the reason why it is neither impermanent nor liable to suffering. And many have called psychedelics “entheogens”—the Greek etymology of which mistakenly *suggests* that they *produce* what is *unproduced*<sup>26</sup> (for a defense of these substances as “entheogens” cf. Walsh, 2003).

Many so-called psychedelics combine a holotropic effect that *tends* to dissolve the figure-ground division, with the effect I call *epochotropic* (from the Greek noun *epochē*<sup>27</sup> and verb *trepein*<sup>28</sup>) or *tending to delay the arising of judgment in*

*perception*, making what the Dzogchen teachings call the neutral condition of the base-of-all manifest for an unusually long span. Subsequently a mental subject arises and takes the ensuing totality as object (which thus ceases to be a totality, as it now excludes the subject), identifying with this object and taking pride in the concept in terms of which the object is understood—which produces a short-lasting, *saṃsāric* formless absorption (which one of the four formless conditions Buddhism posits will depend on which concept the perceiver identifies with).

Subsequently what the Dzogchen teachings call consciousness of the base-of-all<sup>29</sup> (as different from the homonymous concept in Third Promulgation Sūtras and the philosophical schools they inspired) produces the figure-ground division, and the individual may remain awestruck even before something “insignificant” (e.g., a grain of sand)—and hence when judgment arises a *saṃsāric* absorption of form may ensue.<sup>30</sup>

Suppose the individual is with a potential sexual partner and their eyes meet, or they touch, and intense polymorphic pleasure arises: what the Dzogchen teachings call consciousness of the passions<sup>31</sup> emerges, and the instant the individual conceptualizes the sensation and clings to it, for a moment she or he experiences a state like those of the gods in the *saṃsāric* realm of sensuality.<sup>32</sup>

What has actually happened is that the individual has gone through the process, described in the Dzogchen teachings and somehow analogous to the sequence of the intermediate states discussed above, whereby *saṃsāra* develops from the neutral condition of the base-of-all—having successive experiences of one or more of the three *saṃsāric* spheres. However, an inadvertent individual with some knowledge of Buddhist categories yet lacking a Master, may take the formless experience for the *dharmakāya*. When an object is singled out, if the latter is a luminous non-Jungian archetype, it may be mistaken for the *sambhogakāya*. And if polymorphic pleasure arises, one may believe to have realized the *nirmāṇakāya*. (Cf. Kyemé Dechen's<sup>33</sup> and Karma Thinlé's<sup>34</sup> commentaries in Guenther, 1973.)

Furthermore, it is equally possible that, for fortuitous reasons (elsewhere I identified three of them: cf. Capriles, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012),

the individual reacts with aversion to the substance's holotropic, epochotropic effect, having a "bad trip." In an equally stormy panoramic condition arising either in practice or outside it, a Dzogchen practitioner having transmission, a capacity of spontaneous liberation, and knowledge of traditional pith instructions, could make extraordinary progress on the path. However, consumers of psychedelics will most likely remain in hell—in some cases indefinitely, for what initially would be viewed as a psychotomimetic experience may fail to abate and be diagnosed as a psychosis.

The above effects are not limited to psychedelics. Something analogous was shown to occur in the intermediate state between death and rebirth, and may also happen whenever, for whatever reason, there is a raise in the energetic-volume-determining-the-scope-of-awareness<sup>35</sup> (which in the newborn is near its fullness, this being the reason why the figure-ground mind has not developed and why there is an *oceanic feeling*—which, contrarily to Freud's idea, *in itself* does not involve helplessness and is not a faulty phenomenon, yet is *not nirvāṇa* <sup>36</sup>).

Conversely, without means to raise the energetic-volume-determining-the-scope-of-awareness, there cannot be a true path. Moreover, the "higher" a path, the swifter and higher its methods will raise the energetic-volume-determining-the-scope-of-awareness, potentially turning *avidyā* into conflict—and the more effective methods it will offer for facilitating the spontaneous liberation of both *conflict* and the *avidyā* at its root. (In Theravāda Buddhism this raise may result from intensive practice of mindfulness / recollection,<sup>37</sup> insight,<sup>38</sup> and the supramundane *jhānas*.<sup>39</sup> In *Chán/Zen* Buddhism, the raise may depend on intensive meditation practice, particularly in the framework of therapeutic double-binding—which may include, though need not be limited to, what the Japanese call *kōan*<sup>40</sup> study.<sup>41</sup> On the Vajrayāna path of transformation, it results principally from completion stage practices of *tsa-lung-thiglé*.<sup>42</sup> In Dzogchen *Atiyoga*, it raises significantly when *Tekchö*<sup>43</sup> is boosted by the practice of *Chö*,<sup>44</sup> and it rises to unforeseen heights for very long periods in practices of *Thögel*<sup>45</sup> and the *Yangthik*.<sup>46</sup>)

Thus Stan Grof (1998c, pp. 106–114) is right, in his debate with Ken Wilber, that what he has called NOSC (nonordinary states of consciousness) are key occurrences on the path to ultimate sanity. Śākyamuni Buddha attained Awakening after a NOSC involving visions of Māra's (the demon's) daughters—the *apsarasah*<sup>47</sup>—seducing him and demons attacking him; Milarepa had his initial realization after being attacked by future *dharma-guardian*<sup>48</sup> Tserinma—and, as a rule, great mystics went through experiences of the kind right before a major spiritual opening. Likewise—and what is more significant—the most direct, and in this sense highest Buddhist practices, such as that of *Chö*<sup>49</sup> and the supreme practices of the highest series of Dzogchen teachings—*Thögel* and the *Yangthik*—are based on NOSC, which they induce by means that *exclude* drugs yet are *among the most powerful and direct to this aim*.

Since Wilber studied Dzogchen and uses the Dzogchen terms *rigpa*<sup>50</sup> (nondual Awake awareness) and Great Perfection to refer to our true condition, if his "front door" / "back door" spirituality dichotomy (Wilber, 1995) meant that what he has called *front door spirituality* and viewed as true spiritual development—and in particular all major spiritual breakthroughs—must exclude NOSC, he would find himself in a paramount contradiction. Stan Grof (1998c, p. 109) rightly wrote:

If [Wilber's front-door entrance] is something resembling William James's "educational variety" of spiritual development, where one would gradually open to the mystical dimension over a long period of time, in the way in which one learns to speak or develops an ego,<sup>51</sup> it does not seem to be the mechanism driving the spiritual evolution of humanity ... the spiritual opening of most famous mystics involved dramatic episodes of NOSC.

However, Grof overlooks the fact that NOSC are supremely useful only when rightly used (in Dzogchen, they are an occasion for applying pith instructions<sup>52</sup> resulting in the unconcealment of our true human condition and the simultaneous, spontaneous liberation of thoughts and passions), for otherwise they are unlikely to result in



*nirvāṇa*, and may either be inconsequential, have relatively good consequences, or have seriously deleterious ones: though they may precede crucial spiritual breakthroughs—which outside a path only extraordinarily could be instances of *nirvāṇa*, for as a rule they remain within the bounds of relativity / delusion—they will more likely trigger a “psychotomimetic experience” or a psychosis, which because of the widespread ignorance and disorientation concerning these processes and experiences, is most likely to be ravaging.

This leads us into the discussion of what the Grofs (Grof & Grof, 1992) called spiritual emergencies. Though this concept is nonexistent in Buddhism, all genuine Buddhist traditions note that on the path NOSCs will arise involving varying degrees of derealization and depersonalization, which could yield anguish or disorientation, and which psychiatry would class as psychotomimetic or psychotic according to duration. In the context of *vipassanā* practice, the Pāḷi Canon lists *ten corruptions*, just as *Chán/Zen* contemplates what it calls by the Chinese term *mójiàng*<sup>53</sup> and the Japanese *makyo*, and Dzogchen discusses what it labels *nyam*.<sup>54</sup> These dire straits may resolve themselves spontaneously if the individual is allowed to go through them in a supportive rather than interfering environment and with the help of wise spiritual friends—and, in Dzogchen, they offer an ideal platform for applying pith instructions and thus reaching a defining breakthrough.

However, in my view Buddhism would disagree to the Grofs’ tenfold classification of spiritual emergencies, and note that only some of the latter, in the right setting and with good facilitators, could facilitate a transition to a more detached, integrated, wholesome mode of existence, or serve as a platform for Dzogchen practitioners to question the dualistic, delusive structure of experience—others of the varieties listed by the Grofs being as a rule deleterious and hardly capable to yield breakthroughs.

Finally, the so-called participatory vision in transpersonal thought, which asserts all spiritual states to be co-created—according to Jorge Ferrer (2002), by the individual *and* the *Mystery that is*

*the source of all*—and pretends to facilitate a new respectful, fruitful dialogue between religions, metaphysical perspectives and spiritual practices, frontally contradicts Buddhism. As repeatedly noted, all that is produced / created / contrived / conditioned is impermanent and liable to suffering. Thus if *nirvāṇa* were (co-)created, rather than being *nirvāṇa* it would be *saṃsāra* and would not offer a definitive solution to suffering. Moreover, for a Christian mystic it is palpable that Mystic Union takes place by the grace “of God” after the individual surrenders will and action, just as for a Buddhist it is palpable that *nirvāṇa* cannot result from action or activity, and that, contrariwise, it involves the latter’s *cessation*. Moreover, co-creation outright contradicts higher Buddhist teachings that assert all to arise from a single source—such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*’s (Suzuki, 1999), “Consciousness is at the same time the spectator, the theater and the dancer;” the Semdés<sup>55</sup> Dzogchen teachings’ assertion that all that manifests arises as the play of the single principle called All-Creating King (Norbu & Clemente, 1999),<sup>56</sup> and so forth.

All that was presented here has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Capriles, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012), where I intended to present Buddhism and Dzogchen in terms now deemed scientific, while ridding transpersonal theory and practice from all that Buddhism would deem misleading. My aim is not to replace Buddhism with a Buddhist-based system of psychology and philosophy, for higher forms of Buddhism require *transmission* and simply would *not* work without it; my aim is to achieve a mutual complementation of disciplines where transpersonal theory and practice will not pass for a self-sufficient awakening path, yet it will be able to help those who face problems and conflicts in the transpersonal and perinatal realms and those who face obstacles on the spiritual path, while providing those who are not treading a path of awakening with relatively healing experiences that may inspire them to devote themselves to tread the path in question. Thus I envisage a marriage of Buddhism and transpersonalism where each will remain independent yet actively support the other.

## Notes

1. In “higher” vehicles, a few authors—including Je Tsongkhapa and most of his Gelugpa followers—assert the relative to appear in *nirvāṇa*.
2. Pāli: *saṅkhata*; Skt. *saṃskṛta*; Tib. *’dus byas*.
3. Skt. *apratisthitanirvāṇa*; Tib. minepai myangen dai (*mi gnas pa’i mya ngan ’das*).
4. Pāli and Skt., *kāmaloka* or *kāmadhātu*.
5. Pāli and Skt., *rūpaloka* or *rūpadhātu*.
6. Pāli and Skt., *arūpaloka*, Pāli *arūpadhātu* and Skt. *arūpyadhātu*.
7. Pāli, *arūpajjhāna* or *arūpasamāpatti*; Skt. *ārūpyadhāna* or *ārūpyasamāpatti*.
8. 禪 / 禪; Wade-Giles, *Ch’an*; Jap. *Zen*; Korean, *Seon*; Viet. *Thiền*.
9. Tib. kunzhi lungmaten (Wylie, *kun gzhi lung ma bstan*). There are various other terms for nuances.
10. Skt. *anuttarasamyak saṃbodhi*.
11. Skt. *mayadeha*; Tib. gylü (*sgyu lus*).
12. τόπος.
13. Pāli, *saṅkhata*; Skt. *saṃskṛta*.
14. Skt. *Sthaviravāda*.
15. The *Vajrasamādhisūtra* of the Mahāyāna (Oon, undated) warns that dwelling in *nirodhasamāpatti* is a deviation yielding birth in the highest *saṃsāric* realm of formlessness. The Dzogchen teachings view it as a case of the neutral base-of-all that will most likely be followed by one of the formless states of *saṃsāra*, and so forth.
16. Cf. Bultrini (2008) and Clifton & Miller (1997).
17. Pāli and Skt., *vāsanās* and *āvaraṇas*.
18. Skt. *antarābhava*.
19. This text is a commentary to the Pāli Canon’s *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*; it is not certain that its author was Buddhaghosa.
20. Pāli: *dukkha*; Skt. *duḥkha*.
21. I found Dr. Guenther’s rendering of the Tibetan text in terms of categories of systems theory to be incorrect and offered an alternative rendering (Capriles, 2007, 2012 and several other works).
22. Pāli: *kappa*; Skt. *kalpa*; Tib. *kal pa* or *bskal pa*.
23. Tib. chikhaï bardo; Wylie, *’chi kha’i bar do*.
24. Tib. chönyi bardo; Wylie, *chos nyid bar do*.
25. Tib. sidpa bardo; Wylie, *srid pa bar do*.
26. Advocates of the term claim this is not implied by its etymology; cf. Appendix II to Capriles (2009b, 2012).
27. εποχή; suspension of judgment.
28. τρέπειν: to tend to (present active infinitive of τρέπω).
29. Skt. *ālayavijñāna*; Tib. kunzhi namshé (*kun gzhi rnam shes*) or kunzhi nampar shepa (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*).
30. This is the door to the realm of form (Skt. *rūpadhātu* or *rūpaloka*; Tib. zugkham [gzugs kham]).
31. Skt. *kliṣṭamanovijñāna*; Tib. nyönyikyī namshé (*nyon yid kyī rnam shes*), nyönmongkyī yikyī namshé (*nyon mongs kyī yid kyī rnam shes*) or nyonmongpa chengyi yikyī gyi nampar shepa (*nyon mongs pa can gyi yid kyī rnam par shes pa*).
32. Skt. *kāmadhātu* or *kāmaloka*; Tib. Döpai kham (*’dod pa’i kham*).
33. *skye med bde chen*.
34. *kar ma phrin las*.
35. Tib. *thig le*, roughly equivalent to the Skt. *kuṇḍalinī*.
36. In his epistolary exchange with Freud, Romain Rolland positively appraised the oceanic feeling, in which no definite individual boundaries are felt, and which he asserted to be the root of religion and constitute the core of mysticism. Freud (Letters, in Parsons, 1999, and subsequent writings) viewed the oceanic feeling in infants in a negative light—and in adults viewed it as a psychotic condition. Klein, Jung, Piaget, Fairbairn, Mahler and Loewinger followed Freud, whereas Reich, Brown, Marcuse, Grof and Wilber I followed Rolland. Washburn (1995, p. 47) follows those who claim earliest infancy involves an ego function.
37. Pāli, *satipaṭṭhāna*; Skt. *smṛtyupasthāna*; Tib. tenpa nyerzhak (*dran pa nyer gzhas*): mindfulness. Pāli, *sati*; Skt. *smṛti*; Tib. tenpa (*dran pa*).
38. Pāli, *vipassanā*; Skt. *vipaśyanā*; Tib. lhantong (*lhag mthong*); Chin. 觀, Hànyǔ Pīnyīn, *guān*, Wade-Giles, *kuan*; Jap. *kan*; Viet. *quán*.
39. Skt. *dhyāna*; Tib. samten (*bsam bstan*).
40. Chin.: 公案; Hànyǔ Pīnyīn *gōng’àn*; Wade-Giles, *kung-an*.

41. It the therapeutic double-binding (Bateson, 1972) the Japanese call *kōan* study, the manifestation of the “great mass of doubt” is the precondition of satori (Chin. 悟; Hànyǔ Pīnyīn: wù; Wade-Giles, wu).
42. *rtsa / rlung / thig le*.
43. Wylie, *khregs chod*.
44. Wylie, *gcod*.
45. *thod rgal*.
46. *yang thig*.
47. Singular, *apsarāḥ*. The term is often rendered as “sky dancers,” for in late Hindu scriptures they are Indra’s handmaidens, or dancers at his court.
48. Skt. *dharmapāla*; Wylie *chos skyong*.
49. *gcod*.
50. Wylie, *rig pa*.
51. Wilber (1998) acknowledges the spiritual process may involve some difficult passages, noting that in his model every fulcrum involves a signature death-rebirth struggle, which is most dramatic and typical in the “centaur/existential level”—which in Capriles (2006a, 2007a vol. II) I showed to be wrong. Wilber nowhere emphasizes the role of NOSCs in the breakthroughs that are most decisive on the path.
52. Skt. *upadeśa*; Tib. *menngag (man ngag)*.
53. Chinese 魔境; Wade-Giles *mo-ching*.
54. *nyams*.
55. *sems sde*.
56. Tib. *Kunche Gyalpo (kun byed rgyal po)*.

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- 3) <http://www.youtube.com/user/CEAAULA> (search for Elias Capriles).

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