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: drez [bras-bu]). Dzogchen as Base is our original condition of total (chenpo [chen-po]) plenitude and perfection (dzogpa [rdzogs-pa])—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 uninterruptedly 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). 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.

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], mu, 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 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 Awareness 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 explanation), or bad faith (in case we prefer to use Sartre's). This depends on a low bioenergetic input and the concomitant state of small space/time/knowledge, 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

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...

Desire

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 emptiness 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

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.

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

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...

Tension

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

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

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.

When we begin to meditate 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, uneluded 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

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.

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

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...

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

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**

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**

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.

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.”

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**

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

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.

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

As children, we are taught that, in order to “be good,” we have to keep our nature under control and “behave” — 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 us — 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

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, unconditioned Awareness.

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

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

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 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: “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 samaya²⁶ 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 anoic 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**

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**

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**

When the "two lights" 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**

Our inability to somehow alter the impassivity of peaceful mandalas—the peaceful, undefeatable 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.

The Meaning of Self-Liberation and Some Loops From The Source of Danger Is Fear 63
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' a-lethia 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 [dzu-lus]); (2) the Body of Light (Ökiku [od-ki-yi chu] or Òphung [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 Mennagde (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 watersource that cannot be followed: rather than being like the more stable ripples that form in a stream and that, as they go...
Thus, when the recognition of the essence (ng o rol), (man-ngag), (man-ngag gyi-sde).

9. 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—\[= delusion—\] 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. Dukkha: 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 zhiro (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 zhiro, as all the relevant deities are contained in him. In the Dzogchen
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-hsien 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 unveling 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-ngal), or of the indivisibility of thögel and tekchö (khregs-chod) in the

References


