

SCIENCE, SHAMANISM AND METASHAMANISM

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1.- «Scientific» and Shamanistic Vision

We shall begin by reviewing two main approaches to life, health, illness and healing: the «primitive», shamanistic one prevailing in tribal communities, and the «modern», scientific one prevailing in industrial societies and their followers.

The «scientific» approach characteristic of industrial societies and their followers regards the environment as a cumulus of objects lacking subjectivity to be manipulated, and studies the generation of «physiological disease» overlooking the state of the «patient»s network of significant relationships and the effects that the problems arising in that net could have on the development of «illness».

In general, the «scientific» approach only considers the patient's significant relationships in the case of imbalances deemed to be «psychological», and only recently—as a result of research such as the one carried out by Bateson, Haley, Weakland and Johnson on the genesis of «schizophrenia» or as the one carried out by Winnicott on the genesis of autism, of the development of the understanding of family dynamics¹, and of the development of Antipsychiatry²— has managed to understand part of the social dynamics at the root of such «imbalances».

Whereas the «scientific» approach causes human subjects to relate instrumentally to their environment, the shamanistic approach, which regards the latter as a cumulus of subjective phenomena (or even as a living whole) leads human subjects to relate to it communicatively. In other works I have attempted to show that, in so far as we are possessed by instrumental relations, there is no way for us to confine them to the field of our relationships to the environment and thus we necessarily treat other people as things, and also that, given our technical might, instrumental dealings with the natural environment necessarily result in the destruction of the physical basis of our existence, giving rise to the ecological crisis that threatens us with destruction. Therefore, we must not accept

¹Please consult the Bibliography at the end of this article.

²Although the term «Antipsychiatry» was coined by David Cooper (see the Bibliography), Ronald Laing is also considered as an antipsychiatrist, and the same may be said of Aaron Esterson, Lee, Philipson, Berke, Szchazman and other members of Laing's original group. The precedents of Antipsychiatry are to be found in the Jungian interpretation of neurosis as a potentially healing process, in Kazimierz Dabrowski's book *Positive Disintegration* and in the research by Gregory Bateson (in particular, in various of the works in the book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* and in the book *Perceval's Narrative*). According to Antipsychiatry, psychosis may be a spontaneous self-healing process that, unless institutionally aborted, may put an end to alienated, pathological normality (that is, of the pathological result of adaptation to a sick society).

Habermas' thesis that the relations between human beings should be communicative and that the relations between human beings and their environment should be instrumental³.

Now, what we are concerned with here is that the shamanistic approach searches for the root of imbalances or illness in a pathology of the intersubjective relationships of the «diseased» person. Among the sharanahua, the cashinahua and the members of other South American tribes, the shaman consumes a psychedelic substance in order to discover and treat the communicative pathology that supposedly produced the imbalance⁴. As noted by Marlene Dobkin de Ríos⁵:

«The use of *ayahuasca* for healing does not require the conceptualization of the hallucinogenic as a healing agent *per se*. Rather, the vine is regarded as a substance that activates a powerful means for achieving an intended result: it gives the healer access to the culturally important zone of the causality of illness, allowing him or her to identify the nature of the illness... in order to later on neutralize or drive away the magic ill that is regarded as the cause of the disease. In regard to the successes attributed to the healer, we find that in general terms there has been a process of selection whereby the healers only accept the patients whom they believe they may successfully treat... Only the patients suffering given kinds of illness take *ayahuasca*—normally those suffering ills often classified as psychosomatic.»

We should not think that shamans only treat *maladies imaginaires*. Recent research has dug out the psychological roots of many illness that until very recently were regarded by the prevailing «medical science» as physiological diseases having no connection to the psyche—and in particular of illness still deemed «incurable» or difficult to cure, such as cancer⁶.

³See Elías Capriles, *Las aventuras del fabuloso hombre-máquina. Contra Habermas y la ratio technica*.

⁴See Michael J. Harner, *Alucinógenos y chamanismo*.

⁵Marlene Dobkin de Ríos (Spanish, 1976), *Curas con ayahuasca en un barrio bajo urbano*. In Michael J. Harner, *opere citato*.

⁶As noted by Fritjof Capra in his book *The Turning Point*:

«The Simontons fully recognize the role of carcinogenic substances and environmental influences in the formation of cancer cells, and they strongly advocate the implementation of appropriate social policies to eliminate these health hazards. However, they have also come to realize that neither carcinogenic substances, nor radiation, nor genetic predisposition alone will provide an adequate explanation of what causes cancer. No understanding of cancer will be complete without addressing the crucial question: What inhibits a person's immune system, at a particular time, from recognizing and destroying abnormal cells and thus allows them to grow into a life-threatening tumor? This is the question on which the Simontons have concentrated in their research and therapeutic practice, and they have found that it can be answered only by carefully considering the mental and emotional aspects of health and illness.

«The emerging picture of cancer is consistent with the general model of illness we have been developing. A state of imbalance is generated by prolonged stress which is channeled through a particular personality configuration to give rise to specific disorders. In cancer the crucial stresses appear to be those that threaten some role or relationship that is central to the person's identity, or set up a situation from which there is apparently no escape^a. Several studies suggest that these critical stresses typically occur six to eighteen months before the diagnosis of cancer^b. They are likely to generate feelings of despair, helplessness, and hopelessness. Because of these feelings, serious illness, and even death, may become consciously or unconsciously^c acceptable as a potential solution.

«The Simontons and other researchers have developed a psychosomatic model of cancer that shows how psychological and physical states work together in the onset of the disease. Although many details of this process still need to be clarified, it has become clear that the emotional stress has two principal effects. It suppresses the body's immune system and, at the same time, leads to hormonal imbalances that result in an increased production of abnormal cells. Thus optimal conditions for cancer growth are created. The production of malignant cells is enhanced precisely at a time when the body is least capable of destroying them...

In ancient Tibet, shamanistic and metashamanistic Bönpo medicine asserted that in order to heal the patient it was necessary to heal the environment, for it was believed that many illnesses were caused by the subjective entities who animate—or who live in—natural phenomena, as the result of a provocation in which the diseased person or other human beings (often intimately related to the diseased) had incurred⁷.

In regard to «mental illness», the shamanistic approach is, also, radically different from the «scientific» one. States that modern science deems «pathological» and which it tries to «heal» by means of countless inefficacious and destructive treatments were intentionally induced by the shaman as means of initiation to a sacred reality, capable of leading the individual to a state of greater personal realization and communicative integration.

In fact, in the last three decades a series of students of the human mind have insisted that certain psychotic episodes could be spontaneous self-healing processes that are aborted by the environment in the family, the asylum and other institutions, and transformed into processes of self-destruction, of which the former also contain an element⁸. As noted by

«...Lawrence LeShan studied more than five hundred cancer patients and identified the following significant components in their life histories^d: feelings of isolation, neglect, and despair during youth, with intense interpersonal relationships appearing difficult or dangerous; a strong relationship with a person or great satisfaction with a role in early adulthood, which becomes the center of the individual's life; loss of the relationship or role, resulting in despair; internalizing of the despair to the extent that individuals are unable to let other people know when they feel hurt, angry, or hostile. This basic pattern has been confirmed as typical of cancer patients by a number of researchers.

«The basic philosophy of the Simonton approach affirms that the development of cancer involves a number of interdependent psychological and biological processes, that these processes can be recognized and understood, and that the sequence of events that leads to illness can be reversed to lead the organism back into a healthy state. As in any holistic therapy, the first step toward initiating the healing cycle consists of making patients aware of the wider context of their illness. Establishing the context of cancer begins by asking patients to identify the major stresses occurring in their lives six to eighteen months prior to their diagnosis. The list of these stresses is then used as a basis for discussing the patients' participation in the onset of their disease. The purpose of the concept of patient participation is not to evoke guilt, but rather to create the basis for reversing the cycle of psychosomatic processes that led to the state of ill health.»

a) For example, situations such as those that Ronald Laing called «untenable», defined as those in which we cannot stay and, however, we cannot leave.

b) See Simonton, Mathews-Simonton y Creighton, *Getting Well Again*, p. 57 *et seq.*

c) Personally, I cannot accept the hypothesis of the «unconscious», unless it be understood as the result of that which Sartre called «bad faith». Therefore, I cannot accept this distinction between «consciously acceptable» e «unconsciously acceptable». Nonetheless, I agree that insisting that the illness is the result of a conscious decision that is then concealed could produce a feeling of guilt that in turn could aggravate the illness or difficult healing.

d) See Lawrence LeShan (1977), *You Can Fight for Your Life*, p. 49 *et seq.*

⁷See the work by John Meredith Reynolds quoted in the Bibliography and the various works by Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, as well as the transcriptions of his talks.

⁸In *Perceval's Narrative*, Gregory Bateson wrote about «schizophrenic» psychosis:

«It would appear that once precipitated into psychosis the patient has a course to run. He is, as it were, embarked upon a voyage of discovery which is only completed by his return to the normal world, to which he comes back with insights different from those of the inhabitants who never embarked on such a voyage. Once begun, a schizophrenic episode would appear to have as definite a course as an initiation ceremony—a death and a rebirth—into which the novice may have been precipitated by his family life or by adventitious circumstances, but which in its course is largely steered by endogenous process.

«In terms of this picture, spontaneous remission is no problem. This is only the final and natural outcome of the total process. What needs to be explained is the failure of many who embark upon this voyage

Michel Foucault, in the European «Classical Age» madness was often thought to have a divine character; it has been rather recently that Europeans have begun to regard all kinds of madness as diseases to be «healed» by re-establishing normality⁹.

In any case, there is no doubt that the shamanistic vision is ecologically healthier than the «scientific» vision, for by leading human beings to relate communicatively to their natural environment, the latter is protected and preserved¹⁰. The instrumental attitude

to return from it. Do these encounter circumstances either in family life or in institutional care so grossly maladaptive that even the richest and best organized hallucinatory experience cannot save them?

In turn, in *The Politics of Experience* Ronald Laing wrote:

«There is a great deal that urgently needs to be written about this and similar experiences. But I am going to confine myself to a few matters of fundamental orientation.

«We can no longer assume that such a voyage is an illness that has to be treated. Yet the padded cell is now outdated by the «improved» methods of treatment now in use.

«If we can demystify ourselves, we see «treatment» (electro-shocks, tranquilizers, deep-freezing—some times even psychoanalysis) as ways of stopping this sequence from occurring.

«Can we not see that *this voyage is not what we need to be cured of, but that it is itself a natural way of healing our own appalling state of alienation called normality?*

«In other times people intentionally embarked upon this voyage.

«Or if they found themselves already embarked, willy-nilly, they gave thanks, as for a special grace.»

And also:

«From the alienated starting point of our pseudo-sanity, everything is equivocal. Our sanity is not «true» sanity. Their madness is not «true» madness. The madness of our patients is an artefact of the destruction wreaked on them by us, and by them on themselves. Let no one suppose that we meet «true» madness any more than we are truly sane. The madness that we encounter in «patients» is a gross travesty, a mockery, a grotesque caricature of what the natural healing of that strangled integration we call sanity may be. True sanity entails in one way or another the dissolution of the normal ego, that false self competently adjusted to our alienated social reality: the emergence of the «inner» archetypical mediators of divine power, and through this death a rebirth, and the eventual re-establishment of a new kind of ego-functioning, the ego now being the servant of the divine, no longer its betrayer.»

⁹See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*.

¹⁰American Indians, like pre-Buddhist Tibetans and the aboriginals of many regions, were still in the communicative stage and therefore related to natural phenomena as though these were persons rather than mere things lacking subjectivity: *all* of their relations were communicative. And, as shown by the prophetic statements of several Indian sages (among which it is best known the answer of chief Seattle to the proposal of the U. S. President to buy the lands of his tribe), having been in contact with the Anglo-saxon invaders and perceived the latter's attitude toward Nature, North American Indians predicted the ecological crisis that currently threatens us with destruction.

In general, American Indians were masters in the art of ecological conservation. As noted by Arturo Eichler in his book *S.O.S. Planeta Tierra*^a:

«The ancient Lacandones of Mexico used to grow 70 different products in a single hectare and, even today, those Amazonian aborigines... who have not yet been exterminated... grow up to 80 varied products in their small chacras, which they never over-exploited, so that after millennia they have not degraded their natural environment. They know that many «undesirable» weeds are indicators reflecting the quality of the soil or some specific lack. When the balance of the soil is restored, the weed disappears on its own.»

A group of anthropologists that in Peru restored a pre-Columbian system of irrigation channels that also works as natural fertilizer and used it for growing crops obtained with its help, and without chemical fertilizers, a much higher productivity per hectare than the average productivity achieved elsewhere with the help of chemical fertilizers. In the same way, as Dr. Eichler notes in the above-mentioned book^a:

«Already in the thirteenth century Marco Polo observed that Asian peasants used to leave aside small lots sown with grain for insect-eating birds, and he was astonished when he observed that the birds... used to

toward the natural environment that characterizes the «scientific» vision, instead, has produced an ecological crisis that threatens to cause our extinction before the first half of the next century, or even during the last decade of the present one.

In the same way, the shamanistic approach to illness and «delirium», and the shamanistic treatment of imbalances, is no doubt less dangerous and harmful—and, in many cases, more effective—than that of the prevailing «medical science».

2.- A Third Approach, Different from the «Scientific» and the «Shamanistic»: the Metashamanistic, Liberating and Genuinely Religious¹¹

As noted by Michael J. Harner, South American shamans think that the «reality» to which the hallucinogenic substance gives them access is the «true reality», and that the every day vision free of the effect of drugs is a «false reality». Available information about shamanistic cultures of other regions suggests that Harner's statement about South American shamanism may apply to shamanism in general: although different shamanistic cultures may attribute a greater or lesser reality to the every day vision of the «normal» individual, *all* shamanistic cultures attribute a high degree of reality—in general higher than that of the «every day reality»—to the shamanistic experiences induced with the help of psychedelics or by other means¹².

learn (to eat only that which had been destined to them). Today, whichever species competes with us for food is our deadly enemy.»

Possessed to such an extent by instrumental relations and by the lack of systemic wisdom that Buddhists call *avidya*, modern Westerners only know how to destroy the world with the technological tools that they developed for that purpose. Thus, the transformation of the human psyche that would allow us to survive and that would give rise to a new Golden Age must, on the one hand, put an end to instrumental primary process relations and, on the other hand, provide us with a wider range of vision free of conceptual overvaluation that will not set us in opposition to Nature and other human beings.

a) Arturo Eichler, work mentioned in the Bibliography.

¹¹The word «religious» comes from the Latin *religare*, meaning «to re-establish the link»: religion is the re-establishment of the link with the divinity or, in other words, with Unity, Wholeness, Plenitude, Perfection, etc. Now, in so far as we feel separate of that which religions call «divinity», any link we may establish with it will necessarily break sooner or later. This is why, far more «religious» than the temporary re-establishment of a link with something that we consider external to ourselves is the discovery of our primordial nature, which is precisely that which theistic religions understand as an «external divinity» and that constitutes the true nature of all appearances and of the whole universe.

Furthermore, leaving aside etymological considerations, in the life-histories of most founders of those religions that we call «great» we find stories telling us how they had experiences of the «supernatural reality» in which shamans work, and were Enlightened precisely because they recognize them as illusory and managed to avoid its enchantment. Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, was first attacked with arrows and other weapons by Mara (the demon) and his retinue and then was object to the seduction of the *Apsaras* (Mara's daughters), yet remained undisturbed and thus attained Enlightenment. Jesus was tempted in the desert, yet did not succumb to the false appearances and thus achieved his spiritual majesty. Milarepa was attacked by the goddess Tseringma and a retinue of demons; having given up the protection of self and recognized that all experience is illusory, he attained Enlightenment. And so on and on.

¹²See the works mentioned in the Bibliography; in particular, those by Mircea Eliade, that by Gary Doore (Ed.) and that by Ronny Velásquez.

In Tibet and its zone of cultural influence, popular culture contains important shamanistic elements¹³, which the representatives of the two most important religious systems do not discourage. Both Bönpo and Buddhist Lamas refer to local spirits and demons as self-existent entities that may cause great harm and, in general, encourage the belief in supernatural entities that may be noxious or helpful to human beings. Nonetheless, to gifted disciples who wish to attain liberation from error and delusion, obtaining that which both Buddhists and Bönpos call «Enlightenment», Lamas of both systems teach very dangerous practices that may eventually allow them to recognize the «supernatural» reality as illusory and free themselves from its influence and power. Repetition of the practice progressively neutralizes the propensity to experience the «supernatural» reality to which the practitioner gains access by yogic-shamanistic means as something self-existent, independent of the practitioner's mental processes, and absolutely true.

The point is that Tibetan spiritual systems regard as delusive, *both* the every day experience of human beings *and* the «supernatural» experience to which practitioners gain access by yogic and shamanistic means. This is not to say that both realms of experience are considered to be merely hallucinatory. Tibetan Teachings acknowledge that there is a *given* that, upon being processed by our mental processes, is experienced as the world in which we live, with its countless entities. Delusion arises when we are unable to see that entities do not have inherent, absolute existence, but depend both on the existence of other entities and on the functioning of our mental process in order to exist in the way they exist for us. Thus, delusion is a confusion about the mode of existence of entities, including the human subject: when we believe that ourselves and other entities exist inherently and substantially (in the sense of being self-existent and not needing anything other to itself in order to exist), that the relative is absolute, we are under delusion.

Delusion produces countless emotional responses that generate constant dissatisfaction and recurring frustration and suffering. If we believe in the supposedly inherent existence of «supernatural reality», we may become victims of demons and spirits, just as has happened to so many Tibetans; if we believe in the supposedly inherent existence of the entities, values and beliefs of every day reality, we will struggle in order to maintain our identities, possessions, etc., and thus will give rise to constant discomfort and dissatisfaction as well as to recurring frustration and pain.

However, by simply telling ourselves that the «supernatural» reality does not exist in truth, we would change nothing: the propensities to experience it and become its victims would still be there and, besides, we would continue to experience the everyday reality as self-existent. This is why it is necessary to do the practice in which, beginning from shamanistic belief, we experience the «supernatural» reality with its demons and spirits and, while we experience that «reality», we apply the instructions received from the Teacher or Lama in order to recognize it as illusory and free ourselves from its influence and power.

¹³Modern anthropologists would say that it has «conserved» shamanistic elements, and would imagine that the metashamanistic approach developed out of shamanism. This is precisely the opposite of what Idries Shah asserts in his book *The Sufis*: according to Shah, shamanism is a degeneration of metashamanism. This thesis fits into the Indian-Greek-Roman schema of processes of temporality—aeons or *kalpa*—that are divided into eras of increasing degeneration. The reader may find a description of the some versions of this schema as well as a critique of Hegel's opposite schema in my book *Mind-Society-Ecosystem: Transformation for Survival*, in a forthcoming book I have written with Mayda Hovevar and three other post-graduate students of philosophy, and also in my paper *Wisdom, Equity and Peace* and in my book *Qué somos y adónde vamos*.

If we are successful in this and we repeat the practice again and again, also in daily life we shall recognize to an ever greater extent the delusive character of our projections and therefore we shall experience ever increasing plenitude and ever decreasing dissatisfaction, frustration and suffering.

3.- Illness, Tibetan Ethnomedicine and the Practice of *gCod*.

Among the means applied by Tibetans in order to achieve the above, the famous practice of *gcod* is of the greatest importance.

According to the Bönpo ethnomedicine of ancient Tibet, many illness were the result of the revenge of spirits, demons and other «supernatural» entities who had been harmed by the plowing of the soil, the building of dams, the construction of houses, etc., by the harmed individual, by members of her or his family and/or by other human beings. Ancient Bönpo medicine attempted to cure the disease by healing the natural environment, on the premises that, if the dwelling and environment of the «supernatural» entities were healed and therefore the entities themselves would heal, they would cease taking revenge by inflicting illness on those responsible and on other human beings¹⁴.

In the practice of *gcod*, the practitioner starts from the basis of the belief in demons, spirits and other supposedly objective entities who inflict illness on human beings, bringing to bear the principle of ancient Bönpo medicine that requires that the natural environment be healed if human beings are to be healed. Nonetheless, instead of encouraging the practitioner to protect her or himself from demons and spirits regarded as «objective» in order to forestall harm, she or he is told to face them, *because they are her or his own overvalued thoughts which she or he must recognize as such and liberate*. Yet it is not enough to know intellectually that demons and spirits are only overvalued thoughts; the practitioner must carry out the practice spending the nights of waning moon in the charnel grounds where Tibetans dismember the corpses of their dead and offer them to the wild beasts¹⁵, for it is widely believed that such places are inhabited by most noxious «supernatural» beings and that whoever spends the night in them will meet the most horrible death one can imagine.

During the practice, by yogic-shamanistic means the yogi must gain access to the dangerous «supernatural» reality that is proper to the charnel ground and that, according to popular belief, is bound to destroy her or him. Then, faced with dreadful demons and other noxious beings, she or he must realize that these are but projections of her or his own mind and thus apply the instructions that will lead to the spontaneous dissolution of the tensions at the root of the illusion of inherent existence and of the dread begotten by that illusion, and thus to the realization of Truth, understood as the dissolution of delusion and error: the realization of the unreality of the visions that appear in the practice and of all experiences—those of daily life and those of the «supernatural» realm.

¹⁴See Note 7.

¹⁵In this way, human corpses can be more directly and immediately useful to other sentient beings than they would be if they were buried or cremated. Moreover, this custom may serve as a medicine against the illness of wanting to keep and protect one's own body, even beyond one's death.

Some practitioners who, during the practice, have failed to attain liberation from delusion, have met death, being «devoured» by the «supernatural», noxious beings inhabiting the charnel ground. One could ask how can the beings of the practitioner's imagination kill her or him. There is the story of a practitioner of *gcod* who had a knife with him while doing the practice; upon being assailed by demons and other noxious beings, panic overtook him, and he took out his knife in order to defend himself. Fortunately, when he was about to stick the knife into the demon's belly, a flash of clarity caused him to check and see where was he going to stick it—upon which he realized that he directed it to his own belly. Had he stuck the knife, he would have died and his corpse would have found half-devoured or fully devoured by the beasts who feed on corpses.

The practitioner must offer her or his body to the demons, visualizing it as an ambrosia that gives access to wisdom and liberation¹⁶ and thus causes the beings who eat it to cease suffering and to stop inflicting suffering to other beings. This will induce a dreadful «supernatural» experience in which the noxious beings devour her or him. If her or his practice is effective, she or he will recognize the illusory character of the experience, and the psychophysical tensions at its root will spontaneously dissolve, putting an end to fear and forestalling harm.

Repetition of the experience will cause the practitioner to become immune to the influence of illness-inflicting demons, which results in a most «real» immunity to infectious diseases—so «real» that, during epidemics, the experienced practitioners of *gcod* were in charge of disposing of the corpses and dismembering them to feed the beasts, *but none of those who were in such an intimate contact with the illness would contract it*: the practitioners of *gcod* who had obtained the result of the practice had become immune to all infectious diseases¹⁷. Furthermore, in many cases lepers and other people suffering illness then deemed «incurable» set out to practice *gcod* as a preparation to face death and, as a result, were «miraculously» cured and, moreover, became immune to all infections¹⁸.

Tibetans also believe that the realized practitioners of *gcod* have the ability to cure the diseases of others when they are caused by demons and other «supernatural» entities. In fact, practitioners of *gcod* often perform the *gcod* ritual for the ill and, although many Lamas insist that those rituals are mere superstition, in most cases the diseased person heals as a result of the ritual.

Of course, Tibetans only resort to such rituals when remission cannot be achieved by other means and it is suspected that the cause of the illness is the provocation of noxious «supernatural» beings. In other occasions, Tibetan doctors prescribe: (1) pills made with different vegetable products, (2) products that often contain such chemicals as mercury, sulfur and gold, and even gems; (3) cauterization, and (4) acupuncture. I have with me different kinds of Tibetan pills that I can show to those interested.

In the case of that which Tibetans call «energy disturbances» and which we call «mental illness», Tibetan doctors also prescribe various medicines featuring different vegetable products. However, according to Tibetan medicine, such disturbances are often the result of the provocations of «supernatural» beings, and therefore it is common to ask the practitioners of *gcod* to perform the therapeutic ritual. Again, in many cases, this results in the remission of the disturbance.

¹⁶Sanskrit: *amṛta*; Tibetan: *bdud-rtsi* (dütsi).

¹⁷See Giuseppe Tucci, work mentioned in the Bibliography.

¹⁸*Ibidem*. See also the various works in which Alexandra David-Neel recounts her experiences in Tibet.

Nevertheless, both Tibetan Buddhists and Bönpos insist that the only true mental illness is delusion and the passions associated to it: delusion and the passions are called *nyon-mongs* (nyonmong), whereas crazy people are called *nyon-pa* (nyonpa), which means «the one who is under the power of the *nyon-mongs*». Therefore, both Buddhist and Bönpos affirm that the mind is truly healed only when the individual is freed from delusion. For example, when she or he has successfully completed the practice of *gcod* and the subsequent practices of *thod-rgal* (togel) and/or of the *yang-thik* (yangthik).

Besides—preferably before undertaking the practice of *gcod*—the yogi or yogini must practise for some time a set of other disciplines, among which I will refer to the practice of dreams. If delusion consists in being confused in regard to the mode of existence of reality, when we dream and believe that our dream is part of the «real life» of wakefulness, unaware that it is only a dream, we are also under delusion. Therefore, the practice of dream is deemed very important. In it, we must recognize the dream as such and yet keep dreaming¹⁹ and direct the dream according to the traditional instructions provided by the Teacher²⁰. Among these, I want to mention the following: (1) to jump into abysses, into the fangs of wild beasts, into torrents and, in general, to face situations that in the «real life» of wakefulness would destroy our body, in order to taste the inseparability of insubstantiality and pleasure when the «body of dream» is not destroyed as a «real body» would be during wakefulness; (2) to practise the «alchemy of transformation», transforming our own body into water in order to put off fires, into fire in order to burn wood, and so on; (3) to transform demons and other noxious entities appearing in our dreams into tutelar deities²¹ such as those that are visualized in the practices of *bskyed-rim* (kyerim) and *rdzogs-rim* (dzogrim), etc. In order to carry out these practices successfully, the Teachings prescribe other practices to be performed during wakefulness, such as that of the «illusory body»²² and that of imagining that the experiences of wakefulness are sequences of a dream²³. In the same way, although celibacy is not recommended, the practitioner must keep the precepts of *anuyogatantra* that forbid the emission of sexual fluids²⁴. Success in recognizing dreams as such and in carrying out the various activities prescribed will prepare the practitioner to succeed in the practice of *gcod* and forestall the potential harm of failing to recognize the «supernatural» experience as illusory and thus failing to dissolve the tensions at the root of the illusory experience and of the dread it begets.

4.- Conclusion

Although the vision of shamanism is less harmful than that of modern «science», it is still a vision that imprisons and enslaves human beings. The aim of Tibetan methods is to

¹⁹Both Descartes and Sartre (see Bibliography) claimed that this was impossible. As the experience of any practitioner of this yoga proves, they were both totally wrong in this respect.

²⁰See Namkhai Norbu, *Dreamwork*. Also, see Elías Capriles, *Autoliberación de los seis bardo o «modos de experiencia»*.

²¹In Sanskrit, *devata*; in Tibetan, *yi-dam* (yidam).

²²Practice performed with a mirror, with one's own echo, etc. See Herbert V. Guenther, work mentioned in the Bibliography, and Elías Capriles, *Auto-liberación de los seis bardo o «modos de experiencia»*.

²³See Elías Capriles (1986), *Autoliberación de los seis bardo o «modos de experiencia»*.

²⁴See Elías Capriles: (1) *The Direct Path. Providing a Background for Approaching the Practice of rDzogs-chen*. (2) *Introducción a la teoría y práctica del budismo tántrico*. (3) *Qué somos y adónde vamos*.

allow individuals to achieve liberation in regard to all possible visions: to the daily, everyday vision—whether «scientific» or «tribal»—and to the «supernatural» vision proper to shamanism. Upon attaining that liberation, the individual obtains a complete mastery of the «supernatural forces» that affect human beings, precisely because the sensation that the «I» as a separate entity is mastering something different from and external to itself has dissolved.

Thus, Tibetan systems are not normal shamanistic systems, but metashamanistic ones: systems that employ the principles of shamanism in order to free the individual, not only of the supernatural beliefs that enslave her or him, but also of the belief in self-existence of everyday reality that causes him to face constant dissatisfaction and recurring suffering.

Although in the West some traditions and isolated individuals are aware that the supreme aim of yogic and shamanistic tools is the liberation of all experiences rather than the mere production of extraordinary ones, and some have even attained to the self-liberation of experience, in general most members of Western civilization who have experimented with different means of access to the «supernatural reality» proper of shamanism—including most psychologists and psychiatrists who have done so—have contented themselves to induce extraordinary experiences, without knowing how—and in general without even trying—to liberate those experiences. Thus, the bulk of Westerners has had no access to genuine metashamanistic systems²⁵.

²⁵It was due to the lack of direct metashamanistic instruction and transmission, and to the influence of shamanistic and protoshamanistic ideologists such as Timothy Leary, that the *hippy* movement fell apart, that many of its members were «psychiatrycized», that many others destroyed themselves through hard drugs or adapted to the system and, leaving aside their spiritual search, set out to achieve a high position in that system, and that still others enslaved themselves with the help of false spiritual masters and systems.

The mistake of *hippies* was to have given themselves to the induction of «altered states» unaware that these states were experiences conditioned by delusion to which it was a major mistake to cling and that it was necessary to interrupt and liberate, not knowing the methods for interrupting and liberating them and lacking the capacity to apply them. Thus, they clung to the experiences of greater space-time-knowledge^a and the pleasure resulting from the increase in the bioenergetic input^b induced by the substances in question, and came to depend on those substances in order to obtain extraordinary experiences—which, as we have seen, in general were conditioned and delusive and did not represent a true liberation.

Therefore, sooner or later many of the seekers of «altered states» had to face the «bad trip» or «psychotomimetic experience» that may obtain after the widening and permeabilization of the focus of conscious attention. This widening and permeabilization—produced by the effect of psychedelic substances, by *kundalini yoga* and by other spiritual practices—may allow «ego-asyn tonic» contents to slip into the consciousness, which in turn may face the individual with a tremendous conflict. It may also reveal the insubstantiality of the «I» and of all that we consider substantial, producing enormous anguish in those who have been conditioned to dread insubstantiality and «nothingness» and to flee from that dread by clinging to the «I» and to the illusion of substantiality. In the same way, if during the state produced by the increase of bioenergetic input passions based on aversion happen to manifest, the high bioenergetic input and the widening and permeabilization of consciousness may cause us to experience them as a veritable hell.

No matter how anguish and tensions arise, the high bioenergetic input will not allow the individual to remain unaware of them by means of the phenomenological double negation or «bad faith»^c: the limits of conscious attention have become wider and more permeable, no longer allowing the individual to keep unaware of whatever she or he does not want to see. And, since the individual reacts to an increased suffering with increased rejection, the anguish becomes a veritable hell which—in case the individual does not manage to act on her or his experience so that it will cease contradicting his self-image and false sense of substantiality—may last far beyond the normal effect of the drug, becoming «psychosis».

This is not to say that metashamanism has only been easily accessible in Central Asia and, to a lesser degree, in the rest of the East. We cannot discard the possibility that some nations of pre-Hispanic America may have had wide and easy access to metashamanistic systems. If it were proved that they are not mere fiction, the works by Carlos Castañeda would show, at least, that some systems of aboriginal America *contain elements* of the kind that I have called «liberating» or «metashamanistic».

If the individual is unprepared, she or he will not manage to descend, like Dante, to the bottom of Hell, in order to enter Purgatory and, going through it, reach the Open Space^d of liberation. Instead, she or he will take the descent to Hell as a dead end and will try by all means to return to the Limbo of «normality». However, unable to manage, she or he will remain in a state of despair, with her or his ego-function and capacity to socialize impaired.

During the sixties, many of those who faced the above problem resorted to the consumption of cocaine, to false spiritual systems and teachers, to heroine and to other means of inflating their deflated egos and/or recover their capacity to socialize. In particular, many of those who became habituated to cocaine integrated themselves into the system and set out to work hard in it in order to afford the costly habit, helping the system to temporarily prosper. Heroine addicts, instead, «gave themselves up to death»: whereas cocaine may produce a false «heroism of victory», heroine may produce a false «heroism of defeat».

a) When our focus of conscious attention widens, our spatial perspective widens and our subjective sensation of temporality slows down. The focus of attention widens to the extent that the bioenergetic input increases. For an explanation of the concept of space-time-knowledge see Tarthang Tulku, work mentioned in the Bibliography.

b) In Sanskrit, *kundalini*; in Tibetan, *thig-le* (tigley). Western science explains in terms of the concept of «alterations of brain biochemistry» the alterations that ancient Eastern traditions explain in terms of the concept of «increase of bioenergetic input». Both explanations are partly valid and must be taken into account.

c) I.e., self-deceit. See J. P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. In several of my works I have explained how the Freudian hypothesis of the unconscious and the Sartrean theory of «bad faith».

d) In Tibetan, *nam-'mkha* (namk'a), meaning «space», «sky» or «heavens» (the latter, **not** in the sense of the conditioned state of temporary, illusory happiness that Buddhism calls *deva loka* or *deva gati*).

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