Exploring the Concept of Spiritual Crisis among Tibetan Buddhists: An Interpretive Approach.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Leeds Beckett University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2016

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank my supervisors Elliot, Steven and Gavin for all your interest, inspiration, generous support, careful advice, and patience.

I would also like to thank all my participants and all those who came across with me in my long journey to understand the concept of spiritual crisis for Tibetans, many of whom were not mentioned in the thesis, for sharing their stories and for not wanting to do so.

My gratitude to Munok and Morley for their encouragement for me to embark on this long journey.

A big thanks to Ivan for endless red pen work and support.

A high-five to Elias Beom for keeping me sane!

Abstract

There has been a growing awareness of the need for transpersonal psychology to expand itself both epistemologically and methodologically as a holistic discipline. This study aims to respond to that need by exploring how lived experiences of spiritual crisis are expressed, interpreted, and socially received in Tibetan Buddhist culture. Broadly speaking, 'Spiritual crisis' as developed in transpersonal psychology refers to experiences of physical and psychological distress and malfunction which may be understood to be relevant to the individual's psychological transformation.

Previous discussion of Buddhism within psychology has largely drawn from Buddhist theories and practice of meditation, its effect on mental and physical health, and contemporary interpretation of Buddhism as a perennial philosophy. This has marginalized the voices of non-elite and female Buddhists, belittling their experience and understanding of spirituality, while confirming the romanticized image perpetuated in the West of 'people with no self from the snowy pure-land'. This study therefore proposes to study narratives of spiritual crisis among Tibetan Buddhists looking into the various levels at which Buddhist concepts inform the way they make sense of their experience and self.

Using intuitive inquiry as a methodological framework 1) facilitated the research process, sensitizing it to the transpersonal experience and meaning of the research topic, and 2) offered flexibility to adopt ethnographic participant observations and narrative collection in order to gain insider perspective on spiritual crisis at different stages of the research process, and to reflect on the diversity of experience and perspectives.

Drawing on narrative analysis of contemporary Tibetan Buddhist narratives, this study explores how Tibetan Buddhist refugees construct the meaning of spiritual crisis and development. Emerging themes are life as a ground of ongoing spiritual development, and in particular, the significance and complexity of the meaning of exile in the lives of Tibetan refugees in India. It is proposed that the concept of *karma* is utilized by them as an interpretive framework to bring about understandings of traumatic life experience. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the transpersonal perspective expressed in the narratives cannot be generalised to that of a political understanding of collective trauma as felt by most Tibetan refugees.

Candidate's Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is my own work; and that all published or other sources of material consulted have been acknowledged in notes to the text or the bibliography. I can confirm that the thesis has not been submitted for a comparable academic award.

Unjyn Park

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Introduction

<General statement>

This thesis is an exploratory and interpretive study that focuses on the construction of meaning of spiritual crisis in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural context. It draws on analyses of narratives and ethnographic observations amongst Tibetan Buddhist refugees in India.

A brief history and background of the concept of spiritual crisis

In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1902, p.31), defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.” He urged psychologists to study man’s “religious propensity” and religion as lived experience. The founder of analytic psychology Carl Jung believed religion was related to the deepest realms of human nature. In humanistic psychology Abraham Maslow placed religious saints at the top of his human developmental hierarchy. The new term “spirituality” now replaces “religion” for the sake of making a clear distinction from organisational religions. Transpersonal psychology has grown out of humanistic psychology, addressing this particular interest in spirituality and its relationship to human potential.

Since the late 1970s there has been a discussion of “spiritual crisis” in psychology and psychiatry. It was American psychologist Stanislav Grof who initiated the discussion by coining the term “spiritual emergency” in 1978. Grof and Grof (1990, p. 31) define it as “critical and experientially difficult stages of a profound psychological transformation that involve one’s entire being.” The experiences reported as spiritual crisis were usually labelled as psychotic within the field of mainstream psychology and psychiatry. The claim made by Grof and David Lukoff amongst others is that spiritual crisis “may be indistinguishable from psychosis, but [it] represents a process of transformation and spiritual opportunity” (Daniels 2005, p. 310). Within the field of transpersonal psychology, therefore, spiritual crisis has been discussed as a transformative process by which one reaches the fully actualised, developed state, achieving one’s highest potential (for example, see Bache 2000). Accordingly, reference to spiritual crisis has been made in the field of psychiatry in terms of redeeming psychosis in a more positive light (Clarke 2001, 2010; Perry 1989 among others).

The term "spiritual emergency" was coined by the American psychologist, Stanislav Grof in 1978. He defines it as "critical and experientially difficult stages of a profound psychological transformation that involves one's entire being." UK psychologist Michael Daniels (2005) offers a succinct definition extracted from Grof's work as "disturbing and often overwhelming crises that may be indistinguishable from psychosis, but which represents a process of transformation and spiritual opportunity." Grof and Grof (1989, 1990), Lukoff (2010), and Scotton et al. (1996) amongst others observed that psychedelic drug use and the practice of various techniques of Eastern spirituality seemed to be major triggers of spiritual emergency. Both psychedelic drug use and an interest in Eastern spiritual practices became common in the US during the 1960s (Shaffer, 1978; Scotton et al, 1996). Grof's own mystical experience while under the influence of LSD and his wife Christina's crisis catalysed by Hatha yoga practice and child delivery led the two of them to respond to the growing awareness of this issue by establishing the Spiritual Emergency Network (SEN) in 1978. SEN is an information and referral service network run by mental health professionals in the US.

The same recognition resulted in a new category of 'religious or spiritual problem' with the classification V62.89 being included in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994.[1] One-time LSD mystic David Lukoff was one of the contributors. This edition provides a more nuanced attitude towards experiences that were previously diagnosed simply as psychotic.

> *Ideas that may appear to be delusional in one culture (e.g., sorcery and witchcraft) may be commonly held in another. In some cultures, visual or auditory hallucinations with a religious content may be a normal part of religious experience (e.g., seeing the Virgin Mary or hearing God's voice). (p. 281)*
>
> *(Extracted from http://www.spiritualcompetency.com/dsm4/lesson5_1.asp, 2011-02-10.)*

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[1] See the section 'Religious and Spiritual Problems' in *DSM-IV* (APA, 1994) and *DSM 5* (APA, 2013). This demonstrates the relevance which the discussion of spiritual crisis has, and the contribution it has made, to academia and society outside the field of transpersonal psychology through becoming a recognized part of diagnostic criteria, and this continues in *DSM-5*.

Spiritual crisis as so far described was first noted in connection to the sudden influx of Eastern spiritual traditions, the counterculture, and the human potential movement in the West—more precisely, in the US. However, this must not mislead us into thinking that either contact with spiritual techniques not originating from one's own culture or reckless psychedelic adventure was the sole causes of psychotic reactions. Grof and De Waard, who collected many episodes of spiritual crisis, report cases in which the individual previously had neither a spiritual/religious bearing nor any psychedelic experience. This awareness was present when the Spiritual Crisis Network was founded in the UK, 2004 with the aim of providing the same service that SEN in the US offers.

Definition of spiritual crisis, why not 'spiritual emergency'

As a piece of interpretive research that does not test hypotheses but works with concepts as they interact with meanings that 'emerge from the field' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 38), this thesis does not follow a clearly delineated definition of spiritual crisis but starts from it. Rather than a concept that has been postulated by any single scholar, spiritual crisis in this thesis refers to a theme on which much theoretical discussion has been generated in the field of transpersonal psychology. Therefore, prior to providing a working definition, I will offer a summary of the various assumptions which underlie the discussion of spiritual crisis: firstly, that human beings are spiritual beings, and as such, that the human psyche as we daily experience it has the potential to expand/develop beyond the limits usually placed on it; secondly, that this process of unleashing psychic potential may not be linear and may involve disturbing experiences that have considerable debilitating effect on the individual; thirdly, that such a non-linear process is not accidental but originates from the very structure/nature of the human psyche; and lastly, that supported with the right understanding, such a process can bring about psycho-spiritual transformation.

Largely drawing on the definitions of 'spiritual emergency' proposed by Grof & Grof (1989, 1990) and Lukoff et al. (1996), the working definition of spiritual crisis in this thesis is that of a rapid unfoldment of spiritual potential with psychological, physical, and/or social debilitations 'which represents a process of transformation and spiritual opportunity (Daniels, 2005, p. 310)' The triggers of such a process, it is argued, are diverse and range from experiences of emotional loss, meditation, spontaneous mystical experience, and past life regression to seemingly bizarre causes such as abduction by UFOs. Cases of such a process of spiritual crisis may appear similar to symptoms of various mental illnesses such as severe depression, addiction, and schizophrenia (de Waard, 2010, Lucas 2011, Lukoff et al, 1996).

Its contribution to the field

The concept of spiritual emergency proposed by Grof & Grof (1989, 1990) initiated much active debate on the potential hazards of the transformative process (Bragdon, 1990/2013; de Waard 2010; Clarke 2010a; Lucas 2011; Viggiano and Krippner 2010). Clarke (2001/2010) and Cortright (1997) amongst others argue that this concept has continued to deepen and expand the debate on the connection between mystical experience and mental illness. Lucas (2011) and Bragdon (1990/2013) further argue that the concept of spiritual emergency depathologizes various forms of so called psychotic experience and validate the individual's own understanding of such experience as transformative experience.

Previous theoretical positions

As well as arguing for the legitimacy of the experience of spiritual crisis as a psycho-spiritual transformative process that must be distinguished from cases of psychosis, debate within the field has centred on understanding the mechanism of such a process, and its position on the map of human spiritual/transpersonal development. A few prominent theoretical positions are listed below, leaving a more expansive list to be explored in chapter one.

1) The ego's immersion in the unconscious in which it reaches its source, the Self, and is renewed (Washburn, 1994, Assagioli, 1989).

2) A disorder of psychic energy in the process of the ego's movement towards the genuine Self (Assagioli, 1989)

3) A disturbing process that is triggered by contact with the transpersonal beyond the ordinary consciousness, and which unleashes unprecedented potential (Grof and Grof, 1989, Grof and Bennet, 1993, Grof, 1988, 2012, Bache, 2000). The major difference between this position and the two stated above is in its adoption of the concept of reincarnation and in the assumption that the human psyche is

able to consciously experience the transpersonal, i.e., what lies beyond the perimeter of the individual psyche.

4) A transitory experience of becoming aware of, and free from, the attachment particular to a state of consciousness when one progresses to a higher state based on a largely straight-forward model of spiritual development (Wilber, 2006). This position refutes the first three accusing them of confusing and glossing psychotic symptoms with spiritual implications (Wilber, 1993).

Identification of niche: Spiritual crisis unexplored outside the Western cultural context

Bragdon (1990/2013), Grof and Grof (1989), and Lucas (2011) amongst others assume that spiritual crisis is universal to many cultures other than the West, and that cases are often better understood and supported in those non-Western cultures where traditional spiritual knowledge still remains uninfluenced by contemporary materialistic culture. However, such a generalized claim is open to the criticism that it lacks academic rigor, as raised by Daniels (2005) and Ferrer (2002) among others. For example, in order to claim the universality of spiritual crisis, it needs to be evidenced that the experience of an individual in a non-Western cultural context, which transpersonal psychologists recognize as a case of spiritual crisis, is also recognized as such by the individuals and spiritual authorities in the given indigenous culture. This can be done only through exploring the concept in other cultures, and to date little work has been produced to either evidence or refute this claim.[2] I argue that wide-spread perennialism within the field, a criticism that has already been made by Ferrer (2002, 2011) and the dominant interest in transpersonal experience (which many transpersonal researchers are personally drawn to) may be behind such a lack of research. There has been growing awareness within the field of the need to be more culturally informed (Lukoff, 2014), to develop more rigorous epistemological and methodological approaches (Ferrer 2011, 2015), and to be more specific in the way researchers interact with religious traditions (Berkhin & Hartelius 2011; Ferrer 2002; Lancaster 2014).

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[2] De Waard (2010) considers the experience of spiritual crisis amongst Dutch participants. Regardless of the question of whether the Dutch cultural context should be distinguished from that of English speaking countries, the matter of cultural context was not given much consideration in her work. Peters (1991) describes the process of shamanic crisis and initiation of a Tamang Buddhist shaman in Nepal. This is the only relevant work identified by running a number of academic search engines (last confirmed October 2015), even though Peters does not focus on the concept of spiritual crisis per se.

Based on these considerations, the present thesis attempts to occupy the niche left by the lack of previous research of spiritual crisis. It aims to do this through an exploration of the concept in the current Tibetan socio-political context. In other words, this thesis explores the experience of spiritual crisis in everyday life and its relationship with individual psychological development amongst Tibetan Buddhists. It also considers how socio-cultural elements such as religious belief, language, and cultural practices influence subjective experience and its interpretation.

Defining the research setting

This study defines its area of investigation as Tibetan Buddhist culture, especially that found in a particular refugee community in India. It differs from the way in which Tibetan Buddhism is reviewed in psychology where it is commonly held to be a general and homogeneous entity. By Tibetan Buddhist culture, I refer to the set of contexts whereby individual inner experience is felt, made sense of, and then communicated to others. Therefore the notion of context in this thesis refers to the range of Tibetan Buddhist concepts available to individual Buddhists as well as the geographical, socio-political environment in which they are situated.

With my previous training in Tibetan & Sanskrit philology and my experience of living alongside Tibetan refugees for many years, I am keenly aware of the diverse, often contradictory, positions and transformative practices that exist within Buddhist culture. Yet, within transpersonal psychology as within the field of psychology in general, as Berkhin and Hartelius (2011) noted, Buddhist doctrines are commonly represented as an example of perennial philosophy without due specification.

The current popular image of Buddhism as it is represented in psychology begins with Jung, who interpreted the deities encountered by the dead after death as ‘archetypes in the collective unconscious (McMahan, 2008, p. 53). Translation of Buddhist ideas into depth psychology continues to this day (see for example, Epstein 1995; Fromm et al. 1960; Preece 2006). One aspect of Buddhism that has received much attention lately is that of the therapeutic effects[3] of meditation, on which research is being carried out in the fields of psychotherapy and neuroscience. Mindfulness (*sati* in Pāli) meditation has since the 1970s been developed by Kabat-Zinn as a clinical stress reducing programme commonly known as MBSR, which is a good example of the secularization of a Buddhist spiritual practice. The neuropsychological implications of Buddhist theories of perception and self have also been noted (Blackmore 2003, Varela et al, 1991; Wallace 2006, 2007). Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, has been very active in its communication with the field of neuroscience. Since 1987 there have been biannual symposiums organised by the Mind-Life Institute in collaboration with the Dalai Lama, the leader of the Tibetan Geluk tradition and former head of the Tibetan Government in exile. Wilber (1981, 1993, 2000, 2006)'s assimilation of elements of Tibetan Buddhism into his transpersonal meta theory is one example of many similar approaches found within transpersonal psychology.

Looking at Tibetan Buddhism in particular, Lopez (1998) argues that Buddhist and Tibetan studies have tended to romanticise Tibet, projecting upon it what the West feels it lacks in itself (Lopez 1998). In addition, Psychologizing Buddhism as a homogeneous entity (Cohen 2010, McMahan 2008) has tended to replicate traditional doctrinal positions taken by Buddhist masters. This has resulted in a situation where academic interest tends to ignore the need and value of investigating the inner and lived experience of Buddhists in terms of psycho-spiritual spiritual transformation, and also how these experiences are understood within the complicated patterns of meaning. By exploring individual experience through narratives of spiritual crisis as related by Tibetan Buddhists, as this study proposes to do, it is hoped that this imbalance can to some degree be addressed.

Researching a transformative concept in a Tibetan refugee community

In the previous section, I have argued that the exclusive dominance of elite Buddhism in transpersonal psychology has marginalised the lived experience of contemporary Buddhists. My choice of approach in this thesis which is to use narratives of contemporary Buddhists is also justified for another reason. Ferrer (2002, p. 92) argues that 'the fundamental spiritual value and beauty of the various traditions derives precisely from their unique creative solution to the transformation of the human condition'. However, during any given age, traditions are continuously challenged and informed by individual endeavours to achieve their religious ideals and by the socio-political contexts of the time. Not to explore the narratives of individuals whose lives are embedded in the particular patterns of ideas underlying contemporary Tibetan Buddhism leaves texts as the only source of information, and this only perpetuates the practice of uncritically imposing the perennial philosophy found in the textual tradition on the lived experience of Buddhists and hence further romanticising them. This in turn causes our understanding of the 'unique creative solution' to remain unchallenged and stagnant.

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[3] Sati, translated as either mindfulness or awareness is a component of most meditative techniques expounded by the Buddhist schools. However, mindfulness techniques which have been popurlar as methods for stress-reduction in clinical settings and for personal growth are based on the south-east Asian Buddhist traditions of Myanmar and Thailand.

In regard to geographical and cultural context, Tibetan Buddhists fall into three contemporary categories: firstly, those who live in the various autonomous regions and areas of modern day China (still referred to as Tibet by many), secondly, the part of Tibetan diaspora in India and Nepal, and lastly, those ethnic Tibetans now living in the West. Choosing any of those communities would result in its own distinctive outcome, yet none would be free from the current geo-political context – Chinese occupation, and the resulting changes in life experiences that this entails. This thesis is based upon my fieldwork within one of the refugee communities in Dharamsala, India.

Main research question and sub-questions

This thesis aims to explore whether a notion equivalent to spiritual crisis as it is understood in transpersonal psychology can be found, either explicitly or implicitly, in Tibetan Buddhist culture. To achieve this main goal, the present study has two secondary aims.

i) To identify equivalent triggers of spiritual crisis (from the perspectives of Transpersonal Psychology) among Tibetan Buddhists, and to explore whether such experiences of crisis are recognised as having spiritually transformative implications by Tibetan Buddhists themselves.

ii) To explore the ways, through narrative research and ethnographic observation, in which Tibetan Buddhists construct meanings of spiritual crisis and transformation, and to investigate how the individual, the socio-cultural, and the transpersonal, each as a context of experience, may be interwoven in such a construction.

Research design

In attempting to achieve those goals, the research design has been informed by number of methodological considerations that are currently used in a broad framework of interpretive research: ethnographic, qualitative and transpersonal research methods. In particular, this research adopts intuitive inquiry (Anderson 1998, 2006, 2011a, 2011b) and narrative analysis (Josselson 2011; Josselson & Lieblich 1999; Riessman 1993, 2002), both qualitative research methods used in psychology, as it major methodologies. As the researcher, my own personal interest in the subject of spiritual crisis and my personal connection to Tibetan refugees in India played a central role in formulating the research project. In interpretive research, the position of the researcher, the knowledge and the perspective which the researcher brings to the research are important factors in formulating the research project as well as in generating its outcome (Anderson 2011a, 2011b; Charmaz 2002, 2011; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Intuitive inquiry, in particular, enables the researcher to use personal engagement with the subject as a research tool, as well as engaging non-linguistic, emphatic ways with the data. While intuitive inquiry has as its strength researching the transpersonal, transformative experience, narrative analysis is a method specialising its strengths in understanding the individual’s meaning making process and how it is embedded in the socio-cultural context. As the present research considers the transformative concept of spiritual crisis in a non-Western culture, these two methods were considered likely to provide solid epistemological grounds for this study (See chapter three for detailed discussion).

Primary data collection was carried out in Dharamsala, India where I spent three months collecting Tibetan Buddhist narratives of experience suggestive of spiritual crisis. In searching for narratives of spiritual crisis amongst Tibetan Buddhist refugees, especially at the earlier stage of this study to prepare my fieldwork, I used the list of triggers of spiritual emergency made by Grof and Grof (1989) as a reference point. The main criteria used to identify a case of spiritual crisis was that of ‘the transformational meaning or effect that it has on the person (Daniels, 2005, p.50)’ resulting in a new form of identity and understanding of reality which involve the transpersonal/spiritual (Ferrer 2002; Lancaster 2004)[4]. Details of data collection will be described in chapter four.

Original contribution to knowledge

1) This study will inform, broaden, and deepen the current discussion of spiritual crisis by exploring the lived experience of spiritual crisis and the method by which Tibetan Buddhism as 'guiding meta-narrative' (Tarnas 2006) shapes the individual experience in the current political context. No such study has been previously attempted on a non-Western culture.

2) In so doing, this study will voice the lived experiences of Tibetan Buddhists hitherto unheard in academia.

3) Methodologically, using interpretive approach to understand spirituality in another culture has only recently been promoted within the field of transpersonal psychology. This study which endeavours to explore contextual meaning of transformative experience by combining intuitive inquiry with narrative analysis will contribute to furthering methodological discussions in the field.

Outlining structure of the thesis

Chapter one outlines the previous theoretical positions on the concept of spiritual crisis within transpersonal psychology, and traces their forerunners, for example, in the theories of Carl Jung and William James. This chapter focuses not on the symptom-treatment oriented discussion of the Grofian concept of spiritual emergency but on the theories of the structure of human psyche which underlie the Grofian concept.

Chapter two consists of three parts, each of which serves a distinct purpose. The first part reviews the previous treatment of Buddhism within transpersonal psychology in order to justify my theoretical and methodological stances in choosing to research narratives of individual experience amongst Tibetan Buddhists. The second part demonstrates that Tibetan Buddhist culture is a legitimate source from which to investigate the concept of spiritual crisis by outlining the Buddhist doctrines on spiritual development and also by indicating the apparent absence of the concept in the doctrinal system. The last part provides examples of motifs of spiritual crisis found in Buddhist hagiographies (those of Tibetan Buddhism in particular) and accounts of near-death experiences and relevant literature, as illustrations of the cultural context which may play an important role in shaping the individual's experience within Buddhist culture.

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[4] If the meaning of life and one's sense of identity are the key elements to be examined, it may be asked where the difference lies between existential and spiritual crisis. Discussion of this issue is beyond the purview of this chapter, and will be considered in chapter one.

Chapter three defines the broad methodological framework of interpretive research, then explores the two distinct qualitative research methods to be adopted in this thesis: intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis. I argue that, despite the epistemological contradiction between them, the strengths of each offer a unique contribution to research such as the present one, an exploration of the transpersonal concept in a non-Western culture. In outlining these two methods, I will focus upon their ontological assumptions, their treatment of data, i.e., narratives, and their positions on the role of the researcher.

Chapter four describes the research process with its emergent issues and resulting revisions. Based on the considerations made in the preceding chapters, I describe the research procedure as two stages of data collection and a stage of descriptive data analysis.

1) Preparation for fieldwork: preliminary interviews, selecting hagiographical stories to encourage participants to make connections with similar experiences from their own life (the second and third parts of chapter two belong to this stage), and circulating questionnaires in order to create a potential pool to help identify participants,

2) Fieldwork in a refugee community, Dharamsala, India: narrative interviews, emergent problems that arose due to cultural perceptions and the current (at that time) political context,

3) Description of the process of sieving through the vast amount of material gathered, making interpretive choices and deciding on the criteria for such choices: the selection of key narratives to be analysed; decisions on the style of transcription and the eventual form for presenting narratives.

Chapters five to seven will investigate five narratives that appear to satisfy the criteria for spiritual crisis suggested by Daniels (2005), Ferrer (2002), and Lancaster (2004) as mentioned above. The resulting analysis is to some degree descriptive as it aims to explore the process by which the meaning of spiritual crisis is constructed within each of these narratives. Each narrative is presented with a description of the distinctive process of its acquisition, a summary of the narrative presented in the participant's own voice, and analyses of its themes and forms based on the methodological protocols established in intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis. By so doing, I attempt to highlight how the personal, the socio-cultural, and the transpersonal each entwine to form a complex picture of the experience of spiritual crisis. These three chapters aim to explore some of the diverse ways in which Tibetan Buddhists understand spiritual development involving crisis.

Chapter five considers an esoteric hermit's life story which portrays the course of his traumas, peak experiences, and crises including loss of family, exile, kundalini awakening and an encounter with an evil spirit. The analysis does not centre round a single event as a specific case of spiritual crisis. Instead, it pays attention to the sequence of events found in the narrative and sheds light on the way in which an event is construed as a crisis or a peak experience in relation to the others in the story.

Chapter six investigates narratives of three spirit-mediums. It begins by identifying the experience of spirit-possession in Tibetan culture as an example of spiritual emergency as expounded by Grof and Grof (1989, 1990). Literature review on spirit-possession in Tibetan culture is provided in this chapter because chapter one is devoted to discussions of the structure of psyche as explanation of spiritual crisis. My analysis focuses on the complex, dialectic process in which the meaning of experiences of possession are shaped by the socio-cultural, in particular, by the Buddhist doctrine and the monastic system. This is done by drawing on the difficulties lying in the construction of meaning of psycho-spiritual transformation of the two female spirit-mediums.

In chapter seven, I present a narrative of a former political prisoner, which exemplifies spiritual crisis as Tibetan Buddhists understand it: traumatic life experience as a form of spiritual crisis. On the surface it does not seem to fit into the category of psychotic symptoms or psychological distress leading to spiritual awakening. For that reason, prior to analysing the narrative, I recount how I encountered the narrative and on what grounds I recognised it to be a key narrative. The narrative brings our attention to the role of the concept of karma in linking a traumatic life experience to that of spiritual crisis. I make comparison between the explanation of karma as appearing in the narrative and the concept of karma as it underpins the narrative plot. I then demonstrate how the two different usages of the concept of karma render a life event as a spiritual/transpersonal event.

Chapter eight considers the concept of karma as the conceptual framework which underlies the construction of meaning of spiritual crisis in the narratives described in chapters five to seven. I discuss some common themes which have significant implications for our understanding of spiritual crisis amongst Tibetan Buddhist refugees: personal *karma* as causality and elements within psyche, karmic representation, and karmic relations.

In chapter nine, I review the research process and attempt to assess my attempt to combine intuitive inquiry with narrative analysis. I highlight the difficulties that I have faced and discuss how these affected the research in its process and outcome, not to mention me as a researcher and an individual.

In Conclusion, I summarise the findings, and assess their contribution to knowledge, their limitations, and their implications for future research.

Chapter 1

Literature review

Outline of this chapter

In this chapter, I will first introduce and review the previous discussion of spiritual emergency, one which has been most influential inside and outside transpersonal psychology, and which has contributed to widening the diagnostic criteria of mainstream psychiatry on religious/spiritual experience (Chinen, 1996; Lukoff 1985). My focus will be on highlighting the central features of this discussion regarding the concept of spiritual emergency as originally argued by Grof and Grof (1989, 1990).

In so doing, I suggest a few problems inherent in the concept of spiritual emergency, which may have contributed to the current stagnation suggested by Viggiano & Krippner (2010). As an alternative approach, I suggest that the Grofian model of spiritual emergency be read not with exclusive emphasis on the variety of symptoms but on a broader theoretical ground of Grof's major transpersonal concepts, such as those of the holotropic consciousness, the basic perinatal matrices, and the condensed experience. That is to say, I approach the concept as a key part of Grof's transpersonal theory of human psyche, keeping the question at the centre of my review: how do transpersonal psychologists such as Grof understand human psyche so as to view certain types of experience as 'spiritual emergency'?

For this purpose, I review concepts of transformative crisis proposed by William James (1902), Carl Jung (1956, 1961, 1983, 2009) and Roberto Assagioli (1965, 1989, 2002), which are based on their models of psyche, in order to elucidate how each hypothesis on the nature/structure of the psyche has helped to form the concept of spiritual crisis. In the light of those, I review how Grof (1975, 1993, 2000) formulates his concept of psycho-spiritual crisis based on his model of psyche.

Spiritual emergency

Context of the emergence of the concept spiritual emergency

Although the concept of spiritual emergency emerged from the field of transpersonal psychology, the evolution of the idea was also set in a wider social context. Firstly there was the wider socio-political context of the anti-psychiatry movement which criticised the excessive prescription of psychiatric drugs then prevalent, and questioned, at a deeper level, the validity of the definition and diagnoses of mental illness as given by mainstream psychiatry and contemporary societal norms (for a few examples, see Arieti 1976; Laing 1960/1976; Szasz 1960, 1970)[5]. Wide spread psychedelic drug use and the influx of various practices of Eastern spirituality such as yoga, *zazen*, and mindfulness meditation to the West (and particularly to America) formed another important element. These movements greatly influenced the beginnings of transpersonal psychology as an academic discipline, one that was both committed to understanding human potential with a strong emphasis on the incorporation of knowledge from mystical traditions, and which aimed to establish itself as a more comprehensive discipline than humanistic psychology which drew from the existential philosophies for its conceptual base (Shaffer 1978; Scotton et al 1996). Grof and others' early discussion of spiritual crisis (Grof and Grof, 1989; Scotton et al. 1996; Bache 2000; Lukoff 2010) drew considerably on these psychologists' personal exposure to, and research on, substances and methods used to induce altered states of consciousness. As Cortright (1997) summarises, 'urges toward spiritual seeking, expressed as a search for wholeness through deepening individual, social, and transcendent awareness' are regarded a vital part of the human psyche in transpersonal psychology (See for example Maslow 1968, 1970, 1971). Such interest was initially central to defining transpersonal psychology (Hartelius et al, 2007).

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[5] While Szasz criticised the way that diagnosis of 'mental illness' was societally controlled, one of his central arguments was that mental illness is a pseudo-illness, and social construct, which cannot be objectively/experimentally proved to be either present or absent. While Szasz's work was rather close to similar arguments made by social theorists, Arieti, another early authority on schizophrenia, accepted the link between mystical experience and mental illness. Arieti (1976) maintained that both mystics and schizophrenics have greater access to the subconscious processes in the brain such as dream, imagery, and association than others do. Even though Arieti accepted the idea of the connection between mysticism and mental illness, for him, either subconscious workings or logical thinking were basically the work of the brain. Understanding mental illness from the perspective of spiritual development was first introduced by Laing (1960/1976).

Criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviourism formed a major force in birthing transpersonal psychology. Maslow (1954, p. 236) criticises mainstream psychology, especially Freudian psychoanalysis, as “a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy” that draws from cases of neurosis and ignores cases of psychological health. Similarly, Assagioli (1965) maintains that Freud places excessive emphasis on the pathological aspect of the psyche at the cost of its potentials. In order to compensate for this tendency, Maslow focused on studying self-actualizers, individuals whose needs were at the highest level in his system (Hastings 1999). To address the theoretical imbalance in the field of psychology mentioned above, Maslow (1968) holds that transpersonal psychology ought to provide a life philosophy, a value system as used to belong to the domain of religion.

Developing/altering states of consciousness by employing various meditative techniques and by psychedelic drugs has been a significant trend in the field (Cortright 1997; Grof 1975, 2000; Maslow 1964; Smith 1993; Tart 1969, 2004, 2008). Such interests in altered states of consciousness were combined with expectancy theorising the stages of consciousness development that could be glanced through those altered states of consciousness (see for example, Wilber, 1977, 1981. 1995).

As the change of central attention in the field has been noted by Hartelius et al. (2007), chartering the states and stages of consciousness has invited the question of how the shifts between states and between stages of development actually occur. Bache (2000), Grof (1989, 1990, 2012), and Washburn (1994) amongst others argue that the process by which the personal is transcended does not always proceed smoothly and in a straightforward manner. In their view, coming into contact with the spiritual/transpersonal dimension of life may manifest itself as traumatic experiences which call for much adjustment at both the physical and psychological levels of the individual. A good example of such an experience is the case of Jung mentioned above. Grof (1989) argues that spiritual emergency is a crisis in the process of the ‘evolution of consciousness’ (p.2). What is intriguing about this claim is the implication, as will be discussed in more detail later, that having a traumatic, debilitating experience which may include visions, psychic energy, physical symptoms, etc. is not an accident but a built-in part of the processes of psychological transformation.

Its contribution to transpersonal psychology

Cortright (1997, p. 156) has suggested that, in the field of transpersonal psychology, Grof's concept of 'spiritual emergency' initiated the discussion of spiritual crisis, that is, a new understanding of various types of experience that had traditionally been regarded psychotic, as a process of development of consciousness, a manifestation of 'a deeper order' underlying our self-consciousness. Washburn (1994) states that Ken Wilber (1983)'s concept of 'pre/trans fallacy' a seminal contribution to the field mirrors the discussion of spiritual crisis. According to Clarke (2010), Stanislav Grof in transpersonal psychology and Ronald Laing in psychiatry were the two crucial figures in their contribution to 'signalling the positive and transformative potential of states usually dismissed as psychosis' (p. 102). Catherine Lucas (2011), founder of the UK Spiritual Crisis Network, argues that the concept of 'spiritual emergency' enables various forms of so called psychotic experience to be discussed from the individual's own perspective.

Reviewing the impact of Grof's concept of 'spiritual emergency' on mainstream psychology, however, Viggiano and Krippner (2010, p. 119) comment that it has been 'rarely used outside of a small circle of transpersonal psychologists', and they suggest that the concept may be ahead of its time. While this evaluation of Viggiano and Krippner (2010) may hold some truth, the concept of 'spiritual emergency' had a major contributing influence on the decision to include 'Religious and spiritual problems' in *DSM-IV*, creating a noticeable change in the psychiatric perception of psychosis[6]. Lukoff et al. (1992)

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[6] The close relation between the concept of spiritual emergency and the inclusion of the category in *DSM-IV* is reflected in the following account. Lukoff (2010) observes that his own experience of spiritual emergency in his twenties was an inspiration behind the endeavour to bring a change in the medical perception of psychosis. Triggered by ingesting LSD, his experience met the *DSM-II* criteria for an Acute Schizophrenic Episode, and the *DSM-IV* criteria for a Hallucinogen-induced Delusional Disorder. His two month long experience involving his self identification as a reincarnation of the Buddha and Jesus Christ was contained within the circle of his family and friends, who helped him 'to get grounded in the everyday social world and consensual reality". Although, unlike many individuals reported by de Waard (2010) and Lucas (2011), he escaped hospitalisation, the experience with its meaning and implications were not readily integrated into his life, either. Through years of silence and further years spent under Jungian analysis and psychotherapies, Lukoff was eventually able to integrate the experience into the spiritual dimension of his life. However, it was coming into contact and working with Grof at the Spiritual Emergengy Network that inspired him to develop his understanding of other experiences of a similar sort and to propose a new category for *DSM-IV*.

suggests that the new category highlighted the occurrence of religious and spiritual issues frequently found in clinical practice, together with the absence of a diagnostic category for such issues, and the resulting lack of training provided to mental health professionals (Kaminker and Lukoff, 2013). The category has stood the test of diagonal validity and clinical value and is still included in the fifth edition of *DSM*. Raising awareness of the need to introduce diagnostic criteria to distinguish spiritual experiences and non-pathological psychosis from mental disorders expanded to the Latin American context (Modeira-Almeida & Cardeña 2011).

All this shows the way in which the concept of ‘spiritual emergency’ has contributed to the creation of an awareness in the psychiatric perception of the cultural, religious, and spiritual issues involved in mental health. However, it also makes it possible to understand the seemingly limited impact of the concept so far: most emphasis has been placed on its relation/distinction with mental illness. This is why this thesis suggests that it is necessary to review the concept in light of the Grofian theory of the structure of psyche which functions as the underlying assumption of the concept of spiritual emergency.

Grof’s personal background of conceptualizing ‘spiritual emergency’

William James (1902) suggested that psychedelic substances could be used as a stimulant to access areas of the psyche beyond the threshold of ordinary consciousness. Huxley (1956) similarly held that both chemical substances and hypnosis could be used as a means to provide access to the subconscious mind. The transpersonal potential of psychedelics was also noted by Maslow (1970) who listed, among transpersonal, experiences Grof’s ‘psycholytic therapies’ that used LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) for treating deep-seated trauma (Bravo & Grob 1996). Transpersonal psychology has shown a keen interest in similarities between some psychedelic episodes and mystical experiences such as those of the experience of god within, and the universe beyond the personal self (Roberts & Winkelman 2013). It is well known that Grof has been a central figure in this trend (Cortright 1997; Sperry 2001).

Grof’s decades-long research into the impact of psychedelics on consciousness and the development of a form of psychotherapy able to utilise such impact to induce transpersonal experiences are intimately associated with his view of the nature of the psyche (Cortright 1997; Grof 1975, 1993, 2012; Reich 2001; Tarnas, 1990). When he first started studying psychiatry, he had been fascinated by Freudian psychoanalysis. However, finding this approach too limited to understand the human psyche in its entirety, he turned instead to Jungian analytical psychology. Around the same time, he began researching the effects of LSD on consciousness. While participating in his own experiments, he had a mystical visionary experience of 'cosmic consciousness' which seemed to him to resonate with the mystical literature of various religious traditions describing dazzling light, consciousness travelling into limitless space and profound insights on various issues regarding self-identity. For him, his own experience and those of others induced by LSD suggested further dimensions beyond everyday reality in terms of both human consciousness and the exterior world. This led him to be convinced that human consciousness is not merely an epiphenomenon of the neurophysiological and biochemical processes in the brain (Grof, 1993, pp. 14-17), and eventually led him to join Maslow and others in founding transpersonal psychology.

Defining spiritual emergency

Original definition

In the 1970s, Grof coined the term 'spiritual emergency' to refer to 'both a crisis and an opportunity of rising to a new level of awareness' (Grof & Grof 1989, p. x). Grof and Grof (1990, p. 31) further outline this definition as follows:

> *Spiritual emergencies* can be defined as critical and experientially difficult stages of profound psychological transformation that involve one's entire being. They take the form of nonordinary states of consciousness and involve intense emotions, visions and other sensory changes, and unusual thoughts, as well as various physical manifestations. These episodes often revolve around spiritual themes; they include sequences of psychological death and rebirth, experiences that seem to be memories from previous lifetimes, feelings of oneness with the universe, encounters with various mythological beings, and other motifs (italics in original).

The central idea as outlined above is that spiritual emergency is a transformational crisis and that it involves nonordinary states of consciousness, and hence various forms of nonordinary ('spiritual' above), or transpersonal experience. Grof and Grof (1989, p.x) argue that examples of spiritual emergency are found universally in the world's religious traditions where they occur 'as a result of meditative practices and as signposts of the mystical path.'

When in the grip of a spiritual emergency, Cortright (1997, p.156) suggests that the individual “becomes disorganized and overwhelmed by an infusion of spiritual energies or new realms of experience which [he/she] is not yet able to integrate.” This condition can also turn into a form of identity crisis, as Sperry (2001, p.82) noted, causing individuals to feel that ‘their sense of self-identity is fragmenting, that their old beliefs and values no longer hold true, and that the ground beneath their personal reality is radically changing.’

Emergency vs. emergence

Grof and Grof (1989, 1990) contrast the concept of spiritual emergency with that of spiritual emergence by the criteria of the speed and intensity of experience and the degree of ease/difficulty in terms of integrating the process into the individual’s daily life (Grof & Grof 1990). Lukoff, Lu and Turner (1996, p. 238) make the following distinction between the two: spiritual emergence as ‘a gradual unfoldment of spiritual potential with no disruption in psychological-social-occupational functioning’, and spiritual emergency as ‘an uncontrolled emergence of spiritual phenomena with significant disruption in psychological-social-occupational functioning’.

The table below outlines the characteristics of spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency. The original table by Grof and Grof (1990, p.37) was edited in order to highlight the criteria by which Grof and Grof merged their descriptions of two concepts, and to make more obvious the contrast between spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency.

	Spiritual Emergence	Spiritual Emergency
Inner experiences	Fluid, mild, easy to integrate	Dynamic, jarring, difficult to integrate.
New spiritual insights	Welcomed, desirable, expansive.	Challenging and threatening perspective.
Experiences of energy	Contained, manageable.	Uncomfortable and disruptive to daily life.
Differentiation and transition between internal and external experiences	Easy.	Difficult/ Simultaneous occurrence of both.
Incorporating non-ordinary states of consciousness into daily life	Easy.	Disturbing daily life.
Awareness of Self and world	Slow, gradual.	Abrupt, rapid shift in perception
Attitude toward new experience	Excitement. Willingness and ability to cooperate with them.	Ambivalence, but willingness and ability to cooperate with them using guidance

Attitude toward change	Acceptance.	Resistance.
Sense of control	Ease in giving up control and trust in process	Need to be in control. Dislike or mistrust the process
Difficult experiences	Treated as opportunities for change	Found overwhelming and unwelcome
Positive experiences	Accepted as gifts	Difficult to accept, seem undeserved, even painful
Need to discuss experiences	Infrequent	Frequent urge
Communication about process (when/how/with whom to discuss)	Discriminating	Undiscriminating

Figure1. Differences between spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency

The first six criteria in the table above are related to phenomenological descriptions of the event, i.e., what happens as perceived by the individual. On the other hand, the latter seven criteria are related to the individual’s reaction to it. Spiritual emergence consistently shows an easy, smooth, well managed process of transformation with the suggestion that the individual has a greater readiness/capacity to integrate the experience. Contrary to this, spiritual emergency is associated with a greater intensity of experience, but also with a diminishing ability on the individual’s part to cope with such ‘a suddenly appearing acute’ event (Grof, 2012, p121). Grof and Grof (1990, p. 33) stress that the level of ‘individual readiness for inner transformation is far more important than external stimuli’. This idea has been largely ignored in much previous works on spiritual emergency.

From an anti-psychiatric perspective, R. D. Laing (1989) suggests fear as a crucial element in determining whether or not a given experience will develop into crisis. Individual readiness, Cortright (1997) holds, depends on the development of self structure. He goes on to suggest another significant factor: the question of whether the individual’s frame of reference or the cultural context where the individual belongs, embraces the unfolding event as acceptable or not. This matter of cultural acceptance has also been raised by Clarke (2010), Grof and Grof (1989, 1990), Lucas (2011), and Lukoff et al. (1985, 1996, 1998) amongst others. However, in her research on interplay, and differentiation, between spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency, Kane (2006) questions the necessity of differentiating between spiritual emergency and emergence. She argues that the only distinction between the two found in narratives of her participants is the presence/absence of a crisis.

Diversity of forms of spiritual emergency

One of the difficulties in defining spiritual emergency lies in the fact that it is, as defined above, a highly inductive concept that describes a pattern arising over the course of a given event and/or the meaning of psychological transformation (and/or the emergence of the spiritual realm in life) which the individual discovers only through the medium of the given event. The distinction is, Daniels (2005, p.49-50) remarks, made more ‘in terms of … the transformative meaning or effect that [the crisis experience] has on the person’ than in terms of the particular form of the experience.

To begin with, Grof & Grof (1989, pp. 13-14) list more than ten different examples of phenomena as forms of spiritual emergency in the seminal text of spiritual emergency:

- Shamanic crisis
- The awakening of *Kundalini* (a subtle energy much discussed in Hindu mysticism)
- Episodes of unitive consciousness (‘peak experiences’)
- Psychological renewal through a return to the centre
- The crisis of psychic opening
- Past-life experiences
- Communication with spirit guides and ‘channeling’
- Near-death experiences
- Experience of close encounters with UFOs
- Possession states
- Alcoholism and drug addiction.[7]

As Cortright (1997) comments, the list shows an extremely wide range of experience, not all of which would be easily accepted as case of spiritual experience by transpersonal psychologists. It should be noted again that by no means does this list delineate all the types of spiritual emergency and it is open to revision, as noted by Viggiano & Krippner

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[7] ‘Alcoholism and drug addiction’ was originally described as a convincing example of spiritual emergency as a result of Christina Grof’s own experience of alcoholism (Grof & Grof 1989, 1990) but only later was included in the list of forms of spiritual emergency (See Grof, 2012, p. 129).

(2010). In the same volume (Grof, 1989), contributors such as Kornfield (1989) and Ram Dass (1989) discuss potential spiritual crises which can be induced by meditation and other spiritual practices.

Grof and Grof (1990, p. 33) also add ‘triggering situations’ of spiritual emergency that can be found in everyday life, for example, ‘physical and emotional stress during childbirth’, sexual orgasm, and psychological distress resulting from a significant loss physical, relational, and/or social.

We have seen that the concept of spiritual emergency tends to function as an umbrella term for a diverse range of experiences that are linked to psychological transformation. Such diversity has enabled it to be applied in psychotherapy (Ankrah 2002; Cortright 1997; Hartter 1995; Hendlin 1997; Sperry 2001; Watson 1994), yet also as provider of alternative perspectives in understanding spiritual experience. For example, Lesniewicz (2004) explores female Christians’ lived experience applying the concept of spiritual emergency. Arguelles and Rivero (1997) explore the notion of spiritual emergency when triggered by a physical stressor amongst a socially marginalized community, that of gay/homosexual Latinos suffering from HIV/AIDS in the United States.

Mechanism of spiritual emergency

With such an extreme diversity of examples, the issue of the types of triggers becomes tangential (Cortright 1997; Daniels 2005). As a common denominator of all the situations of triggering spiritual emergency, Grof and Grof (1990, p. 33) suggest ‘a radical shift in the balance between the unconscious and conscious processes [by which the unconscious dynamics] override ordinary awareness’, which is akin to explanations given by Assagioli, James and Jungr in this chapter.

The connection between the unconscious and the onset of spiritual emergency seems to be accepted by Assagioli (1965/1989), Bragdon (1990/2013), Mazak (1998), Perry (1989) and Washburn (1984) amongst others. For example, Cortright (1997, p. 156) suggests that the process is due to ‘an infusion of spiritual energies or new realms of experience’ that have previously been beyond the grasp of the individual. Mazak (1998) construes such dynamics as a preemption of ordinary reality by the archetypal dimension.

Despite numerous references made to Jung and his theories of the unconscious, individuation, and the archetypes which appear throughout S. Grof's works (1975, 1980, 1993, 2012 amongst others) as well as those jointly authored with his wife Christina Grof (1989, 1990), his core assumptions underlying the concept of spiritual emergency appear to differ from those which underlie Jung's concepts of the personal and collective unconscious. Grof and Grof (1989, p. 8-13) propose the unconscious that consists of the biological (meaning psychological experience tracing back to early childhood memory), perinatal (those regarding intra-uteral experience and memories of one's birth), and transpersonal (those beyond the limit of personal consciousness in terms of time and space) as the inner mechanism of spiritual emergency.

Drawing from his consciousness research centring on the psychotherapeutic effect of psychedelic drugs (specifically, LSD) and later that of breath work, Grof's concept of the unconscious is first of all based on the assumption that the nature of the human psyche is neither confined to, nor defined by, a physical body, but is something that reincarnates through lives (Bache 2000). This idea is seldom proposed overtly in Grof's works but is reflected in exemplary episodes. The best illustration of this may be an account of his own experience of past life regression (Grof 1993, pp.128-131), and integrated in his theory of COEX which will be discussed later in this chapter. Based on this assumption, Grof claims that spiritual crisis is a form of innate evolutionary process of consciousness, which is not culture specific, but found universally (Bache 2000; Grof & Grof 1989, 1990; Grof 1975, 1993, 2000, 2012). As mentioned in the previous discussion of spiritual emergency, Grof's explanatory suggestion on its dynamics has been largely overshadowed by discussion of its diversity and its engagement in psychiatry.

Outcome of spiritual crisis

Some expressions synonymous with spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof 1989, 1990, Grof 2012) are transformational crisis and, psychospiritual crisis. Positive outcomes of spiritual emergency are considered to be:

> enhanced emotional and psychosomatic health, greater freedom of personal choices, and a sense of deeper connection with other people, nature and the cosmos, … an increasing awareness of the spiritual dimension in one's life and in the universal scheme of things (1990, p. 34).

Such an outcome may be the result if the process is left to run its natural course. Many authors have stressed that the result is to some degree dependent on suitable levels of support and validation of those around the individual who is undergoing the spiritual emergency (Bragdon1990/2013; Cortright 1997; Grof & Grof 1989, 1990; Perry 1989; Sperry 2001).

Distinguishing spiritual emergency from psychotic disorders

Cortright (1997), Chinen (1996), Viggiano and Krippner (2010) amongst others note that the concept of spiritual emergency has challenged and broadened the field of mainstream psychiatry. In the context of mental health, the concept of spiritual emergency has been regarded as having the potential to contribute to forming alternative perspectives on psychosis (Clarke 2010; Martens & Willem 2010; Nixon, Hagen & Peters 2010; Williams 2011).

Grof (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Grof 2012) and Lukoff (Lukoff et al. 1992; Lukoff 2010; Kaminker & Lukoff, 2013) amongst others have consistently criticised the main stream psychiatry for making a diagnostic error in disregarding spiritual, mystical, and visionary experiences as part of a valid process of personal growth, considering them rather as cases of psychosis. This dismissal of mysticism tends to be traced back to Sigmund Freud, who regarded religion as a form of neurosis (Freud 1927/1989, cited in Kaminker and Lukoff 2013). In response to comments by Romain Rolland who named his experience of limitlessness of mind 'oceanic feeling', Freud held that such types of experience might rather be an infantile 'regression to the pre-Oepidal stage of development' (Parsons, 2003, p.87).[8]

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[8] It is widely accepted that Freud was antagonistic to mysticism and treated experiences such as 'oceanic feeling' as psychotic. For example, Storr (1989/2001, pp. 114-115) suggests that Freud compared it in a rather degrading manner to the experience of falling in love, both being examples of 'an extreme regression to' an infant who cannot yet distinguish herself from the mother's breast. According to Storr, Freud concluded that both experiences are illusions and 'a kind of madness, as 'the normal prototype of the psychoses'.

Vergote (2003) and Parsons (2003) argue however that one needs to be more cautious in dealing with Freud's attitude toward mysticism. Vergote argues that Freud did not refer to 'oceanic feeling' as "psychotic self-investment, but an attempt to retrieve primary narcissism beneath the constitution of the ego before it is cast adrift in a psychotic rupture with reality. (p. 93)" According to Parsons (2003), Freud did not interpret oceanic feeling as a mystical experience as it had been

In terms of the link between spiritual emergency and psychotic disorders, there are, broadly speaking, two positions. Firstly, that of Grof (1993, 2012) who has consistently stressed that spiritual emergency may share the same origin as psychosis but should be clearly differentiated from it, in particular, those cases that have an observable physiological cause. In this regard, there has been an ongoing endeavour to develop measures to assess cases of spiritual emergency and to distinguish them from psychopathology in clinical settings continues to be an ongoing endeavour (See for example, Bronn & McIlwain 2014/2015; Goretzki, Thalbourne & Storm, 2009, 2013); and to validate experiences of spiritual emergency distinguished from psychosis (Johnson & Friedman 2008; Mazak 1998; Ossoff 1993; Raab 2015 amongst others).

The second position denies/ignores any distinction between spiritual emergency and psychotic disorders (see for example, Laing 1989, Lucas 2011, and Clarke, 2010, Williams 2011). Both Laing (1989) and Perry (1989) argue that the potential for personal growth is inherent in most cases of psychotic disorder.

Lukoff amongst others (Lukoff et al. 1992, 1998; Lukoff 1985, 2005; Philips, Lukoff & Stone, 2009) takes a middle position, arguing that, in combination, spiritual experience and psychotic disorders yield positive outcomes. Lukoff (1985) argues that both satisfy a few shared phenomenological criteria, namely, ecstatic mood, sense of newly-gained knowledge, perceptual alterations, and delusions with specific themes related to mythology.

Reason why I choose spiritual crisis not spiritual emergency

While this definition and other descriptive definitions given by Grof have been frequently quoted in the field, this definition appears to be problematic in a few ways. As illustrated in terms of diversity of its triggers, the concept of spiritual emergency as proposed by Grof and Grof (1989, 1990) functioned to link various concepts on spiritual experience and

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characterised by James (1902), that is as something passive, transient, ineffable, and noetic. Instead, he regarded oceanic feeling ‘as a “constant state” that reveals…the “preservation” of an original ego feeling (from the pre-Oedipal stage) that exists alongside the more developed adult ego’ (p. 87). However, Parsons argues that the absence of noesis in experiences of oceanic feeling was an important reason for Freud not to regard it as a mystical experience.

psychotic disorder. Moreover, there is a confusion regarding whether the diverse forms are spiritual emergencies per se or the triggers (Cortright 1997; Viggiano & Krippner, 2010).

In his recent work, Grof (2012) regards spiritual emergency as one of ‘psychospiritual crises’ indicating that even after a spiritual emergency one might have some other crises involving spiritual/transpersonal matters. Grof (1993, pp. 13-4) calls spiritual emergency ‘an episode of spontaneous psychospiritual crisis’ and lists it amongst “the practice of meditation, a session in experiential psychotherapy, …a near-death situation, or ingestion of a psychedelic substance” as the triggers of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Later Grof (2012) adopts ‘psychospiritual crisis’ as synonym to emergency, revising the relationship between the occurrence of such crises and his major concepts.

In this thesis, the foremost interest in the discussion of spiritual emergency lies in the question, of what makes certain types of psychological distress/ psychotic symptoms a spiritual/transpersonal experience. In other words, on what grounds are various forms of so called spiritual emergency understood to imply ‘transpersonal transformation and evolution of consciousness’? As shown above, Grof himself situates spiritual emergency within a broader category of psycho-spiritual crisis. Throughout his career, furthermore, Grof refers to his mapping of the psyche as a mechanism of spiritual emergency. As I wish to draw more attention to the mechanism than to the variety of symptoms, I use ‘spiritual crisis’ in this thesis, in favour of the widely used but limited ‘spiritual emergency’.

The Unconscious: an explanatory framework of spiritual crisis

One of the central ideas that connect the theories of spiritual crisis is the idea that mystical experience and psychosis both arise from the same region beyond our normal waking consciousness in the psyche. In *Spiritual Emergency*, the seminal work on the subject, Grof and Grof (1989) propose a map of the consciousness which is comprised of three realms in terms of modes of awareness and contents of experience. Before examining the Grofian concept of psyche in detail, we will look into the forerunners of such thought and their respective explanations of psychological crisis. It is vital to note that the Grofian map of psyche is grounded on the earlier development of theories of unconscious.

By the end of the 19th century, this idea of areas of the psyche beyond or below our consciousness had been proposed by a number of psychologists such as Pierre Janet, Alfred Binet and Frederic Myers (Ellenberger 1970; Kelly 2007). Later the hypothesis of the unconscious became a seminal ground for the work of Sigmund Freud and that of Carl Jung. Particularly relevant in terms of the historical development of the notion of psychological transformation are William James and Carl Jung.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) James raises the question of the existence of states of consciousness different from those of ‘normal waking consciousness’. He describes the concept of ‘subliminal consciousness’ originally proposed by Frederic Myers, in the following terms:

> [T]here is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether,… (1902, p. 233)

James judged the concept of ‘subliminal consciousness’ to be the most important discovery in psychology he had yet observed. Myers had previously suggested that, with subliminal consciousness, unusual religious experiences such as visions, spiritual ecstasy, and voices could be explained as a psychological process (Ryan, 2010). Agreeing with Myers, James takes as his example an experience of a distinctively unusual state of consciousness which he had after ingesting nitrous oxide. During this fleeting experience, he had ‘an intense metaphysical illumination’ (James, 1882). He equates such an unusual state of consciousness with those states of consciousness he had read about in the accounts of religious mystics. The Mysticism chapter of *Varieties* lists many of James's sources such as his contemporary Bucke's cosmic consciousness, along with Christian, Hindu and Buddhist mystical experience. He also suggests that mystics may be particularly susceptible to such forms of consciousness whereas most of us neither experience nor are normally aware of them.

Instead of considering the state of consciousness he experienced as a mere variation of his normal waking consciousness, James argues that these 'potential forms' of consciousness form a 'subliminal or transmarginal region (p. 426)' of the psyche. From this region of the psyche, both classic examples of mysticism and various allegedly psychotic cases such as possession and demonic visions may arise. Citing Myers "…The Self manifests through the organism; but there is always some part of the Self unmanifested", James proposes that "the subconscious continuation of our conscious life" is the source of religious experience, hence justifying the scientific investigation of religious experience (1902, p. 512).

Whereas William James had placed the source of both mystical and psychotic experiences in transliminal/ transmarginal consciousness, Carl Jung suggests their situation in the unconscious. For Jung, the unconscious connotes more than the alternate states or memories that one is not presently conscious of. Jung (1971) envisions the psyche to consist of three regions: the ego as the centre of one's field of consciousness, normally experienced as the conscious 'I', the personal unconscious of forgotten and repressed memories, and unregistered sense perceptions, and finally, the collective unconscious as the inherited contents of the psyche, common to all humans. Jung (1971) argues that the contents of the collective unconscious, i.e., "mythological associations, motifs and images are… inherited… in the structure of the brain" (p. 156). Frager and Fadiman (2006, p. 64) argue that the unconscious functions from infanthood as a "structure that moulds and channels all further development and interaction with the environment". So it is not just those experiences of mystical and psychopathological nature that are organised by the unconscious.

The sick soul's journey to unification: William James

In this section, I consider the concept of the sick soul as raised by William James (1902/1982) in his work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* I discuss the relevance of the concept to that of spiritual crisis by examining its relation to other themes found in *The Varieties* such as 'the divided self' and 'conversion'. While James does not develop a coherent and explanatory theory on this subject, he does succeed in weaving these themes into an interrelated framework of a process of psychological transformation: 'the divided self' epitomizing the sick soul's 'psychological basis' (1902, p. 167), and 'conversion' the sudden or gradual completion of this process. As the connection between the concept of spiritual crisis and that of the sick soul has not been established in previous literature, I will begin this section by explaining why I find linking these two important and well-justified.

Little influence/appreciation

The Varieties is well-known as one of the earliest works to study religious experience as a psychological process (Hastings 1999). Contrary to its popular success and the recognition it has gained as one of the seminal works in psychology, Wulff (1997) observes that James's descriptive method and concepts in *The Varieties* had little impact on later work in the field of the psychology of religion. In the field of transpersonal psychology, on the other hand, James's approach to personal religious experience, his pioneering of introspection as a research method and his narrative approach have been recognised as a significant contribution (Ryan 2008; Taylor 1996). However, little attention has been given to the notion of the sick soul and its psychological transformation even in this field.

One of the reasons for this may be that the notion of predisposition with its two sub-categories, those of the healthy minded and those of the sick soul, has long been treated in academia as 'a contrast between two conflicting philosophies of life' (Bixler 1924, as appearing in Carrette, 2013, p. 12). Such treatment places those concepts not in the domain of psychology but in that of philosophy (see for example, Taylor 2003). However, as Wulff (1997, p. 490) notes, James delineates the difference between the two types as 'temperament predispositions . . . inborn in persons'. Although James does mention the philosophical and theological implications of such temperaments, our discussion in this thesis will limit itself to the individual predispositions. Wulff (1997, p. 490) presumes that for many readers 'the most memorable theme of *the Varieties'* would be this distinction of types of temperament. The resonance which this concept might have originally had amongst readers has been lost through treating the concept of temperament from a philosophical perspective, thus the absence of attention paid to the emotional, experiential aspects of the description of the sick soul results in the loss of the sense of psychological process in *The Varieties*. By contrast, I treat the concept of the sick soul as one based on psychological experience rather than on philosophical concept, by highlighting the concept of psychological transformation of the sick soul as is made explicit in James's text.

My emphasis on the notion of sick soul in relation to the concept of spiritual crisis draws on a few points regarding James's own life and its relation to *The Varieties*. According to Richardson (2006, p. 83) in his biography of James, James found himself 'on the continual verge of suicide' for many years. His depression, along with his exposure to psychedelics and mystical experience in later years, informed his arguments in the Varieties (Hastings 1999; Horn 1996). For example, James relies on excerpts from his own journal to describe an extreme case of psychological distress of the sick soul under the pseudonym of a French correspondent (James & James 1920/2008, p. 145; see The Varieties, pp. 160-161 for the excerpts provided as examples of depression). This demonstrates the personal significance that the concept of the sick soul carries for him, and the importance of the concept as a description of a phenomenon of psychological transformation in *The Varieties*.

Setting the scene of the concept

James (1902, p.230) argues that man's religious experience is one of his biological functions. He defines religious experience as 'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine (p.31)'. On the basis of the biological and psychological nature of religious experience, James suggests that there are two different types of predisposition by which one perceives oneself, God, and the world: those of the healthy minded and those of the sick soul.

Definition of the healthy minded and the sick soul

According to James, the healthy minded tend to feel deeply 'the goodness of life' (p.79). They view the world and life through an optimistic 'sky-blue (p.80)' lens. Abiding happiness is the evidence for and outcome of such a temperament. Individuals having this temperament seek a union with the divine, and such a goal is achieved through gradual, intentional effort to develop this temperament further. On the other hand, the sick soul is characterised by depression and melancholy. One sees suffering and discordance in oneself and the world. One feels a pang of fear in the midst of pleasure, unknown bitterness and a sense of rejection of life and of God. James suggests that these emotional states arise with an ‘appalling convincingness’, and that they are a profound and permanent experience (p.136). The life of a sick soul is smudged with doubt, fear, and a sense of failure.

What is intriguing in this distinction between these two types of predisposition is that James indicates an innate cause for the temperamental difference which destines the direction in which the individual is to progress. Factors include one’s sensitivity in perceiving discords in oneself and the world (p. 140) and ‘heterogeneous personality’ due to biological inheritance (p. 169).

The healthy minded, also called ‘once-born’ (p. 80) as originally labelled by Francis Newman, do not have to go through a distinctive stage of turmoil to be happy. Their process towards their goal, union with Divine is a case of expanding and/or developing what they already have in their experience and attitude. On the contrary, the sick soul undergoes a period of distress before it can become ‘twice-born’ and happy. Based on inborn psychological factors which force them to perceive discordance in the world and then experience it within themselves, as described in the chapter of ‘The Divided Self’ of *The Varieties*, sick souls are destined to go through a long dark journey of psychological transformation, before eventually reaching a more profound understanding of life than the healthy minded could ever attain.

The sickness

What then is this sickness? One thing to note about the ailment James describes, but does not comment on, is that most of his examples of the sick soul are intellectual male authors, for example, Leo Tolstoy, John Bunyan, and himself in the guise of an anonymous French correspondent. At the core of this ailment seem to lie a rationality and sense of separation from meaning or from the source of meaning. The sick soul experiences psychological distress, manifestations of which range from chronic depression, severe forms of fear and guilt to hallucinations (see James, 1902, lectures 7-

8). James supposes that they are the result of ‘heterogeneous personality’ (p. 169), which in turn may be explained in biological terms.

In terms of how the individual subjectively describes his/her experience, the sickness is divided into three types. The first type, exemplified by Tolstoy, is characterized by a loss of meaning in worldly life with its material and social pursuits and with life in general. The second is typified by those who suffer from an acute sense of their own sinfulness as illustrated by the cases of Bunyan and Saint Augustine. The last type under which James included his own case of ‘panic fear’ (p, 160), is characterized by those who suffer from a thorough loss of meaning and security within and without. It should be noted that these three types are manifested contents of the sickness, in other words, diverse forms of the sick soul’s crisis. As *The Varieties* purports to be a descriptive work, much space is devoted to describing these types, which contributes to clouding James’s interpretive, theorising attempts to posit their psychological cause as mentioned above.

The divided self: the psychological conditions of the sick soul

William James developed his own theory of multiple selves by dividing self into two categories: as *I* ‘self-as-knower’ and *Me* ‘self-as-known’. ‘Me’ as the content of experience is then further divided into three more categories: the material self (body, clothes, house, etc.), the social self (as it is perceived in one’s social relations), and the spiritual self (one’s psychic faculties and dispositions) (Marsh et al. 1992, p.45). These selves form a hierarchy, “with the bodily self at the bottom, the spiritual self at the top, and the extracorporeal material selves and the various social selves between (James, 1890, p.313, cited in Marsh et al., 1992, p.46).” Grounded in this framework, the sick soul’s psychological character is described as ‘discordancy or heterogeneity in the native temperament of the subject, an incompletely unified moral and intellectual constitution’ (1902, p. 167). Therefore, this heterogeneity does not imply something unique found only amongst those of the sick soul predisposition, as his self theory grants some degree of heterogeneity to everyone.

For those with a sick soul predisposition, however, James (1902, p. 169) notes that this discordancy amongst different selves is intensified and causes inner conflicts, havoc in outer life, and sometimes causes in its extreme form even psychosis. Although this discordance can occur between one’s inner life and the exterior environment (p. 186), what James dwells on mainly are the clashes within the individual. James explains this concept of discordancy in terms of an emotional excitement moving between groups and systems of ideas, aims and objects which consist of the various sub-categories of the 'self-as-known', mentioned earlier. While the centre of consciousness is occupied with one group of ideas, another group, contradicting the former, may occupy a peripheral area of conscious awareness. The groups may be in competition or may coexist with each other. By being central, James means that emotional excitement or psychic energy is invested on a particular idea or group of ideas. This differs from the way in which the object of attention shifts each moment. By transformation/ unification, James means that an aim or a system of ideas has become so central and dominant that alteration or competition between aims now ceases to exist (p. 194).

The passage of journey of the sick soul

The journey of the sick soul is primarily 'the process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord' (p. 175) within the general category of the psychological process. James succinctly describes this process of unification of the divided self as 'a firmness, stability, and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and inconsistency' (p. 175), which parallels the working definition of spiritual crisis proposed in the introduction.

Depending on the rate of progress, James (1902, p. 183) suggests that this process may occur gradually (*lysis*) or abruptly (*crisis*). Whether gradual or abrupt, the presence of new intellectual insights and emotional storms would be part of the process. However, the latter, the sudden transformation often entails intense mystical experiences, which will be discussed below.

Conversion

The last stage of the sick soul's journey, conversion, is described as a form of psychological transformation, that is, a process (again sudden or gradual) in which the sick soul gains unification and happiness as a result of attaining a 'firmer hold upon religious realities' (p. 189). Therefore the conversion described in *The Varieties* is irrelevant to the common usage of the word.

James's attention lies mainly with the sudden process of conversion (p.230). Compared to the gradual process of conversion, James suggests, the sudden process or 'conversion crisis' (p. 212) is likelier to yield a more complete psychological transformation. While

James argues that conversion as psychological transformation is a type of growth process, his argument and examples largely focus on those of a sick soul predisposition, who have unstable, active movement of energy within themselves, as described in the section above.

James emphasizes the occurrence of unusual, intense mystical/religious experiences as parts of this transformative process. As mentioned in the introduction, the manner in which transpersonal experiences such as out-of-body experience, altered states of consciousness (whether induced by spiritual practice or psychedelic drugs) have the power to trigger spiritual crisis is a central question in the discussion of spiritual crisis. These experiences are conceptually, and in the sense of psychic energy, so powerful that they leave an indelible mark on the individual's psyche. It is a process which grows deeper and wider until it brings about psychological transformation or initiates such a step. Here, the causal potential lies in the experience itself; a specific experience brings about a responding result to the psyche.

James (1902, p. 209) attempts to explain intense religious experience, as defined at the beginning of this section, within the context of the process of conversion or transformation as following.

> A man's conscious wit and will, so far as they strain towards the ideal, are aiming at something only dimly and inaccurately imagined. Yet all the while the forces of mere organic ripening within him are going on towards their own prefigured result, and his conscious strainings are letting loose subconscious allies behind the scenes, which in their way work towards rearrangement; and the rearrangement towards which all these deeper forces tend is pretty surely definite, and definitely different from what he consciously conceives and determines.

It is contingent on a dynamic of power between the conscious and the subconscious (or the subliminal self) whether or not one has religious experience which with '[its] last acuteness, [and its] touch of explosive intensity ... enables [the individual] to burst [his/her] shell, and make irruption efficaciously into life and quell the lower tendencies forever' (p. 173).

Quoting Starbuck, James (p. 209) states that 'to exercise the personal will is still to live in the region where the imperfect self is the thing most emphasized'. In other words, conversion as psychological process implies that the subconscious or the subliminal self begins to win the power game over the conscious will. So when the subconscious self takes the lead, when 'the new centre of personal energy has been incubated' long enough, it comes to the front, and directs the process as 'the organizing centre' (p.210). At this stage, it becomes necessary to surrender one's idea of one's identity and to accept the course of transformation without resistance.

How does this shift of power from personal will to subconscious forces occur? James offers two hypotheses. Firstly, the latter overpower individual consciousness by sheer force. Secondly, resistance consumes whatever energy the personal will still possesses, and then forces the conscious self to finally give up, without leaving enough energy to care about the result. On arriving at this vacuum state, the subconscious forces take over the process completely.

Even though James suspects that both this kind of transformative process and psychosis may arise due to the subliminal self, he does not provide any distinction between them, other than how the individual is perceived by others (for such evaluation, see chapters on mysticism in *the Varieties*). James suggests that the amount of energy in the subliminal self varies from person to person depending on the development therein. Lastly, an important factor for determining whether a sudden or more gradual progress is likely to occur depends on how actively the subliminal self and conscious self are connected: the more 'leaky' the subconscious is, the more thorough and sudden one's conversion is likely to be (p. 242). Based on these assumptions, James interprets the experience of sudden conversion accompanied by non-ordinary experiences such as vision of light and ecstasy. Likewise, the fact of not having undergone a conversion experience is, for him, an implication of some psychological inhibition that stops the release and expression of the subconsciousness.

Completion of the process

James suggests that the conversion experience which may occur in various forms such as God's revelation, or as a vision of light as well as many others, comes as the culmination of a prolonged, dark journey. It not only opens the individual to a transpersonal perspective, but also compensates and heals the preceding 'sickness'. Thus it marks the entry to a unification of personalities, a complete transformation of the individual.

As the sick soul has been tormented with fear, absence of meaning, and a sense of guilt so strong as to make it contemplate suicide, a condition illustrated by the examples of both Tolstoy and himself, the unification restores the individual to a new life, a new reason and desire to live: ‘something welling up in the inner reaches of [one’s] consciousness, by which extreme sadness could be overcome’ (p. 187). This is not a continuation of the previous life, but ‘a second birth, a deeper kind of conscious being than he could enjoy before’ (p. 157). Nor is the plateau that awaits the soul battered from its journey in any way something similar to the simple happiness of the healthy minded. However, the consciousness is dominated by ‘a force that re-infuses the positive willingness to live, even in full presence of the evil perceptions’ (James, 1902, p. 187).

The extent of such a psychological transformation is expressed in various statements of James such as “the man must die to an unreal life before he can be born into the real life” (1902/1982, p. 165). Although we must be cautious in comparing this transformation to that of ego death, a sense of psychological transformation equal in degree to those cases discussed by Grof (1993, 2012), Assagioli (1989), and Washburn (1994, 2003) amongst others, is clearly present in James’s arguments.

Conclusion

Having reviewed James’s discussion on the psychological transformation of the sick soul, this sickness, one of the central themes of *The Varieties*, may be redefined, borrowing James’s own terms, as an incubation of subconscious forces which occurs regardless of the individual’s conscious will. The principal themes in James’s discussion can be summarised as follows: the subliminal self (which he calls the ‘better self’) initiates, and organises the process of psychological transformation for some people, those who he labels the sick souls; and this process involves various degrees of psychological distress and non-ordinary experiences, until at its successful completion it leads to maturity and insight of an unprecedented degree.

James’s discussion of the sick soul bridges transpersonal psychology and Christian mysticism by describing Christian mystical experience and interpreting it as a biological and psychological process. In typical narratives of spiritual crisis, mystical experience is often described as the trigger of a crisis rather than its epiphanic resolution (See for example, Lukoff 1985; Lukoff et al. 1996; Grof & Grof 1989; Lucas 2011 amongst others).

James’s map of the sick soul’s journey locates religious experience at the culmination of the journey, thus forming a difference from other models discussed in this literature review.

Encountering the Unconscious: Jung

As was mentioned in the section above, James (1902) describes feelings of depression and despair, as a form of existential crisis prevalent amongst a certain type of people, the so-called sick souls. James (1902) proposes the hypothesis that this sickness arises due to psychological traits which all such individuals share. Such traits, he suggests, may be linked to biological explanations such as the difference in temperament of the parents.

Jung's theory of individuation and the unconscious examined in this section locates a form of psychological crisis as part of the conscious ego's natural development. Jung's theory influenced both Assagioli and Grof, whose ideas are also reviewed in this chapter as key concepts of spiritual crisis. His theory also exerted influence on Laing (1976, 1989) and Perry (1989), who both argued that mental illness is the natural process by which the organism integrates traumatic experience and renews itself. They also both contributed to the discussion of spiritual emergency.

Throughout his long career, Jung developed and revised his theories and left an extensive body of work on the subject of the unconscious. This makes any approach to Jung's writing on the subject to some degree partial. Of primary relevance to this thesis is Jung's description of the period of his life when he underwent a withdrawal into his own fantasies and the theorisation he constructed to analyse those experiences. These bear a close affinity to narratives of spiritual crisis. Material relating to changes in his theoretical position towards the end of his life is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter. For example, Jung's interest in reincarnation expressed in his autobiographical account *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961/1996) will not be discussed.

Activation of the unconscious: Jung's creative illness

Jung's unique contribution to the discussion of spiritual crisis centres round his own experience of crisis between 1913 and 1919. These events are relatively well known and documented thanks to the account in *Memories,* and with further details, in *The Red book* published in 2009. During his 'creative illness' (Ellenberger 1970), he experienced dreams and fantasies which included symbols, and autonomous figures of prophets and non-human beings, with whom he conversed through the active engagement of his imagination. He kept detailed records of all these dreams and conversations (Ellenberger 1970; Jung 1961; Shamdasani 2009). These visions laid the groundwork for the later development of his ideas on the psyche, for example, on the unconscious, on individuation and on archetypes that were to distinguish his analytical psychology from that of Freud's psychoanalysis (Shamdasani 2009; Walach 2013). Thus, Jung demonstrated by the example of his own life how a spiritual crisis can lead to a huge leap in the unfolding of one's potential, the implications of which go well beyond the personal.

In *Memories,* Jung defines his crisis as a 'confrontation with the unconscious' (1961/1993) which begins with the release of 'an incessant stream of fantasies' (p. 200) accompanied by a constant tension of colossal proportions. Jung (2009) comments that the experience of his confrontation with the unconscious as recorded in the *Black Books* (unpublished), his journals of those fantasies, and in *the Red Book* (2009) would appear to make a case for his insanity to those unfamiliar with the workings of their unconscious. Jung (1961/1993) further notes that his encounters with the unconscious could indeed have progressed into madness but for an integrative capacity and strength which he had previously developed.

Jung attributes such a sudden release of initially uninterpretable dreams and visions to the activation of his unconscious, a statement which suggests that such a 'confrontation' does not occur all the time. There are times or stages in one's life when the unconscious is activated, and such times force the individual to confront it. Thus, the Jungian concept of spiritual crisis examined in this section can be summarised in terms of how one's unconscious is activated, why such an event occurs, and its implication for one's psychological development.

Considering the structure of the psyche in an chronological order

The Jungian concept of the psyche refers to 'the entire mental apparatus, unconscious as well as conscious' (Vaughan, 2013, p. 144). Jung identified a number of distinctive psychic functions such as ego, persona, shadow, archetypes including anima/animus, mana personality, and the self as well as personal and collective unconscious. Below, I will focus on some of these in their relevance to transformative crisis – 'confrontation with the unconscious'.

The biological aspect of the psyche: the unconscious inherited

Jung’s concept of the unconscious is characterized by a collective quality which functions as an a priori structure of the human psyche. The concept of the collective unconscious has been a controversial one amongst Jungian psychologists (Haule 2011; Nagy 1991; Stevens 1993, 2003; Vaughan 2013). By and large, the controversy lies in the biological dimension of the collective unconscious. This is an important argument in terms of our discussion of spiritual crisis because it determines its course and rationale. To elucidate this point, I quote Jung (1939/1983, p. 223) at length on the origin of the psyche:

> If we examine…the fantasy material…, we find countless archaic and ‘historical’ associations, and images of an archetypal nature….They live and function in the deeper layers of the unconscious, especially in that phylogenetic substratum which I have called the collective unconscious. This localization explains a good deal of their strangeness: they bring into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life belonging to a remote past. It is the mind of our unknown ancestors, their way of thinking and feeling, their way of experiencing life and the world, gods and men. The existence of these archaic strata is presumably the source of men’s belief in reincarnations and in memories of ‘previous existences’. Just as the human body is a museum, so to speak, of its phylogenetic history, so too is the psyche.

In the quote above, Jung argues that the unconscious as a psychic function shared by all human beings exists a priori to the personal unconscious and the consciousness. Along with physical characteristics, the psyche with all its structural elements and functions are inherited from generation to generation through one’s genes. He also suggests that life experiences are inherited through this genetic principle as well. Therefore a large part of the unconscious is proposed to be collective rather than personal. Stevens (1993, 2003) and Haule (2011) amongst others stress Jung’s position on the biological principle of the collective unconscious and the biological dimension underlying the individuation process, i.e., the development of the individual psyche has to date been largely ignored by commentators, in spite of Jung’s consistent position on the biological basis of the collective unconscious. For instance, Jung (1971, p. 156) defines collective unconscious as ‘the inherited possibility of psychic functioning’ and ‘the inherited structure of the brain’. In *Memories* (p. 381) one of his late works, he argues that the human psyche is an outcome of biological evolution.

It is plausible that this conclusion about the biological nature of the psyche enabled Jung to posit the concept of the universal developmental process of the psyche, individuation. And in that universal process of individuation, Jung locates his experience of ‘confrontation of the unconscious’ with all its mythological motifs of dreams and visions.

The ego’s birth & development

The collective unconscious, the innate structure of the psyche and its contents, provides all the directions and rules for the formation of the personal unconscious and the ego. Jung (1961, p. 381) considers the birth of consciousness as the process of differentiation at the level of the species ‘repeated in every child’.

> The psyche of the child in its preconscious state is anything but a *tabula rasa*: it is already formed in a recognisably individual way, and is more over equipped with all the specifically human instincts, as well as with the *a priori* foundations of the higher functions. On this complicated base, the ego arises. (italics original)

The ego gradually forms from birth out of the mass of the unconscious and becomes the experience of ‘I’.

> The ego, the subject of consciousness, comes into existence as a complex quantity which is constituted partly by the inherited disposition (character constituents) and partly by unconsciously acquired impressions and their attendant phenomena. [“Analytical Psychology and Education,” CW 17, par. 169.]

Once the ego has been born out of it, the unconscious refers to ‘all psychic contents and processes that are not conscious, i.e., not related to the ego’ (Jung, 1971, p. 154). As the child’s life proceeds, the unconscious becomes then divided into personal and collective unconscious.

The personal unconscious, according to Jung (1971, p. 156) consists of ‘all the acquisitions of personal life, everything forgotten, repressed, subliminally perceived, thought, felt’. He further states that personal unconscious is primarily the product of interaction between the collective unconscious and the individual’ physical and socio-cultural environment.

In terms of the chronological order in which psychological functions come into existence, the discussion thus far may be summarised as following:

1) the undifferentiated mass of unconscious that the foetus inherits from its parents,
2) the birth of the conscious ego and its subject ‘I’,
3) the ego’s social interaction involving the development of social appearance, persona, and
4) the simultaneous formulation of the shadow from repressed and forgotten material, which forms the personal unconscious.

The four stages above describe the first half of the process of individuation, which he proposes as the development stages of the human psyche throughout its lifespan.

Individuation as the context of facing the unconscious

The further the ego develops, the more separated it comes to feel from its origin, the unconscious. Contents of the collective unconscious are now experienced as mythological images, and motifs regardless of one’s native culture (1961/1993, 1971). However, the ego does not relate to the unconscious as a random collection or array of images. Jung postulates the concept of the self, the totality of psychic phenomena, ‘the unity of the personality as a whole’ (Jung, 1971, p. 131), which provides the purpose of bringing birth to and developing the ego with its conscious experience of life. The self appears to the consciousness as a ‘supraordinate personality’ such as a king or hero in dreams, myths, and fairy tales; and as symbols of totality such as the circle. It is suggested that founders of religions, such as Christ and the Buddha are ‘embodiments of the self’ (1961/1993, p. 309).

Unlike the first half of the process of individuation, the second ‘leads the individual to the discovery of the self’ (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 672), a process that continues throughout one’s entire life. Human life is seen as ‘a series of metamorphoses’ (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 711), which involve critical stages of apparent madness, according to Shamdasani (2009). The process concerns, as Frager and Fadiman (2006, p. 56) summarise, “establishing a connection between the ego and the self”—“the hypothetical point between conscious and unconscious” (CW 1, par. 67 cited in Storr, 1983, p. 16) as the centre of the whole psyche. The shift in the ego’s attitude towards the contents and functions of the unconscious marks ‘the beginning of the second half of the life, when metanoia, a mental transformation, not infrequently occurs’ (Shamdasani, 2009, p. 14).

Activation of the unconscious

Jung (as represented in Shamdasani, 2012, p.58) differentiates between two situations in which the unconscious is triggered to activate: 1) ‘a crisis in an individual’s life and the collapse of hopes and expectations’ and 2) ‘times of great social, political, and religious upheaval’. In the first case, the unconscious initiates the transformative process because ego’ consciousness and its orientation are no longer ‘psychologically/spiritually congruent with one’s developmental needs’ (Aziz, 2007, p. 198).

Jung (1961/1993, pp.199-200) suggests that a dream he had in 1913 of blood flooding over Europe was related to the first World War, and that the rising political tensions of the time may have been a trigger to the explosive release of contents of his unconscious. This aspect of spiritual crisis, an individual experiencing a psychological upheaval which reflects the exterior environment (either through the socio-political background of the time or through some ill-defined process of atmospheric influence), has been little supported by later studies. One of the rare cases would be transpersonal psychologist Bache (2000), in agreement with Jung, suggests that different individuals may to differing degrees be affected by the suffering of the world. Assagioli (1989), Grof and Grof (1989, 1990), Lukoff (1985, 2010), Washburn (1994, 1995) and others deal with spiritual crisis in relation to individual spiritual development, and suggest that its causes or triggers lie mainly within the individual’s psychological and physical boundaries. Narratives found in Clarke (2010), De Waard (2010), Grof and Grof (1989) and Lucas (2010) tend to portray the experience of spiritual crisis in terms of personal context.

Danger in the experience of facing the unconscious

Once activated, the unconscious can cause great upheaval as in Jung’s case mentioned earlier. It throws up to the surface of the consciousness the sort of material that can bewilder, shock, and frighten the ego, and shatter its solid sense of identity and integrity. Because the ego has during its earlier development separated itself from the unconscious, and come to believe itself to be the whole of the psyche, the individual may find it difficult to identify himself or herself with the contents experienced in dreams and visions. Therefore the onset of activation of the unconscious can induce a critical crisis. Jung

(1961/1993) states that it was theoretically possible that he could have fallen victim to psychopathology. Symptoms may appear as worsening neurosis, signaling the need to look into the neglected contents of the unconscious (CW7).

Mythological motifs Jung discusses the difficulties that can arise during individuation and explains the mechanism of this 'negative feeling' by means of mythological motifs which, he argues, describe the journey to maturity and to the whole (Edinger 1991; Grof & Grof 1989; Washburn 1994). For example, in the myth of the night sea journey of the sun, the sun enters the sea in the West and travels towards the East, going through various ordeals along the way (Jung, CW5. par.308-309). Jung (CW16, p455) understood this journey as being symbolic of 'an immersion in the unconscious', and as a motif of the ego's confrontation with the unconscious, in which the sun is submerged by the sea and so undergoes a renewal process (Washburn 1994, 2012). Similarly, the hero (CW5, par. 310) who embarks on a journey is often imprisoned or swallowed by a dragon or a whale (as in the case of Jonah in the *Old Testament*) before returning to this world. According to Jung, these myths:

> represent the complete withdrawal of interest from the outer world. The overcoming of the monster from within is the achievement of adaptation to the conditions of the inner world, and the emergence ("slipping out") of the hero from the monster's belly…, which happens at the moment of sunrise, symbolizes the recommencement of progression ("On Psychic Energy," CW 8, par. 68.).

Washburn (1994, 2012), who has re-interpreted the motif of the night sea journey as a 'regression in the service of transcendence, suggests that hitting the bottom of the sea, i.e., reaching the source of the ego itself brings about insight and renewal of the ego.

As the individual withdraws into the realm of powerful mythological fantasies represented by the metaphor of being swallowed up by the ocean, active engagement with these fantasies is judged to be the way that the ego integrates such unconscious material. Jung underwent his creative illness by 'translat[ing] the emotions into images' or by 'find[ing] images concealed in emotions' (1961/1993, p. 201). He is also said to have conversed with the autonomous figures within these fantasies, demanding that they explain their intentions (Shamdasani, 2009). His aim was to translate an experience of unrecognisable psychic energies into contents of the conscious mind. Although the unconscious holds the initiative in this process, the conscious self can also make choices relating to the process.

A right decision is ‘confirmed by dreams indicative of progress’ whilst a wrong one may result in ‘deadlock, resistance, doubt’ (CW7, para 189)

According to Jung, the principle that underpins both ‘the night sea journey’ and psychological disorder is the same: the unconscious’s ‘attempt to compensate the one-sided conscious attitude’ (Shamdasani, 2009, p. 27).

> The corrective impulses that present themselves in the language of the unconscious should be the beginning of a healing process, but the form in which they break through makes them unacceptable to consciousness.

This enables Jung (1971, p. 121) to assume that the result of ‘confrontation with the unconscious’ is ‘an extension of the sphere of consciousness, an enriching of conscious psychological life’

Archetypes as symbolic images during the night journey

Jung labels the modes of psychic functions ingrained in the psyche archetypes. Archetypes give the dreams and fantasies present during the activation of the unconscious a sequence which indicates progress in the ego’s journey towards the self. All the images arise from the innate archetypes which are not personal but ‘species specific experiences’ (Vaughan, 2013, p. 146), which Jung connects with the universality of mythological motifs found across differing cultures.

Archetypal images are ‘highly charged autonomous centers of power’ (CW7, para 110). Successful integration between the ego and the imagery may bring a transformative effect but equally there are risks of the individual becoming overpowered by them, or identifying him/herself with them. In this lies the danger of confronting one’s own unconscious, which may appear similar to psychopathology (Jung 1961/1993; Shamdasani, 2009)

For example, anima, a female figure for man and animus a male figure for women signify personified imagery of the unconscious, ‘a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious’ (CW9ii, para. 33). Appearance of anima and animus as the opposite sex lies in the ego’s perspective of the unconscious as a complete other. Next, figures of the wise old man/woman which Jung called mana personality personify the self, and identification with this archetype may lead to ego inflation (Ellenberger 1970)

Concluding remarks

In this section, we have seen that Jung’s concept of the phylogenetically formed unconscious underpins his concept of individuation, an individual’s ongoing psychological development. On the whole, individuation describes the emergence of the ego out of the undifferentiated collective unconscious, its development in the social environment, its change in the direction of development towards its origin, and its final return to its origin at death (Ellenberger, 1970). Within this broader conceptual framework, we have also seen that the concept of ‘activation of the unconscious’ is proposed as a critical stage of psychological transformation, which as a developmental stage of the individual transcends the boundary of any given culture.

Descent of the superconscious and the Self: Assagioli

This section considers Roberto Assagioli (1888 – 1974)’s theorization of spiritual crisis drawing on his concept of psychic energy and the constitution of the human psyche. His concept of spiritual crisis can be summarised as an apparently distressing effect resulting from an infusion of spiritual energy that originates from the Higher Self and the Superconscious. In order to clarify this concept, I will first outline Assagioli’s constitutional approach to the psyche.

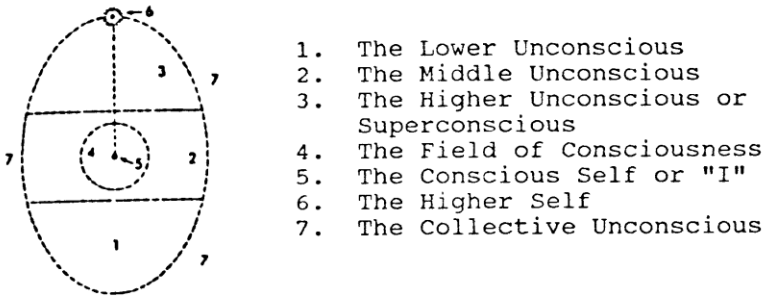
Intro

Assagioli’s theory of psycho-spiritual development both departs from his criticism of, and attempts to integrate, the two major psychodynamic approaches – those of Freud and Jung respectively – with the psychological theories of ancient and recent spiritual traditions (Daniels 2005, 2013; Firman and Gila 2002).

Assagioli (1965, p. 35)’s main criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis is that its ‘exaggerated emphasis on the morbid manifestations and on the lower aspects of human nature’ eventually lead to an unwarranted generalization that it is the true nature of the human psyche. Further, he argues that such a viewpoint results in a disregard for ‘intuition, creativity, the will and the very core of the human psyche- the Self’. As for Jung’s approach, Assagioli criticizes him for not making the necessary distinctions between differing realms of the unconscious – a theme that will be further explored below.

Outline of Assagioli’s model of psyche

The principal characteristic of Assagioli’s model of the psyche is that the personal unconscious is divided into three areas: the lower, the middle, and the higher unconscious. Assagioli himself saw it as an important distinction from Jung’s concept of the unconscious. Dividing the unconscious into areas is to some extent based on judging, in terms of their perceived values, functions, symbols and contents what each part of the unconscious contains. Along with three kinds of individual unconscious, Assagioli posits four further elements that affect the experience and state of the individual psyche as depicted in the diagram below.


6
3
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7
4
5
2
1
7
1. The Lower Unconscious
2. The Middle Unconscious
3. The Higher Unconscious or Superconscious
4. The Field of Consciousness
5. The Conscious Self or "I"
6. The Higher Self
7. The Collective Unconscious

Figure2. Assagioli's diagram of the constitution of the psyche (Assagioli, 1965, p. 17)

Experience of self

In the diagram above, experience of one's own identity, that is, of being oneself and living as oneself, is labelled as the conscious self (the dot in the middle in Figure. 1) and the field of consciousness (4 in Figure. 1). For Assagioli, the conscious self, 'I' is 'the point of pure self-awareness' (1965, p. 18), which in itself does not have any contents or objects. It is also the subject of will and choice. 'I' is immediately surrounded by the field of consciousness which contains the contents of one's experience such as sensations, feelings, and thoughts. This field is also the field in which 'I' practices will and choice (Assagioli, 1974/2002).

The distinction between the conscious self and the field of consciousness is significant for Assagioli. While 'I', the pure awareness is in actuality the observer, the subject who experiences, the agent who affects on objects, it is often submerged in these objects and identifies itself with them. He argues that confusion between the two, that is, the identification of 'I' with an endless array of its objects is the usual, ordinary experience of waking consciousness. In such a state, the individual is oblivious to the meaning or purpose of one's life, which Assagioli sees as the condition of life prior to spiritual awakening, an intervention from the superconscious and the higher Self.

Unconscious

Assagioli (1965, 2007) enunciates four kinds of unconscious which affect the conscious self and its experience, but which the conscious self is normally not aware of.

1) The lower unconscious is related to drives, emotions, dreams and imagination relevant to physical functions and activities, Trauma and emotions that Assagioli regards as inferior, such as fear, anxiety, and sadness belong to this area.

Assagioli (1965) assumes that psychotic symptoms originate from this particular area of unconscious, more specifically, from conflicts between elements within it, rather than from any other parts of the unconscious.

2) The middle unconscious constitutes elements readily available to the consciousness. This middle unconsciousness also processes and assimilates various experiences into the personality, and thus its contents are often mistakenly perceived as the personality of the individual. The middle unconscious gradually expands as the individual becomes familiar with, and ready to integrate, more material from both the lower and the higher unconscious. This expansion is viewed as a harmonious type of psychological development, which Assagioli (1965, 2007) termed personal psychosynthesis.

3) The higher unconscious or superconscious consists of 'higher potentialities, which seek to express themselves, but which we often repel and repress' (Assagioli 1965, as appearing in Firman & Gila, 2002, p. 3). The 'higher psychic functions' (1965, p. 18) of the superconscious include philosophical and artistic intuitions; inspirations; urges to act for an altruistic cause; love and other elated feelings; and mystical experience. Assagioli (1989, p. 30) maintains that these represent '*values* higher than average'—values such as the ethical, the aesthetic, the heroic, the humanitarian, and the altruistic'. However, it is questionable whether the functions of the higher unconscious are fundamentally of a different type from those of the lower and middle unconscious.

4) The three areas mentioned above make up the individual psyche which interacts with other individual psyches and the 'general psychic environment' (1965, p. 19), i.e., which he labels collective unconscious. Assagioli sees the significance of this connection and communication between the individual psyche and the collective unconscious in the sense that no human psyche is an isolated entity. Yet, in his theory of psychological transformation, the collective unconscious is seldom presented as an important factor. Neither has it a role in his discussion of spiritual crisis.

Higher/Transpersonal Self

In Figure 1, the higher Self exuding light is marked on the boundary of the inner psyche and its psychic environment, signifying its universality. According to Assagioli (1965, p. 18-19), the higher Self is not normally directly experienced. Yet it is ‘inferred as the permanent basis of the conscious self’, based on temporary lapses of the conscious self. Regarding a definition of the higher self, as Vargiu (1973, as appearing in Firman and Gila, 2010, p. 155) remarks, ‘the only recourse [may be] to describe what [it] is not’ due to the elusive nature of language and ‘the transcendent nature of the higher self’. For this reason, this concept of the higher self is not as much expounded as other concepts in Assagioli’s works. However, unlike Jung’s concept of self, Assagioli (2007) argues that it can be experienced during transpersonal experience as a state of consciousness which is accompanied by a sense of ‘limitless expansion and a sense of being pervaded by an intense joy and bliss’ (Assagioli, 2007).

Distinction between the higher unconscious and the higher self

In the same way that Assagioli defines the relation between the conscious self and the field of consciousness as that between an awareness and its objects, he distinguishes the relationship between the higher self from the superconscious. However, as the description of the higher self is not as rich as that of the higher unconscious, the misconception has often arisen that the higher self is part of the higher conscious or that the combination of the Self and the higher conscious corresponds to Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious (see Cortright 1997 for example).

While the higher self constantly interacts with the higher unconscious, it transcends all the contents, qualities, and functions that the higher unconscious owns (Firman, 1996). The higher unconscious comprises ‘elements and different types of active, dynamic, changing contents which are involved in the overall flow of psychological life’ (2007, p. 26). Experiences such as peak experiences (Maslow, 1971), cosmic consciousness (Bucke, 1901), or those of ecstasy and illumination found in traditional reports of mystical experience belong to the superconscious (Firman, 1996). Such experiences occur when an awareness of the conscious self rises into the higher unconscious or conversely, when the contents of the higher unconscious descends into the lower area in the diagram of Figure 1 (Assagioli, 1965, p. 38). Likewise, spiritual awakening and spiritual crisis involve the contents of the superconscious (Assagioli, 1966, p. 38).

On the other hand, Assagioli describes the higher Self, as ‘stable, unmoving, [and] unchanging’. To further clarify the difference between the two, Assagioli states that,

> [T]he reaching up into the realm of the superconscious and its exploration, while approaching the consciousness of the Self, may sometimes even constitute an obstacle to full Self-realization (1965, pp. 38-39).

Firman (1996) argues that, despite Assagioli’s stress on the need to distinguish the higher self from the higher unconscious, Assagioli’s diagram and its exposition has been understood to mean that the Self is only in interaction with the higher unconscious and the conscious self, leaving the middle and the lower unconscious outside its influence.

Communication between the self and the Self

The dotted line between the personal self and the Higher Self in Figure 1 depicts the connection between the conscious self and the higher/transpersonal Self. Described as ‘vertical telepathy’ by Assagioli (2007, pp. 75-79), this connection manifests itself as the form of all kinds of spontaneous and creative inspiration, prescience, ‘the urge to perform heroic deeds’ mystical vision (2007, p. 75). Assagioli (1965, 2007) suggests that the channel of communication between the two can be widened on the part of the conscious self by means of various practical methods starting with that of experiencing the conscious self as being independent from its objects.

Firman (1996) suggests that the higher self must be understood to be ‘transcendent and immanent’, rather than simply regarding it as the summit of the superconscious depicted in Figure 1. Firman’s interpretation seems to be a logical introduction because it is this Self that gives the sense of permanent identity, of continued existence to the ‘I’ in Assagioli’s model of the psyche. This contention that the sense of the existence of the ‘I’ is not an illusion but a reflection of a deeper truth of human beings is one of Assagioli’s core assertions. It differentiates his position clearly from that of other theorists of spiritual crisis, because his concept excludes the experience of ego-death.

Outline of spiritual crisis

Assagioli (1965, 2007) defines his model of psychological development as that of the identification of the self with the higher Self, Self-realization. Within the long developmental process during which the conscious self (‘I’) with its central function of will and choice moves up towards the Self, the individuals undergoes transformation in his/her personality. As one becomes more attuned to the psychic functions of the superconscious and previously dormant potentials, ‘new realms’ emerge to the consciousness. All of these bring about a radical ‘transmutation’ in the ‘elements of personality’ (1965, p. 24). To give a general picture of the process, the widened channel between the self and the higher self provides a conduit for contents from the superconscious to flood into the middle conscious, in the form of mystical visions, insight and inspiration, and psychic energies manifesting as emotions thus unleashing abilities so far hidden from the individual’s consciousness.

However, the identification of the conscious self with the higher Self can be experienced as a spontaneous though transient experience. Assagioli seems to use the term ‘spiritual awakening’ to describe the first of this type of experience during which the rhythmic flux of energy from the Self mediated by the superconscious suddenly increases[9]. Accordingly cases of spiritual crisis are explained in terms of the dynamic between the energies flooding in from the Self and the emotional and behavioural patterns and tendencies in the middle and lower unconscious (Assagioli, 1965, 2007).

While the primary mechanism and trigger of spiritual crisis is held to be the in-flooding of material and energy from the higher unconscious, Assagioli’s approach is not very clear about why the sudden increase of flux occurs in the first place.

Another point to note is that, as does James (1902), Assagioli (1989, p. 31) seems to regard the rational, intellectual, critical mind as an important factor in the psychological process of transformation, as he makes the assumption that people of the modern age have a more developed, complex personality and critical mind that makes the process of spiritual development more prone to crisis. He (1965) suggests that particular types of creative people, such as artists and scientists are prone to undergo a particular form of spiritual crisis manifesting itself in the form of aridity and depression. This attitude is also revealed in the strict criteria he draws between psychosis and genuine spiritual crisis, as he argues that genuine spiritual crisis only occurs to those who have had a successful life which implies that they have had a well developed middle consciousness (1965).

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[9] Assagioli (1965, 2007) is not always consistent about whether it is from the Self or from the higher unconscious that this energy originates. In an interview with Sam Keen published in *Psychology Today*, he stresses the ineffability and rarity of the transpersonal experience of the Self and that the knowledge of it is mediated by the higher unconscious.

Definition

Assagioli uses the term ‘spiritual awakening’ to describe a temporary, sudden, abundant influx of psychic content, function, and energy from the superconscious and the Self into the conscious self and the field of consciousness. Such influx of energy does not in itself necessarily cause a crisis. It can result in experiences of joy and the resolution of previous inner conflicts in the form of psychological and physical symptoms. Integrating the light and energy of such an abundance requires both intellectual and emotional development, and a stable nervous system. In other words, Assagioli thus sees two variables which affect the course of spiritual crisis: the amount of energy influx and the ability and readiness of the self to cope with it, i.e., the development of the field of consciousness and the middle unconscious.

A spiritual crisis centred on the influx of energy initiated by the higher Self may appear to put the self in an apparently passive and receptive position. Assagioli (1974/2002, p. 101) argues, however, that the function of awareness, a quality of the self, enables it to actively intervene in the process, and to direct the influx of energy. What descends from the superconscious meets what lies in the middle and lower unconscious, then combines into something new that transcends them in its synthesis, and this process is willed by the self.

Crises preceding spiritual awakening

This form of crisis is akin to an existential crisis which commences with the sudden realization of lack of meaning in one’s life. Its symptoms are similar to those of depression. However, Assagioli argues that feelings of a lack of meaning of life and depression are both triggered by the superconscious and the Self and that they are the result of conflicts between the drives and tendencies already existing within the personality and those emerging from it. At this stage, the influx from the higher unconscious has already begun but it manifests itself as bringing previously unintegrated conflicts and trauma brought back to one’s awareness, thus initiating a psychological turmoil (Assagioli 1965, 1989). This kind of crisis tends to resolve itself through and as a result of a spiritual awakening. [10]

Crises caused by the spiritual awakening

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[10] The issue of psychic energy which was an important topic for Assagioli has been to some extent ignored by his followers (for example, Firman & Gila (2002, p. 50-52) remove the discussion of energy from the superconscious altogether).

The immediate result of spiritual awakening is ‘a sense of joy and mental illumination that brings with it an insight into the meaning and purpose of life’ (1989, p. 37). Such an experience also brings transformation to the personality of the individual, making it more tolerant, loving, and altruistic.

However, Assagioli suggests three kinds of crisis caused by spiritual awakening. Firstly, in an underdeveloped intellect it may cause a ‘confusion of levels’ (1989, p. 35), such as failure to understand the fundamental difference between the conscious self and the Self. The conscious self assumes itself to be the source of the change and newly acquired power, potentially leading to megalomania. Secondly, the incoming energies are absorbed and cause violent and destructive emotional upheavals. On the surface, symptoms may appear ‘regressive’ while such upheaval is bringing an opportunity to heal past trauma (Kaminker & Lukoff 2013).

Crises following spiritual awakening

If such a spiritual awakening is to bring about a permanent transformation in one’s personality, it requires two conditions to be fulfilled: 1) the strength and quantity of energy absorbed from the Self must be sufficient to make the psychological transformation irreversible, and 2) the responsiveness of the conscious self to such energies must be great enough to ensure transformation. However, in most cases, Assagioli (1989) argues, aspects of the previous personality return as the influx of energies (love and light) ceases gradually. With less strong energy and a less responsive personality, personality traits may be temporally transformed. Yet this temporal transformation accompanied by mental illumination leaves one with an image of self-actualization as a goal for future achievement.

Crisis from over-engagement

Integrating the energies entails a learning process. When the individual is drawn intensely to this newly emergent dimension, dwelling on this may disturb the individual in his/her functioning at the physical and social level. On the other hand, Assagioli (1989, p. 44) maintains that previous psychological problems may be aggravated due to ‘an excessive personal effort to hasten higher realizations through the forceful inhibition and repression of the aggressive and sexual drives’ originating from ‘rigid and dualistic moral and religious conceptions’. Even if one consciously drops such attitude or religious faith, unconscious tendencies may still remain.

Denial

One tries to avoid or deny the psychological blocks, tendencies, and trauma revealed by the light of illumination of the Transpersonal Self. Such a fear based reaction may cause additional psychological distress (1989, p. 43).

Sense of bereavement

‘[A]fter the flood-tide of exaltation has passed’ (1989, p. 42), the return to previous psychological conditions may be experienced as a lack of life and meaning and as an abandonment. Assagioli interprets the dark night of the soul of St. John of the Cross as an example of just such a state: ‘the states of dryness and coldness ‘that follow the initial warm, joyful, profoundly felt experiences on the spiritual path’ (2007, p. 33)

Conclusion

Although Assagioli (1965, 2007) stresses the expansion of the middle unconscious through the integration of the lower and higher unconscious as the process of psychological development, his approach is in general recognized as being linear in form (Washburn 1994). Assagioli’s assumption that intellectual development and social success signify the basic conditions necessary for spiritual awakening may be one example of how the linear model is utilized to interpret cases of spiritual crisis.

As Washburn (2003, p. 40) argues, his model is in line with the strict distinction between prepersonal, personal, transpersonal made by Wilber (1993, 1995), in which experience of resurfacing trauma and psychological pain can in principle be regressive. Even if such experience eventually brings about valuable life lessons, meaning is generated by the self’s organizing ability with resources gained from the superconscious. This is where Assagioli’s position is distinguished from theorists such as Jung and Grof amongst others who place fundamental value in revisiting what Assagioli would regard as the lower unconscious.

Grof's holotropic consciousness and the transpersonal

Context, why talk about it

Grof and Grof's concept of spiritual emergency originally drew on phenomenological descriptions of participants' experiences during S. Grof's psychotherapies. These used LSD and hyperventilation combined with music to induce altered states of consciousness, which Grof (1975, 1985, 1993) calls holotropic consciousness. Grof's theory on consciousness and the human psyche will be discussed for the following two reasons. Firstly, Grof and Grof (1989, 1990) posit the three levels of the psyche as the inner map of spiritual emergency, and these levels draw on S. Grof's research into holotropic consciousness. Secondly, Grof argues for an interconnection between 'an episode of spontaneous psychospiritual crisis' (spiritual emergency rephrased in 1993, p. 14) and holotropic consciousness: one can trigger the other, and vice versa.

Holotropic consciousness

Grof (1988, pp. 38-39) labels ordinary waking consciousness which relates to one's everyday experience of consensus reality as the hylotropic (hylos: matter, trepein: moving toward in Greek) mode of consciousness. Hylotropic consciousness is limited by spatial and temporal conditions, by the sensitivity of the sensory organs, and by the physicality of the environment. Therefore one experiences:

> oneself "as a solid physical entity", world as made of separate objects, time linear, space three-dimensional, all events governed by chains of cause and effect, … experience[s] only the present moment and the present location ("here and now") in the phenomenal world of consensual reality as it changes from one second to another (1988, p. 239).

The holotropic (holos: whole) mode of consciousness, by which Grof refers to non-ordinary consciousness, is equivalent to states of consciousness experienced during meditation and mystical experience in traditional spirituality and also during some states of psychosis. Grof criticises the term 'altered states of consciousness' as used by Tart, pointing out that it does not reflect the nature of these states, i.e., their tendency to expand towards the whole. In this state of consciousness, one's experience of oneself and the environment tend not to be confined by the characteristics that define hylotropic consciousness. Bache (2002) argues that the experience of holotropic consciousness offers a significant challenge to mainstream psychological and philosophical understandings of human nature. Firstly, in that one's awareness may expand chronologically giving one access to memories of intra-uterine and birth experience, to individual past lives, and even visions into the future. Secondly, experience of the holotropic state tends to 'transcend the boundaries of the body/ego' and enables the individual to experience and participate in the collective unconscious (Grof, 2010, p. 100). Grof (1975, 1985, 1988, 2012) lists collective human history as well as identification with other creatures, planets, and the universe as such instances. Grof (1988) argues that the two modes of consciousness (hylotropic and holotropic) complement each other and that it is necessary to 'acknowledge both aspects of one's being, cultivate them, and become familiar and comfortable with both of them' for psychospiritual development (1988, p. 271).

How this relates to psychological distresses and psychogenic symptoms

While the two modes of consciousness are complementary, Grof (1988, 1993, 2000, 2012) tends to regard the levels of psyche accessible through holotropic consciousness as cause and what is manifest in the hylotropic state as effect (Howe, 2006). Bache (2002) comments that the holotropic states underlie the processes of the waking consciousness. Conceptualisation of spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof, 1989, 1990) as reviewed earlier was made possible based on this hypothesis.

Grof (1988, p. 241) argues that when the individual is neither able to consciously integrate nor fully suppress 'a holotropic theme that is trying to emerge into consciousness', the 'hybrid' state between this emerging material and the hylotropic experience of the world may cause psychogenic symptoms. Inducing holotropic states of consciousness can provide an opportunity to heal these symptoms. Grof & Bennet (1993, p. 241) use the metaphor of an 'inner radar system' to describe the tendency of holotropic consciousness to pursue what is most relevant to the individual's given psychological or psychosomatic issues and 'the most powerful emotional charges and [to] bring the material associated with them into consciousness where they can be resolved'.

The three levels of the psyche

Grof and Grof (1989, p. 8-13) argue that the content of psychological and physical symptoms of spiritual emergency is divided into three categories, reflecting the cartography of the unconscious: the biographical, the perinatal and the transpersonal.

The biographical

The first area to become commonly accessible for many during holotropic breathwork or psycholytic therapy is ‘the recollective or biographical level (1993, p.21) which contains memories from one’s early years. Even though the emerging material may have been previously forgotten or repressed, Grof (1993, 2008, 2012) argues that manoeuvring through this realm is relatively easy compared to the other two realms, as the formative effect of childhood is well accepted in psychology. Bache (2002, p. 52) also identifies this area with the well chartered domain of most psychotherapies including those based on Freudian and Jungian psychodynamics. For this reason, the biographical level is not the main area of exploration of Grof’s research and has been little discussed.

However, one’s psychological and psychosomatic symptoms often provide a point of departure for a journey into the holotropic mind (see for example, description of cases 1985, 1993) through the clusters of emotions, memories and images that resonate together there. Grof calls these clusters systems of condensed experiences (COEX). Contrary to what Howe (2006, p. 25) concludes, the application of COEX systems as ‘archetypal manifestations’ is not limited to its role as ‘organizing principle of the memories and fantasies from one’s life from birth until the present’ (see for the example of clarifications, Bache 2002, Grof 2013). Therefore, this concept will be introduced after the three levels have been discussed, as a concept that crosses over the three levels.

The perinatal

The concept of the perinatal was inferred from the fact that most clients in Grof’s therapies reported experiences often identified with trauma from their biological birth (1975, 1993). Grof (2013, p. 100) explains the term ‘perinatal’ as describing the consecutive stages of biological birth.

I: ‘the advanced prenatal state just before the onset of the delivery’
II: ‘the first stage of the birth process’, … before the cervix is open
III: ‘after the uterine cervix dilates’
IV: the moment of birth

However, reliving these stages during therapeutic sessions led Grof to propose Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs) as patterns of emotional experience associated with each stage of delivery above. The experience of revisiting one’s birth is, Grof (1993, 2013) argues, accompanied by intense emotions and unexpected physical manifestations (for example, sensations, contortions and changes in postures, etc.) Experience of the four perinatal stages revolves around the motifs of death and rebirth as experienced from the perspective of the foetus. These begin with the undisturbed intrauterine satisfaction of BPM I; then continue with the despair and fear caused by a sudden premonitions of death and the anxiety that there is no exit in BPM II; the intense struggle and suffering with violence experienced in BPM III; and finally, being born into the light and love in BPM IV.

The experience of one’s birth is, Grof (1975, 1985, 1993, 2012) argues, actually stored in one’s unconscious. Grof (1993) further argues that the traumatic aspect of birth with its four stages forms a ‘psychospiritual blueprint’ for the way the newborn baby later experiences its life. Bache (2002, p. 54) comments that the perinatal level ‘represents the experiential frontier between the personal and the transpersonal’. Grof (2013) argues that this level delineates the boundary of the individual psyche.

Archetypal nature of the perinatal

The description above characterises experience of the perinatal as ‘a context of profound existential and spiritual crisis’ (Tarnas, 1990) at the level of the individual psyche. However, another significant property claimed for the perinatal by Grof (2013, p. 100) is that ‘each of [perinatal matrices] represents a selective opening into the domains of the historical and archetypal collective unconscious, which contain motifs of similar experiential quality’. Tarnas (1990) stresses the archetypal nature of the perinatal in terms of ‘autonomous patterns of meaning that structure and inhere in both psyche and matter’. Another advocate of the concept, Bache (2002) emphasises that experience of the perinatal dimension enables the individual psyche to participate in the collective unconscious, and to share/identify the collective experience that resonates the motifs in the BPM sequences. Bache (2002) argues, drawing on the examples of his own and others’ experience, that the disappearance of the ego-barrier at the perinatal level brings about an expansion of awareness of collective experience, in particular, that of collective suffering, while retaining one’s individual sense of identity.

Connection with spiritual crisis

Unlike the way in which actual birth experiences affect one’s life, reliving the perinatal stages (whether the individual’s own birth as a baby or the archetypal death/rebirth motif) from BPM I to IV during a therapeutic session is considered to have a tremendous therapeutic potential by many holotropic breathwork practitioners and participants (Bache, 2002, Grof, 1975, 1993, 2012, 2013).

BPM II and III are associated with experiences such as premonition, the fear of self-annihilation, the despair of finding no exit from the existential predicament, and the absence of meaning in existence. Further pathological symptoms, Grof (1993) argues, may manifest themselves as claustrophobia, chronic depression, alcoholism, and drug addiction for BPM II; aggression and sexual disorder for BPM III. The existential crisis culminating in ego-death experienced at the end of BPM III is then transformed into an ecstatic joy and sense of union, with the rebirth in BPM IV. Consequently, experiencing the ideal, full sequence of BPM is regarded as being crucial in order to rid oneself of psychological disorders such as paranoia, and undermine the defensive way in which one relates to painful memories.

However, failure to complete the entire course of the four matrices during a therapeutic session may, according to Grof and Bache, result in enacting the motifs of BPM II and III which leads to an acute form of spiritual crisis. Grof (1993, p. 78) suggests that such moments of crisis arising within the therapeutic session need to be worked through in order to integrate unresolved issues from the BPM III stage, and reach the BPM IV stage where ‘rebirth is experienced in its pure form, as a quiet rapture complete with serenity and tranquillity’.

The transpersonal

As Bache (2002) has noted while discussing the difficulty of categorizing experiences at the transpersonal level, Grof has largely been inclined to compile rich and diverse descriptions of the transpersonal level rather than provide them with an ontological hierarchy. To summarise the main claims made by Grof, the nature of consciousness in this realm is infinite, unlimited by the physical laws of time and space, and independent of human existence (1992, 2013). Nevertheless, Grof (1998, 2012, 2013) suggests three experiential regions:

1) an expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the everyday conceptions of time and space and the sense of identity associated with one’s body, for

example, past life memories, collective experience (ancestral, racial, and of species),

2) a collective unconscious, archetypal, including mythical motifs that permeate all ages and cultures, and
3) the realm of the Universal Mind or Cosmic Consciousness, the creative principle of the universe,' 'Primordial Emptiness,' 'Nothingness that is conscious of itself'.

Grof (2013) argues that these transpersonal realms of consciousness are consistent with linear developmental models, for example, the spectrum of consciousness model by Wilber (Wilber, 1980), as well as those found in Hinduism and Buddhism. Grof (1998, 2012, 2013) proposes a monistic solution to the apparent duality of consciousness and matter, that consciousness is the ground of all beings, and that individual consciousness is part of it and is at the same time itself.

COEX

This section considers Grof's concept of systems of condensed experience (COEX systems), the mechanism that determines how the individual psyche relates to the two levels of holotropic realms: the perinatal, relating to birth experience and the archetypal dimension of the death-rebirth motif, and the transpersonal with its individual, collective, and primordial aspects. This concept of COEX systems is significant for this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, the chronological extension of holotropic consciousness beyond the ego boundary incorporates the Buddhist and Hindu concept of reincarnation and so provides a theoretical foundation that can meet Tibetan Buddhists' view of life. Secondly, the concept of COEX is an attempt to explain the origin of non-organic based psychological disorders.

Defintion

According to Grof (1993, p.24), the psyche stores memories of both psychological and physical experience and external events 'in the form of complex constellations'. Bache (2002) and Howe (2006) add fantasies to the set of experiences which are stored in these constellations. Each cluster of memories and fantasies share common emotional theme(s) and/or physical sensations, and are accumulated over many life times of an individual (Bache, 2002, Grof, 1993, 3000). As Howe (2006) suggests, the idea of COEX is influenced by Jung's concept of complexes. For the purpose of this section, a brief quote of Jung's will be sufficient.

> The feeling-tone common to all individual ideas hold them within a complex. Complexes, as Jung conceptualised, 'can become autonomous, that is, not under the control of the ego, and resist and subvert the conscious intentions of the individual often to the point of being 'possessed' by them (1931a, pars 923-928, as appearing in Cope 2006, p. 113).

Like Jung's complexes, COEX systems accumulate layer on layer of memories and fantasies without much influence from individual waking consciousness. As they are emotionally indexed, activation of a COEX system influences the conscious processes as they create a core memory from a present event (Howe 2006). This autonomous nature, beyond the control of the conscious ego is a significant characteristic of COEX as an organising principle.

The main difference between the two concepts lies not in their behaviour but in their origin. Woolger (1988, cited in Howe, 2006, p. 161-2) noted, while comparing Jungian complexes with Grofian COEX systems, how discussing past lives isolated him from the Jungian analytical circle. The idea that these clusters of emotionally indexed memories may have their origins far beyond the genesis of the present body of an individual, Bache (2002) argues, contradicts the premise shared by mainstream psychology and psychiatry, that the individual psyche is causally dependent on the individual body. The concept of COEX in turn is based on the assumption that, if individual consciousness does reincarnate between lives, experiences from each life (whether all or some of them) are stored and carried at the level of the individual unconscious. It must be noted, however, that accepting the concept of reincarnation does not entail that one subscribes to the idea that memories pass on from one life to another. For example, Wilber (1990) amongst others deny such a possibility. I review below how Grof discusses this transference of memories.

From the biographical to the perinatal, and to the transpersonal

Grof argues that (2013, p. 104-5) ''emotional and psychosomatic disorders' without 'an organic basis' may have been their origin in a COEX system, contents of which range across the three levels of experience in the holotropic states of consciousness. To make the discussion clearer, I will use one of Grof's numerous reports (1975, 1987, 2000, 2013) as an example.

The case (Grof, 2013, p. 106-107) concerned here is that of a male client who participated in Grof's holotropic therapy sessions. The client had been suffering from a chronic shoulder pain. During the session, he re-experiences three events that share the theme of choking and pain in a shoulder. Firstly, a biographical event, that of a traumatizing incident that nearly choked him to death in his childhood; then a perinatal experience of his birth when one of his shoulders became stuck behind his mother's pelvic bone causing complications with the delivery; and finally, a transpersonal event which he recognise as the death of his previous incarnation. During this event, he re-experiences being choked by his own blood from a wound. After revisiting this drama of death, the participant's shoulder pain is healed. Grof identifies this personal memory as the ultimate cause of the symptom.

In the case above, three apparently unrelated memories (or supposedly memories) are connected as part of a COEX system. Grof argues that the unconscious material associated with the symptom manifests itself on the surface as an injury in the biographical level including that happened during childhood; in the perinatal (complication of birth); and in the transpersonal as a wound and the ensuing death as experienced during a past life. Grof further argues that the characteristics of disorders caused by COEX systems as multilevel dynamic constellations are determined by the nature of the emotional and physical feelings involved. Howe (2006, p. 28) argues that the relationship between the three levels described above portrays a developmental order.

> [T]he transpersonal layer exists before the perinatal layer. A particular experience from outside the life of the individual sets up a particular perinatal influence that then influences the biographical level. For instance, a past life sets up a particular trauma in biological birth that then creates some sensitivity that impacts a child's early attachment to caregivers and ultimately the development of a negative COEX system.

However, past life memories are merely one part of the transpersonal. Grof (1993, 2013) argues that COEX systems organize the individual unconscious drawing elements not only from past lives but also from archetypes of the collective unconscious, other life forms and universal processes. Bache (2002) argues that the degree to which the collective unconscious process and archetypal patterns influences the individual psyche varies widely. He further holds that some individuals may be more prone than others to suffer during holotropic sessions or to develop chronic or acute psychological disorders.

Critique & Summary

The discussions above may be summarised as following: Grof posits three levels of the unconscious, which can be explored in states of holotropic consciousness. The three levels are organised by COEX systems, which may be spontaneously enacted triggering spiritual crisis or chronic psychological disorders. Based on this theory, Grof and Grof (1989, 1990) assimilated various types of phenomena under the category of psychospiritual crisis. Further, they suggested that becoming aware of the unconscious material of the COEX system relevant to the patient's psychological and psychosomatic disorder may function as a cure to the disorder. However, what Grof seems to have demonstrated is an intimate relation between memories and potential memories which resonate with a common emotional theme around a certain psychological experience. What remains to be proved are the causal and curative functions of the COEX system. In addition, Grof's concepts of COEX systems and BPMs are state specific, that is to say, experiencing them is largely limited to holotropic states of consciousness. Generalizing these concepts beyond his theories of states of consciousness, as shown by the inclusion of alcohol and drug addiction to the list of varieties of spiritual emergency, remains still to be justified.

Conclusive remarks for the chapter

I have reviewed four theoretical positions of the mechanism of spiritual crisis. These propositions share certain characteristics in terms of how elements in their theory relate to one another, while they are grounded in various metaphysical assumptions. All of the four theorists reviewed point to areas of psyche, areas that are outside the conscious self/ego, as the source for the cause of spiritual crisis: subconscious and psychic energy found therein (James), the unconscious and its prefigured course, the higher self and its energy (Assagioli), and the perinatal and the transpersonal (Grof).

Amongst these, James's concept of the subconscious appears to represent the mere totality of what the conscious self is unaware of within the perimeter of the individual psyche. We have seen that James views occurrences of the 'soul's sickness' (spiritual crisis) to be temperamentally determined. Consequently, only people with more contradictory selves/values undergo ‘sickness’. On the other hand, the Jungian concept of the unconscious, from the outset, has biological grounds. For Jung, the unconscious begins its life when the biological life of the individual begins. It has its own biologically prefigured course of development, as does the body, which is termed individuation. Within this life-long developmental process, confrontation with the unconscious, considered as being equivalent to spiritual crisis in this thesis, is located as a turning point at the apex of the ego’s development. This view turns the prospect of the experience of confronting one’s unconscious into a universal phenomenon open to all individuals – as far as an individual is able to reach the level of ego-development required.

Unlike the two theorists discussed above, Assagioli and Grof suggest – though largely implicitly – a non-biological, spiritual origin of the unconscious. The metaphysical stance each adopts entails conceptualisations of spiritual crisis entirely different from those of James and Jung. James’s notion of psychic energy clashing between contradictory selves, is described by Assagioli as originating from the higher self – source of the conscious self. The mythic motifs that dominate elements of confrontation with the unconscious are regarded by Grof to be not only part of one’s phylogenetic inheritance but also past life memories and information acquired through resonation between one’s consciousness and the transpersonal realm in the exterior world whose extent is that of the universe.

We have seen that James and Assagioli view psychic energy as being the decisive factor in initiating a spiritual crisis. James relates it to psychological symptoms such as intense psychological turmoil, depression, panic and a loss of meaning – be it pertaining to one’s own life or to the world in general[11]. The disparate selves/values do not cause a crisis by themselves. It is the intense flow of energy amongst them that creates ‘the sickness’. However, the distance/contradiction between selves may contribute to the increase of the flow of energy, Therefore, the resolution or healing of the crisis is viewed as resulting from a change in the dynamics of psychic energy (see the section on ‘conversion’, pp. 35-37 of this thesis). On the other hand, Assagioli’s opinion of the origin of this energy differs from that of James. For Assagioli who proposes a hierarchical model of psyche, the energy may primarily become a cause of acute psychotic symptoms only when it is absorbed by contents in the lower unconscious. From this perspective, Jungian and Grofian mythical and/or emotional (COEX related) motifs are only the medium through which psychic energy is experienced. We have seen that, for Jung and Grof, the motif's dissimilarity to the world which the conscious self inhabits is its fundamental aspect because the motif represents what the conscious self is not, and, accordingly, is not pathological in itself.

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[11] The more acute symptoms such as hallucination and hearing voices are treated peripherally in the *Varieties*.

Thus far I have reviewed four psychological positions that contribute to the formation of the discussion of spiritual crisis in terms of the mechanisms of spiritual crisis. In spite of all the similarities of their theorisations, it must again be noted that the positions of Assagioli and Grof, seminal contributors to the discussion of spiritual crisis, differ from those of James and Jung, in that they make the assumption that the higher self and the transpersonal transcend the boundary of the physical body. It may not be too unreasonable to say therefore that this assumption is the very factor which enables them to locate symptoms of psychological distress and of psychosis on a broad map of transpersonal/psycho-spiritual development. In the next chapter I will consider and explore Tibetan Buddhism and discuss the difficulties as well as potential of finding similar theorisations of spiritual crisis.

Chapter 2

Tibetan Buddhism and spiritual crisis

This chapter begins by reviewing the way in which Buddhism has been received by psychology in general and by transpersonal psychology in particular. In order to clarify the position taken in this thesis, I respond to questions: in what manner Buddhism can be treated as a system of psychological theories, and why this thesis treats Buddhist religious doctrine as one element in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhist culture, not the context itself.

Following that, I consider Buddhist doctrinal concepts of spiritual development and point out the seeming lack therein of a concept analogous to that of spiritual crisis. Lastly, the question of how the theme of spiritual crisis is portrayed in Buddhist hagiography and traditional accounts of near-death experience is discussed. It is my intention and hope that, by identifying the chasm between the doctrinal map of spiritual development and the hazards of the individual journey, I will be able to demonstrate the need to explore individual Buddhist's narratives of spiritual journey for the purpose of exploring the concept of spiritual crisis within Tibetan Buddhist culture.

Statement

MacIntyre (1985/1992, p. 897) observes that psychology as the 'study of human thinking, feeling, acting, and interacting, …has itself…brought into being new ways of thinking, feeling, acting and interacting'. As a new mode of human self-knowledge, MacIntyre elaborates, psychology has both competed and come into conflict with other forms of such knowledge, for example, theology and literature. He further contends that the conflict between disciplines mainly arises from the fact that psychology, by providing 'new models for self-knowledge', brings 'a partially new self for [people] to have knowledge of', and thus makes itself appear to truthfully represent the nature of the human mind.

McIntyre's reflections on psychology's ambivalent role as a tool to understand the human mind and as a prescriptive system that people submit to is reminiscent of the role of Buddhism as both a medium of self-knowledge for Buddhists and as a matrix of cultural contexts that shapes their ‘thinking, feeling, acting, and interacting’. It is this aspect of the role that Buddhism plays for Buddhists that grounds this thesis in its treatment of Buddhism as an assembly of psychological theories with its own strengths, weaknesses and inconsistencies. In other words, this thesis does not treat Buddhist doctrinal concepts as theories that are generated and debated empirically and experimentally as happens in Western psychologies.

Buddhism in psychology

Since Buddhism was first introduced to the West, the psychological implications of its doctrines have been emphasized. McMahan (2008, p. 52) unsympathetically observes that the Rhys Davids, the celebrated translators of early Buddhist texts from Pāli, presented Buddhism as a ‘science of mind’ and ‘an ethical psychology’. Jung saw a connection between his depth-psychological concept of archetypes and the world of Tibetan Buddhist deities (Preece, 2006). Therefore, the deities encountered by the deceased’s mind after physical death as described in the famous text *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, were interpreted as ‘archetypes in the collective unconscious’ being enacted in the process of dying (McMahan, 2008, p. 53).

Amongst humanistic psychologists, Fromm (1950/1978, pp. 18-19) has argued that Buddhism distinguishes itself from Christianity through its absence of ‘the theistic-supernatural concepts as stages in human development’, and is thus better positioned to share the ‘aim of human development’ as had been proposed by Freud: ‘knowledge (logos), brotherly love, reduction of suffering, independence and responsibility. He (Ibid, p. 38) goes on to argue that Buddhism as ‘humanistic religion is centred round man and his strength’ and that the Buddha’s teachings relate to ‘the truth about his existence’ postulated by means of reason. Smith (1991, as appearing in Wallace & Shapiro, 2006, p. 690) also maintains that Buddhism is ‘the ‘most psychological of all spiritual traditions’ and that Buddhism has developed methods for ‘cultivating exceptional states of mental well-being as well as identifying and treating problems of the mind’. Similarly, Trungpa (1975) and Goleman (2004) amongst others argue that Buddhism as expounded for example in the early Buddhist *Abhidharma* texts, has established both a detailed taxonomy of human emotions and psychological functions, and a developmental map of temporary states and more stable stages in psycho-spiritual development.

Such enthusiasm has broadly manifested itself in two major trends within psychology: firstly, associating Buddhist meditative disciplines with psychological wellbeing, and secondly, interpreting Buddhist doctrines of the spiritual path as developmental psychology. In the fields of psychotherapy and neuroscience, there has been great interest in the effects of meditation including mindfulness,[12] *zen*, and a number of Tibetan Buddhist meditative techniques. Various types of mindfulness meditation were remodelled to fit a secular context (e.g., Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) and have been tested for their effect in terms of psychological and physical wellbeing (Carlson, Speca, Patel, & Goodey, 2004; Davidson & Harrington, 2002; Davidson, Kabat-Zinn, Schumacher, Rosenkranz, Muller, & Santorelli, 2003 amongst others); of their effects on brain (see for example, Cahn & Polich 2006, 2009; Cahn, Delorme & Polich, 2013). Research has focused on areas such as the enhancement of perception and the increase of empathy (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998; Walsh 2005).

The psychotherapeutic effect of meditation has often been associated with states of consciousness induced by meditation that differ from those of usual waking consciousness (Engler 1986; Brown & Engler 1986). Shapiro and Walsh (2007) amongst others have argued that Buddhist meditation may have the potential to enhance psychological wellbeing and make it more stable. According to this approach, the Buddhist ideal of enlightenment is sometimes presented in terms of wellbeing, as proposed by Wallace and Shapiro (2006, p. 691):

> Buddhism promotes an ideal state of well-being that results from freeing the mind of its afflictive tendencies and obscurations and from realizing one's fullest potential in terms of wisdom, and creativity.

This presentation of the doctrinal ideal as a potential for consciousness has also been pronounced in the dialogue between Tibetan Buddhism and consciousness studies (Blackmore 2003; Varela et al, 1991; Wallace 2006, 2007). Similarly, Wilber (1977/1993, 1981, 1986, 2000, 2006) has assimilated Buddhist doctrines on meditation and the stages of spiritual development into his theorization of the spectrum of the human mind through its developmental stages.

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[12] *Sati*, translated either as mindfulness or as awareness is a component of most meditative techniques expounded by the Buddhist schools. However, mindfulness techniques which have proved popular as methods for stress-reduction in clinical settings and for personal growth are based on the south-east Asian Buddhist traditions of Myanmar and Thailand.

Criticism

Introducing Buddhist concepts and meditation techniques into psychology has often been criticised for being part of a process of Buddhist modernization. Criticism from both within and without psychology ranges from a radical position which denies any psychological implication at all to Buddhism (see, for example, Lopez, 2008; Sharf, 1995b); to one that accuses the psychologization of Buddhism of severing it from its theology, metaphysical beliefs and rituals (Lopez, 1998; McMahan, 2008); and to the reprimand of the failure to recognise the diversity of traditions and theories within the general label of Buddhism (Sharf, 1995a; Berkhin & Hartelius, 2011).

McMahan (2008, p. 6) argues that modern Buddhism 'emerged out of an engagement with the dominant cultural and intellectual forces of modernity', the foremost result of which is, according to McMahan, the psychologization of Buddhism, as briefly reviewed above. To some degrees this thesis shares the concerns of critics such as McMahan (2008) and Lopez (1998) who state that the process of modernizing and psychologising Buddhism has deemphasized and marginalized its ritual and religious elements.

Another aspect of such modernization is, as Sharf (1995a, p. 44) has pointed out when discussing the celebrated Japanese Buddhist scholar and zen master, D. T. Suzuki and his promotion of Zen in Japan and America, that each force has tended to 'posit a distinction between the 'essence' of a religious tradition and its 'cultural manifestations'. Sharf (1995a, 1995b) condemns Suzuki for presenting Buddhism as a psychological system, 'identifying the essence as a type of experience' (1995a, p. 45) and thus promoting zen as a meditative discipline and the definitive form of Buddhism. Sharf expands his criticism to include Buddhist textual studies, arguing that they assume that 'meditational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life' (Conze, 1956, p. 11, as appearing in Sharf, 1995b, p. 230). 'The supposition that the original expression of a religious teaching most perfectly reflects its unvarying essence' (Sharf 1995a, p. 44) gives exclusive authority to the doctrinal texts, thus to the traditional elite Buddhists who have access to them, and further to the Western Buddhists who feel superior to the traditional native Buddhists in that regard (Nattier, 1997; Tori, 2006).

Looking at Tibetan Buddhism in particular, Lopez (1998) argues that Buddhist and Tibetan studies have tended to romanticise Tibet, projecting upon it what the West perceives it lacks in itself (Lopez 1998). Lopez's book title, *Prisoners of Shangrila* encapsulates his opinion that the West has idealised Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism as a cure for the Western malaise of spiritual privation, and in doing so has locked Tibet and Tibetans in the image of a pure and sacred Other. Thus, the marginalisation of ritual and mythology has resulted in a suppression of the voices of native Buddhists whose religious life is largely defined by those elements.

However, the position taken in this thesis departs from these criticisms in several ways. While Sharf (1995a, 1995b) and others' disapproval of the presentation of Buddhism as a homogeneous entity may be warranted, it is unjustifiable to deny the significant position placed on mystical experience in the Buddhist tradition simply by drawing conclusions from the situation of Japanese Buddhist society at the beginning of the 20th century. Sharf (1995b) argues that the pursuit of mystical experience has never been the major feature of Buddhist monastic practice. However, it is equally true that it has never lost its position of great significance in Buddhist monastic culture. For example, in Tibet, hermitages for solitary meditators, run either individually or by monasteries, have long been central to the country's Buddhist traditions. Furthermore, political conflicts and doctrinal debates between text oriented and meditation oriented approaches to the tradition are found throughout the history of Buddhist cultures. By rejecting the 'phenomenological approach' as a form of 'projection and transference in the study of Buddhism', Sharf (1995b, p. 232) falls victim to the very same fallacy for which he has criticized Suzuki, namely, he posits a definitive Buddhism which may be abundant with rituals, metaphysical beliefs, and pseudo-psychological, prescriptive concepts but which is shorn of any practical and/or valid implications for the human mind.

Furthermore, such criticisms seem to be based on the assumption that the West is rational (Ouroussoff, 1993), and on their insistence on limiting discussion to a very particular definition of psychology as a discipline which neither includes transpersonal psychology nor reflects many qualitative research methods that are increasingly used in the field. While Sharf, Lopez, and McMahan criticize the West for psychologising Buddhism, they do not mention the numerous Buddhist centres in the West where manuals of rituals, images of deities, and ontological beliefs in Buddhism are faithfully re-created.

Criticism from within psychology

In the section above, I have introduced certain criticisms regarding the different ways in which Buddhism has been psychologised, and have clarified which arguments this thesis reflects and what assumptions it rejects. From within psychology, the need for a more nuanced, informed, and vigorous approach has been asserted by many. Walsh and Shapiro (2006) amongst others have argued that the multiphasic characteristic of the meditative disciplines such as Buddhism needs to be considered in contrast to the conceptualisation of most psychological theories that resort to the concept of the waking state of consciousness. Kornfield (1993), Rubin (1996), and Wilber (2006) amongst others argue that meditative discipline aimed at inducing different states of consciousness cannot ensure psychological wellbeing and personal growth. They suggest that meditative disciplines in themselves are limited in value to a holistic method for personal growth. They base their conclusion on the behavioural issues of certain Tibetan and Zen Buddhist teachers in the West. Within transpersonal psychology, Friedman (2009, 2010) in his criticism of approaches such as those of Wallace and Shapiro (2006) maintains that psychologists have ‘romanticized’ Buddhist meditation, mindfulness in particular, and have uncritically imported faith assumptions inherent in Buddhism. Berkhin and Hartelius (2011) argue that Buddhist concepts from varying sub branches of Buddhism have been presented in a manner lacking due differentiation and that this has resulted in their being misinterpreted.

Buddhist doctrines of spiritual development

In this section, I introduce several Buddhist concepts of spiritual development as elements – though predominant ones – of Tibetan Buddhist culture which forms the conceptual context by which Tibetan Buddhists make sense of their experience. We will be returning to some of these to discuss how they function as relevant conceptual lenses for the participants' experience in chapters five to eight. The focus of our presentation in this section, however, is on pointing out the absence of concepts of spontaneous crisis embedded in doctrinal concepts of spiritual development.

The gap between what Buddhists experience in their religious practice and meditation and what Buddhist tenets proclaim in terms of meditation has often been problematized. For example, in the discipline of Buddhist studies, Buswell and Gimello (1992, as appearing in Sharf, 1995b, p. 240) suggest that theories of the spiritual path (*mārga* in Sanskrit, *lam* in Tibetan) may have little relevance to the experience and problems which one may encounter in spiritual life. They cautiously argue that theories of spiritual paths may 'apply only analogically and normatively, prompting students to mould their own life experiences according to the ideals of their religious heritage'.

The theories map the paths, yet whether each individual seeker treads the intended paths or reaches the correct milestones and what they encounter along the journey is left largely unexplored. One way of understanding this gap is to attribute it to the traditional taboo on sharing one's experiences with those who have not taken the same vows as oneself regarding practice (Urban, 2003, Welbon, 1987). Another is to treat the individual stages set in the Buddhist path as marking distant destinations where human potential can be realized, as was done by early Buddhologists such as Conze (1954) and by Wilber (2000, 2006) who integrated the path theories into his own expansive metaphysical system. If the former method overemphasizes the manifest religious facts and thus denies the path theories their legitimacy as conceptualizations of human psycho-spiritual development, the latter tends to remain oblivious of the gap altogether.[13]

In the following section, concepts will be presented in light of the arguments introduced above along with some further contextual information. This is required because they do not exert equal amounts of influence over the Geluk tradition of Tibetan Buddhism to which most of my participants belong, as will be discussed further in chapter four. Also the discussion in this section will be limited to exoteric Buddhist concepts of spiritual development as a general context of background to the formulation of my research question.

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[13] It may be this very gap that enables Wilber (1996) to deny Grof's concept of the perinatal (and those reports from which Grof evidenced his theory) any claim of validity arguing that no wisdom tradition ever mentioned such experience when chartering spiritual development.

Differing concepts of stages of spiritual development and states of consciousness

Buddhist history has seen many competing and/or complementary systems and hierarchies of spiritual development proposed over a period of two millennia. Earlier systems and ideals were often incorporated into later systems which located the former somewhere on the part of progress culminating in the newly proposed ideal. For instance, the notion of *arahant* the spiritual ideal model of early Buddhism lost its position at the top of the spiritual hierarchy to the bodhisattva in later Mahayana Buddhism.

Four stages

The prominent tendency to propose more complicated and expansive hierarchies of stages began sometime after the Buddha passed away. In the Buddha's own times, for example, a few hundred disciples supposedly became fully enlightened *arahants*. Within a few centuries of the Buddha's death, however, becoming an *arahant* had ceased to be an achievable goal for ordinary people in one lifetime. The gradual progress culminating in enlightenment was set over many rebirths and was held to consist of four saintly stages of the path (*magga* in Pāli):

1) the path of the one who has just entered the path (*sotāpanna*),
2) the path of the one who needs to be reborn in the human realm only once more (*sakadāgāmi*),
3) the path of the non-returner (*amāgāmi*), the one who can be born in the realm of the gods to achieve enlightenment there, and lastly,
4) the path of the *arahant* who achieves enlightenment in this lifetime (Keown & Prebish, 2009, p. 37).

However with the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism, this initial expansion with its absence of detailed descriptions of the attainments achieved at each stage was greatly expanded to include stages and requirements that take numerous life-times to achieve (Snellgrove, 1987/2002, Williams 1989).

Five paths and ten *bodhisattva bhūmis* (stages)

Developmental stages of the path as systematized in Mahayana Buddhism and currently proposed in the various Tibetan traditions consist of five broad stages that commence with one's awakening *bodhicitta,* the aspiration to be enlightened, and conclude with one's becoming a buddha. One thing to be noted is that experience of enlightenment (*nirvana*) which is what defined the historical Buddha as a buddha is now posited as a fleeting experience, a state of consciousness. Consequently the ultimate goal of spiritual development is now presented as the achievement of buddhahood as reflected in the Tibetan term *sang-gé* (*sangs rgyas*) the translation of the Sanskrit word buddha, which in its literal Tibetan translation means 'fully purified and fully expanded'.

Practitioners on the path to this final destination are labelled *bodhisattvas*. *Bodhi* means enlightenment, and *sattva* means 'being'.[14] *Bodhisattva thus refers to* a person who has succeeded in generating *bodhicitta*, the wish to achieve enlightenment (*bodhi*) for the benefit of all beings in the entire universe. The progress of the bodhisattva systematized as five consecutive paths (*mārga* in Sanskrit, *lam* in Tibetan) are listed below.

The first stage, the path of accumulation (*saṃbhāramārga*) is distinguished by the arising of *bodhicitta*. This stage requires two kinds of merits to be produced without limit: 'virtuous deeds and attitudes, which produce corresponding good karmic results and positive mental states', moral virtues (positive karma) and a deepening understanding of life, which is traditionally achieved through doctrinal study (Powers, 1995, p. 93).

Secondly, the path of preparation (*prayogamārga*) which involves achieving meditative absorption (*shamata*), by means of which, one develops an intuitive understanding (*vipasyana*) of the nature of mind. In addition to these, one is required to increase one's conceptual understanding of emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality as defined by Mahayana Buddhism, in order to reduce one's fear of it (Powers, 1995). It is not clearly stated in the doctrines whether 'fear' here indicates the meditator's emotional reaction to the experience of emptiness or whether it indicates falling into a theoretical position of nihilism, a position that has traditionally drawn criticism in Mahayana Buddhism.

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[14] The term itself is found in early Buddhist texts in reference to the period in the Buddha's life prior to his enlightenment as well as to his past lives.

The third stage, the path of seeing (darśanamārga) is distinguished by the realization or direct perception of emptiness. From this stage upwards, one is regarded to have become a bodhisattva.

The fourth stage, the path of cultivation (bhāvanamārga) consists of a further nine bodhisattva stages[15] in which consciousness and personality undergo fine readjustments.

Finally, one reaches the path of no-more-learning (aśaikṣamārga), which is equated with becoming a fully enlightened buddha.

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[15] The system of the five paths and that of the ten bodhisattva stages (*bhūmi* in Sanskrit, *sa* in Tibetan) historically developed independently, although they here are presented in a combined form. The ten stages with associated virtues to be perfected are as follows:

Path of seeing: Pramuditā (Joyful): Perfection of generosity.
Path of Cultivation: Vimalā (immaculate): Perfection of morality (represented as vows),
Prabhākarī (Luminous): Perfection of patience,
Arciṣmatī (Radiant): Perfection of effort,
Sudurjayā (Difficult to conquer): Perfection of meditative absorption,
Abhimukī (Face to face): Perfection of wisdom
Dūraṅgamā (Far going): Perfection of skilful means
Acalā (Immovable): Perfection of aspiration
Sādhumatī (Good intelligence): Perfection of strength
Dharmameghā (Cloud of dharma): Perfection of gnosis

What is distinctive about the descriptions of the *bodhisattva* stages is that each is associated with the perfection (*pāramitā* in Sanskrit) of a particular virtue. When progressive stages are juxtaposed together, it is extremely difficult to make out how each virtue can be understood as a refinement of the previous one and why virtues need to be perfected in consecutive order. This has posed a problem in the case of trying to understand these stages as milestones of actual meditative experience and as individual psycho-spiritual development (see for example Williams 1989/2009).

Supposing that these paths do correlate with the highly developed mindset of mystics, one of the problems in treating them as psychological descriptions is that they are not found as individual accounts (Sharf, 1995b), hence have been neither demonstrated nor refuted.

Three types proposed in Lamrim system

These stages of spiritual development applying to advanced meditators are then in turn presented within a more general system of *Lamrim* (meaning stages of the spiritual path in Tibetan), a kind of typology which is applied to everyone and which utilizes a broader definition of the spiritual path that is able to locate non-Buddhist doctrines within its compass. The habit of categorizing people, if one translates literally, into those of small capacity, those of middle capacity, and those of the greatest capacity was originally popularized by an Indian mystic and scholar Atisha (980-1054) in his work, *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhipathapradīpa).* One of the most influential exegeses of this text remains that of Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) who laid the theoretical foundation for the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism (as will be seen in chapter four, data was obtained from lay and monastic members of this tradition).

The first type of people, those with small capacity, is described as having an understanding of, or having conviction of the truth of, rebirth and karma. Accordingly, they try to lead a moral life producing ‘positive karma’ that will result in a future birth in an environment materially and/or spiritually better conditioned than the present. Hindu practitioners and lay Buddhists are classed as belonging to this category. People of a middling capacity are categorised as those who question the meaning of the endless cycle of rebirths the individual is bound to undergo, and who engage in spiritual practice and vigorous intellectual pursuit in order to free themselves from rebirth. This category is widely accepted to be the Mahayana evaluation of the *arahant* of early Buddhism and the South-East Asian Buddhist branches. The third category, those of the greatest capacity, refers to people who set as their goal the liberation of all others from the cycle of endless, meaningless, and painful rebirth, in other words, achieving enlightenment for the benefit of others, as described above in the section about paths for the bodhisattva. Traditionally, followers of Mahayana Buddhism are automatically placed in this category. Thus the five paths including the ten stages of bodhisattva development are situated within this category of spiritual development.

However, when applied to the setting of contemporary religious teaching, this typology has been used as stages of individual spiritual development. For example, in recent years the Dalai Lama has stressed in his sermons the need to ground one's practice according to explanations from the path of people of small capacity as described in Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise* (2000). Yet this aspect of *Lamrim* barely appears in its printed presentations. Chapter eight will consider a meaning of spiritual awakening in this sense.

The highly systematized understanding of spiritual development presented above provides the general perspective for the Buddhist meditators' spiritual journey whether they follow the exoteric or the esoteric path (Williams, 1989). Nowhere in this system does the kind of spontaneous spiritual awakening or sudden emergence of a spiritual dimension as reviewed in chapter one appear.

Concepts of karma and rebirth[16]

The lists of paths and stages introduced above are not accepted by all Buddhist traditions. However, no branch of Buddhism denies the concepts of rebirth and karma, which causally underlie the continuity of consciousness between incarnations necessary to become a buddha (Rahula, 1997).

At the same time, it cannot be said that these notions have necessarily been taken for granted in Buddhism. Buddhist texts dealing with the Buddha's life describe a number of situations during which the Buddha was asked questions by his disciples and opponents about the nature of the universe, of the self, and of the difference between the consciousness of ordinary individuals and the enlightened. To these questions the Buddha remained silent, which has traditionally been interpreted as a response in accordance with 'the mental attitude and philosophical presuppositions of the questioner'

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[16] In chapter one, I have mentioned issues raised by Bache (2002) and Grof (1993, 2000) amongst others in terms of the experience of past lives. As seen in the literature review, Grof (1993, 2000, 2012)'s concept of COEX (condensed experiences) system/motif/constellation is an attempt to explain the human psyche based on the assumption that the human mind reincarnates over many life times and that experiences from previous incarnations affect the present incarnation of the individual. In spite of an apparent similarity with Jung's concept of complexes, COEX system is primarily a question of the chronologically expanded individual psyche. Grof's claim that memories of past lives can be accessed in states of holotropic consciousness has faced criticism from Wilber (1996) who regards claims of memories of past lives as a case of mistaking personal experience with non-personal information stored in the atmosphere.

(Cabezon, 1994, p. 177, Hwang, 2006). The silence has also been understood as emphasizing the importance of meditative practice over metaphysical speculation (See Olson, 2005, for an account in which the Buddha's disciple Malunkyaputta demands answers to such questions, but the Buddha responds with a metaphor of a patient refusing a cure while demanding to know the cause of his illness). The concepts of karma and rebirth and their apparent incongruence with the doctrine of no-self instigated a prolonged process aimed at legitimizing their metaphysical status: if there is no self as proclaimed by the Buddha, what is the relationship between the agent of an action and the recipient of its result; and, how can spiritual development over many life times be logically possible?

Karma is a Sanskrit word which literally means 'action' or 'deeds', but is also understood in a Buddhist context as 'intention'. The concept of karma is intimately interwoven with the concept of reincarnation, that the individual is the recipient of the consequences of his or her previous actions/intentions performed in the past including in former lives (Powers, 2007, 2008). The combination of karma and rebirth posits a dualistic metaphysical position on the nature of the mind-body relation, as noted by Rhie and Thurman (1999, p. 495) below.

> Karma specifically means mental/verbal/physical action which has life-affecting, eventually life-constituting consequences. The modern materialistic worldview considers the structures of our present lifetimes to have been caused by the genetic re-embodiment of the encoded experiences of billions of previous members of our species, through the biological evolution. The Buddhist worldview considers the structures of our present lifetimes to be caused by the spiritually genetic re-embodiment of our own experiences from billions of previous lifetimes, subtly encoded in a spiritual gene we bring with us into the womb, there combined with the physical genes we receive from our parents, in a complex process of interconnected spiritual/physical/ biological evolution.

Rhie and Thurman's adoption of biological terms such as 'genes' and 'evolution' in describing the concept of karma is a typical example of modernizing and psychologgizing Buddhism. Yet it delivers the ontological dualism inherent in Buddhist rebirth theory very effectively. According to a Tibetan version, karma is transferred from one life to another by a clear light mind, which is considered to be the primordial state of the human mind (Tenzin Gyatso & Berzin, 1997). Whether this clear light mind is identical with the enlightened mind or is also an ever-changing mental continuum is a topic of debate amongst Tibetan Buddhist elites that has had little impact on most Tibetans. In order to form a bridge between this immaterial clear light and the physical human body, Tibetan Buddhism posits the existence of a subtle element of air/wind (*rlung* in Tibetan). In traditional Tibetan medicine, the concept of wind, *rlung* as a major humour that characterises one of the temperaments, is used as a diagnostic explanation for a variety of illnesses ranging from headaches to psychotic disorders (Clifford, 1984).

The popular idea of karma is akin to basic forms of cause and effect, focusing on deeds rather than underlying intentions. In the *Pathama Māhānāma sutta* favoured by one of the South-East Asian Buddhist traditions, the Buddha stresses that the individual's karmic sum cannot be interfered with by others. He does this by means of an analogy of stones sinking in the river and butter floating up to the surface. This understanding that each individual 'experience[s] . . . the effect of karma [that he/she] has accumulated either in previous lives or earlier in this life' (Kelsang Gyatso, 1992, p. 23) summarises the concept of karma as it has been typically understood in the West.

The Unconscious? Ālayavijñāna, kun-gzhi-rnam-shes

The questions of what is reborn and what is carried forward to future lives are central to the concepts of karma and rebirth. Buddhist tradition has explained and defended the concept of karma as a causal principle of the mind operating from moment to moment and as a mechanism for rebirth by positing a substratum flow of consciousness. Early Buddhism proposed a 'ground of becoming' (bhavaṅga) as the base of all mental activities. It was described as a luminosity which meditators could experience by calming the mind and bringing all thoughts to a halt (Wallace, 2005).

The continuity of consciousness (in spite of its momentary arising and disappearing) warranted by bhavaṅga was later regarded to be inconsistent with the orthodox doctrinal position on consciousness taken by early Buddhist theory. Traditionally early Buddhism posited six categories of human consciousness: one for each of the five sensory functions (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) and then a further one for internal mental faculties such as emotion and thought. The overall consciousness, encompassing all the six categories, is classed as one of the five elements that constitute an individual: matter, sensations, conceptual representations, volitions and consciousness.

In the fifth century the Mind-Only school of Indian Buddhism proposed the concept of a base or storage consciousness (Skt. ālayavijñāna, Tib. kun-gzhi-rnam-shes) as a means to explain latent psychological dispositions (Germano & Waldron, 2005, Hopkins, 1983/1996, Wallace, 2005). The same school also proposed another type of consciousness called afflicted mind (Skt. kliṣhṭamanas, Tib. nyon yid). This consciousness identifies itself with all psychic functions and phenomena, and experiences itself as 'I' (Hopkins, 1983/1996). Therefore, the egoic tendency of the human mind that had previously been described as a misconceived representation based on fundamental ignorance is now posited as an independent psychic function.[17]

In terms of unconscious contents and unrecognised psychic functions, ālayavijñāna theory states that each *karma* (intention including wishes, interests, emotions) is stored as a seed which remains latent until it meets the right external and internal conditions necessary for it to become manifest. In terms of spiritual development, the concept of an ālayavijñāna storing all the seeds of one's karma is treated as 'a potency predisposing the individual to certain paths and allowing the attainment of states that never existed before in the mental continuum' (Hopkins, 1983/1996, p. 383).

Another question regarding the nature of ālayavijñāna is its relation to the individual's potential to become a buddha. Buddhist causal theory clearly states that each result needs a cause that shares the same characteristic. A variety of mental activities as seeds can contribute to spiritual progress but they are not the right seeds for becoming a buddha, i.e., possessing the character of buddha nature. The Mind-Only school describes ālayavijñāna, the store consciousness either as the seed of buddhahood in itself, or as intrinsically containing the seed (Hopkins, 1983/1996, Snellgrove, 1987/2002, Wallace 2005).

The affinity between ego-inflation as described by Assagioli (1965) and Grof (1993, 1989) and warnings made in terms of bhavaṅga and ālayavijñāna is noteworthy. Buddhist texts warn meditators against mistaking the experience of bhavaṅga for that of enlightenment. Similarly, the Mind-Only school suggests that ego-inflation and/or the false conclusion of asserting a permanent self may arise when the afflicted mind or I-consciousness identifies itself with the ālayavijñāna during meditation (Hopkins, 1983, 1996, Germano & Waldron, 2006).

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[17] As a passing remark, it remains a matter of dispute whether these concepts were solely posited for exegetic purpose (Kapstein, 2001/2003) or were based on the theorists' own meditative experiences as the school's other name *yogacarya* (yoga practitioners) might suggest.

In this section, I have reviewed the concept of ālayavijñāna as being a Buddhist equivalent to the unconscious. Historically, however, the concept of ālayavijñāna was held to be heretical by most of the other Buddhist schools (Snellgrove 1987/2002, Williams1998). The irony is that, while criticizing the concept for being a disguised form of Hindu substantialism, Buddhist traditions have continued to accept it though under different names. For instance, clear light mind is the term currently used in the Geluk tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

In Tibetan Buddhism the term is currently used only by the Nyingma tradition and with a different meaning. Capriles (2000) and Wangyal (2002) state that, according to both Dzogchen, the mystical system in Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and the non-Buddhist Bon religion of Tibet, *kunzhi* (the Tibetan translation of *ālaya*) refers to the universal ground of all phenomena. Thus ālayavijñāna refers to a state of consciousness, or more exactly 'a disposition to know the base or zhi (gzhi) as object' (Capriles, 2000, p.175). On the other hand, a concept analogous to that of ālayavijñāna is found in that of the clear light mind that is accepted by all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Hookham, 1991). The distinction between the two is that, according to Geluk tradition (Tenzin Gyatso & Berzin, 1997, p. 238), ālayavijñāna is described as 'the source of impure phenomena', and the clear light mind 'the source of pure appearances'. However, it is questionable how consistently such a distinction is ever applied as Tibetan Buddhism also uses the term of clear light mind to describe the death process of unenlightened people (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* being a well known example).

Amongst the concepts so far encountered regarding the stages of spiritual development, karma and rebirth, and Buddhist equivalents of the unconscious, none has been suggested as having any kind of reference to spiritual crisis. As seen above, discussion of ālayavijñāna, as the substratum of all conscious and emotional experience, does not involve any crisis, and is largely centred round the task of explaining conscious experience. Even the ego inflation mentioned above is not described as being linked to any psychological disorders. Instead, warnings focus on the potential for meditators to subscribe falsely to the doctrine of a permanent Self. The term 'self sufficient person' (Hopkins, 1983/1996, p. 384) associated with the negative outcome of such error suggests that the dangers were viewed as those of falling into the doctrinal fallacies (from the Buddhist perspective) of Hinduism, traditional opponent in doctrinal disputes. Following this unsuccessful attempt to find concepts relevant to spiritual crisis within the doctrinal system, a later section of this chapter turns to Buddhist hagiographies in order to locate the concept of spiritual crisis within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Interactive karma

Understanding karma as linear cause and effect tends to amount to the idea that the totality of karma that is carried/ transferred/ stored within an individual is a closed structure. This impression gained from early Buddhist texts and path theories is challenged with different understandings which underscore some aspects of Buddhist ritual.

Transfer of merit (Skt. *pariṇāmanā* , Tib. *yons su bsno ba*) is a ceremony or prayer that marks the end of any meditation, ritual, religious teachings or any other form of religiously virtuous activity, in which the person performing the ritual wishes to donate to others (a particular person, but often, all living beings) any potential virtue from the particular activities one has just completed. It should be noted that wishing being an intention is considered an act, thus creating a type of karma traditionally regarded as positive – generosity. While Western Buddhologists such as Gethin (1998), Ruegg (2004) and Williams (1989) amongst others consider this contradictory to the general rule of karmic retribution, they do not think such a dedication of one's positive *karma* to others can have any implication beyond developing altruistic, non-self-centred motivations in the one who donates the *karma*. However, for many Tibetans, both monastically trained and lay, the ritual is performed, that is, the wish is made on the assumption that one's intentional act can have a real impact on others' psychological wellbeing and spiritual progress. Another example is that of death rituals which include various religious activities performed to facilitate the transference of the individual consciousness and associated *karma* to a more advantageous rebirth, and to mitigate the effect of the deceased person's negative karma (Dargyay, 1986). Occasionally, the mechanism of such transference is explained in terms of intentionally sending out subtle psychic energy in a practice that draws from the discipline of esoteric meditation (Berzin 2012).

Accepting karma and past life experience

In chapter one, past life experience was mentioned as a trigger of spiritual crisis. The concepts of karma and rebirth, though central to their doctrinal understanding of life and their traditional religious practices, do not necessarily mean that Tibetan Buddhists have access to past life memories. The Buddha is said to have remembered a long succession of past lives on the night of his enlightenment (Conze, 1954). In some early Buddhist texts in Pali, instructions on meditation regarding the recollection of one's memories of past lives have been found (Anālayo, 2006, Thanissaro, 1998). This is described as being a result of meditative absorption, which seems to concur with Grof's claim that such memories are available in states of holotropic consciousness. However, in Tibetan Buddhism, such practice is not widely accepted although adepts may have spontaneous memories of past lives (or visions interpreted as such), as attested by the Dalai Lama (Luisi, 2009).

Tibetan Buddhist hagiographic and others textual sources

In this section, I will review certain Buddhist hagiographic narratives and other types of text which appear relevant to the concept of spiritual crisis. Unlike doctrinal treatises which are devoid of their authors' personal testimonials of meditative experience (Sharf, 1995b), hagiographic literature draws from motifs of personal experience. This apparent contradiction may have its origins in the cultural ambivalence observed by Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle (2013) that, while publicizing one's own experiences of esoteric practice is tabooed, the recognition of a recluse as a highly achieved master and revering him is not.

While introducing the Buddhist doctrinal theories of spiritual development, I stressed that concepts have been proposed at varying points during the historical development of Buddhism and that these concepts may contradict each other. When we consider concepts within Tibetan Buddhist culture, we find that there is a great diversity of notions regarding the human psyche. For example, the Tibetan concept of *la* (*bla*), best translated as soul, is one of the three physiological principles underlying Tibetan medicine, together with 'respiratory breath' (dbugs) and 'vital force' (srog) (Karmay, 1998, p. 310). *La* can leave the body and wander, or even be stolen by demons or malicious spirits. While it is widely accepted that *la* is a pre-Buddhist concept and that Buddhist doctrines do not accept it, rituals dealing with *la* are commonly practiced by Buddhist adepts and lamas. Furthermore, *la* is described as permeating the body through the medium of breath/air, which suggests a close parallel with the description of the deepest nature of mind posited in Tibetan Buddhism, the clear light mind carried by air/wind (*rlung*). The division and distinction between Buddhist doctrines and pre-Buddhist, aka shamanic, beliefs and practices are not always clearly delineated.[18] This illustrates the complexity of ideas and practices which make up the lives and experiences of native Buddhists as well as highlighting the potential disparity between Buddhism as practiced by Buddhists and the manner in which it is doctrinally presented.

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[18] I have personally witnessed a ritual for calling back the lost la (bla) of a girl who was believed by her family to have been possessed by several souls of her deceased relatives and who was diagnosed with schizophrenia by her psychiatrist. The ritual was performed by a highly revered ascetic named Amtin in a monastic community in India belong to the Drugpa Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

Buddhist hagiographies describe the accounts of the lives of saintly figures including their realisation of the Buddhist ideal (the renunciation of worldly affairs and the enlightenment) and the attainment of the supra-mundane wisdom and supernatural powers (Cook, 2009). In order to convey such themes, these accounts are interwoven with various cultural elements and beliefs that are excluded from scholastic literature. In addition to hagiographic accounts, I will discuss Tibetan accounts of near-death experience based on the list of forms of spiritual emergency suggested by Grof and Grof (1989, pp. 13-14), as listed in the section under Grof's concept of spiritual emergency.

It is important to note that the texts discussed in this section are not autobiographies but narratives that developed over a long period, in some case several centuries. Karetzky (1992) and Roberts (2007) have suggested that hagiographic tales are often symbolic reconstructions with contradictory elements existing between various versions, and that they have undergone revisions over time. Considering the formation of these texts, any reference to personal experience mentioned below can only allude to themes or motifs communicated through the stories, not to any lived experience of a historical individual per se. However, regardless of the historical veracity of the events they describe, the narratives still indicate whether and where such meaning can be located within Tibetan Buddhist culture.

The four signs and Mara in the Buddha's life story

In chapter one, we have seen that James (1902) and Assagioli (1965) suggested that existential crisis experienced as loss of meaning in life, depression, and/or psychosomatic symptoms may precede a spiritual awakening. Similarly, this seems to be a central theme of one of the accounts of the Buddha's life. Buddhist tradition provides an account of four particular signs that led Siddhartha (as the Buddha was called before his enlightenment) to ask questions about the meaning of life and eventually to leave his family behind in a quest for such meaning. The story of the four signs according to tradition can be summarised as follows (based on Karetzky, 1992; Kewon, 2003; Olson, 2005; Thomas 1931/1999):

> During his early years, Siddhartha was confined to the luxurious residence of his father who was concerned about a prophecy that Siddhartha would become either a great king or a great sage, and that seeing the four signs of aging, illness, death, and the spiritual path would lead him to becoming a sage. One day Siddhartha sneaks out and manages to leave home on a chariot. During his outing, he encounters a frail old man. On subsequent outings,

> he encounters an ill person in pain, a corpse, and a wandering yogi. For the first time, the fragility of the human condition dawns on him. When Siddhartha expresses his wish to leave home to search for an answer, his father does his best to stop him. Then, one night he finds himself awake in the middle of the sleeping women in his harem. He has a vision in which the bodies of the women look like corpses, bare bones sticking out and puss and blood dripping. He finally decides the life he has been leading is meaningless and resolves to leave it. He flees one night.

In the summary above, I have removed details of divine intervention such as the plotting between gods and the deployment of the signs, as well as conversations between deities and Siddhartha which are common to the traditional texts. Instead, Siddhartha is presented as a young man whose awareness has just begun to outreach the influence of his father. His sense of despair in, and disgust with, his life are accentuated together with an urgent need to find raison d'être, which will mark the beginning of his journey.

Another moment of Siddhartha's life relevant to the concept of spiritual crisis is the one known as the attack from Mara, the Lord of death, whose name can be literally translated as either killer or death (Olson 2006; Powers 2007). Unlike the account of the four signs as a moment of existential crisis heralding a spiritual journey, Mara's attack is a vision of the cosmic battle that precedes Siddhartha's transformation into the Buddha, the Awakened one. According to tradition, Siddhartha grew disillusioned with ascetic practices and accepted a bowl of food from a village girl. Because of that, he was abandoned by his fellow ascetics. One evening he took a seat beneath a tree, and resolved not to leave that place until he had achieved enlightenment. Mara initiated his attack by sending an army of demons to frighten Siddhartha. When this failed, he tried to frighten him with natural disasters, then sent his daughters to seduce him. Finally when all else failed, Mara challenged Siddhartha by claiming that it is Mara himself who is qualified for enlightenment, which is attested to by his entire army. Siddhartha then touched the ground and asked the goddess of the earth to bear witness to all the qualifications that he had earned during his previous life times. In response, the goddess of the earth caused an earthquake. Only then did Mara admit his defeat and leave. Siddhartha now proceeded through a series of deeper states of meditative absorption, which led him ultimately to a 'right perception' of the nature of life, and to the recollection of all his past lives.

Traditional Buddhists tend to interpret this account literally and treat Mara as an entity who personifies evil (Powers, 2007), death and samsara – the entirety of the universe conceived as an endless migration of beings in chains (Keown, 2003, p. 173). Powers (2007, p. 28) suggests a psychological interpretation of Mara as ‘a symbol of suffering’, and representation of all kinds of ‘unenlightened states of mind’.

However, Mara is not completely vanquished for he will appear in front of the Buddha again. For example, Mara tries to tempt the Buddha into entering ‘parinirvana’ – an enlightened state of mind combined with physical death (Keown, 2003, p. 193). Based on Mara’s ongoing appearances in the Buddha’s life, Batchelor (2011, p. 250) suggests that Mara represents a shadow (in the Jungian sense) that ‘haunts the Buddha’ throughout his life as an opposing psychic force.

Whether or not Mara is a literary device symbolizing suffering and/or death, an external, non-physical entity, or a personification of Siddhartha’s own shadow, an intriguing question is raised: even after experiencing altered states of consciousness through practicing meditation and asceticism for years, and only several hours prior to crossing the threshold to enlightenment, Siddhartha is tormented by visions of attacking armies, torrential storms and sexual temptation as well as by doubts about his worthiness to complete the task that he has set himself. From the perspective of Buddhist doctrinal path theory, as reviewed in the previous section, bodhisattvas close to the final stage of No-more-learning are supposed to be already devoid of emotional struggles (kleshavarana). Wilber (1996), in his criticism of Grof’s concept of the perinatal, argues that perinatal experiences and those associated with COEX systems arise in the astral realm, a level between the physical and the transpersonal. Wilber’s adaptation of Buddhist path theory also fails to provide any plausible explanation of how Siddhartha with his highly developed consciousness could have undergone an experience in the astral realm – a much lower stage according to his system – with its visions of cosmic battles. Siddhartha’s visionary experience appears rather to have a link with the concept of the transpersonal as proposed by Grof (1973, 1993, 2000).

Yeshe Tsogyal’s hagiography

Caroline Lucas (2011, pp. 77-81), the founder of the UK Spiritual Crisis Network, a referral and support network for those who undergo spiritual crisis, introduces the life story of Yeshe Tsogyal (757-817), a Tibetan female mystic along with Christian mystics such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and contemporary mystics such as Eckhart Tolle. In her introduction, Lucas mentions that Yeshe Tsogyal underwent a number of spiritual crises. Considering that Lucas's main emphasis lies in validating the experience of spiritual crisis as a natural, regenerative process of the human psyche, even when it occurs together with seemingly psychotic symptoms, it may be presumed that she assumes the kind of meditative training undergone by Yeshe Tsogyal, for example kundalini awakening, must have entailed episodes of spiritual crisis. Further examples listed by Lucas are awakening of *kundalini;* the endurance of frostbite almost to the point of death; the overcoming of the physical need by relying on stones and water for food, and eventually, surviving only on air; the abilities which she attains by giving up even the tiniest trace of individual will to her spiritual master, Padmasambhava; being disturbed and attacked by demonic spirits who feared the results of her attaining her spiritual goal; the death of her spiritual teacher, Padmasambhava, which is accompanied by a vivid description of sorrow and despair.

> I struck my body on the ground, tearing my hair, clawing at my face, rolling on the earth.
> And I begged him:
> Woe and sorrow! Lord or Orgyen!
> Will you leave Tibet an empty land?
> Are you taking back your light of love?
> Do you cast aside the Buddha's teaching?
> Will you throw away the people of Tibet so heedlessly?
> Are you leaving Tsogyal with no refuge?
> O look on me with pity!
> Now, now, look at me! (Samten Lingpa, as cited in Lucas, p. 80)

This dramatic expression of bereavement combined with self-abuse continues until Padmasambhava reappears in front her, in his bodiless state, and bestows teachings. Through this vision of her deceased master, Yeshe Tsogyal realises that the two of them are inseparable. With this realisation, all the sorrow that has been tormenting her disappears. Lucas justifies her interpretation of this account by referring to the category of Religious & spiritual problems in DSM-IV, which includes grief caused by 'separation from a spiritual teacher' (Lukoff, Lu & Turner, 1998, p. 31).

Despite the poignant description of bereavement quoted above resonating as it does with a sense of existential crisis and visionary experiences, a significant methodological problem with Lucas's interpretation arises. The text of Yeshe Tsogyal's life story is not the mystic's 9th century autobiography but a hagiography written down by Samten Lingpa in the 18th century. According to Tibetan tradition, Padmasambhava a major figure in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, hid numerous texts and sacred objects throughout Tibet for later generations to discover. These *terma*, or hidden treasures, may appear to a treasure-finder (*terton*), in his/her dreams indicating a geographical location where the treasure may be found. Terma may appear to the terton in the form of an intuition or mental representation of the text or image. The hagiographic text given above by Lucas (2011) is one of these terma texts. The claim of authentic connection between a terton and a revealed treasure text is usually based on a relation that can be traced through rebirths. For example, the terton who 'revealed' Yeshe Tsogyal's biography was supposedly a reincarnation of one of her esoteric consorts who was later reborn as her disciple, Gyalwa Changchub (Padmakara, 1999, p. xxxvii). By means of this cultural context, Samten Lingpa, the author of this hagiographical text could claim qualification to have the knowledge of the authentic life story of Yeshe Tshogyal revealed to him.

According to the Samten Lingpa, the original text was preserved by deities (dharma protectors) in the form of symbolic letters and was presented to him in that form. Therefore he is a terton – a re-discoverer of mystical knowledge, and the text he has written or scribed is a terma – a treature which reflects reality rather than literary creation. This process may be compared to commuting with an archetypal figure in the unconscious or to channelling as a medium for creating a literary work. It can also be said that, as Bettelheim (1975, p.36) notes, terma texts are "the result of common conscious and unconscious content having been shaped by the conscious mind, not of one particular person, but the consensus of many in regard to what they view as universal human problems, and what they accept as desirable solutions."

While an examination of the process of scribing a text as a transpersonal experience is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is possible and necessary to ask to what degree the descriptions of crises Lucas understands as steps towards Yeshe Tsogyal's enlightenment do indeed represent her own spontaneous experience. The context of the text formation does not justify Lucas's treatment of Yeshe Tsogyal's story as a record of individual experience in the same way as that of St. Teresa, for instance. It must be stressed, however, that this does not invalidate the link which Lucas makes between Yeshe Tsogyal's life and the concept of spiritual crisis. It rather shifts the link: from spontaneous individual experience to the construction of mystical concepts within a cultural context, as discussed above.

Delok (’das log): Tibetan accounts of near death experience

Near-death experience (NDE) can be broadly defined as ‘profound subjective event[s] with transcendental or mystical elements that many people experience on the threshold of death’ (Greyson, 1994, as cited in Wilde & Murray, 2009, p.223). NDE is known to be accompanied by ecstatic, visionary experiences and is often associated with a profound spiritual growth and personality transformation (Greyson 1999, 2001;Greyson & Harris 1989; Ring 1980, 1985). Since Moody’s *Life after Life (1975)* appeared, as Grof and Grof (1989, p. 22) note, western narratives of near-death experiences have regularly been published. Typical phenomenological descriptions found in reports of Western NDEs include accounts of moving through darkness, seeing and entering bright light, feelings of peace and/or joy, meetings with loved ones or guardians, reviewing one’s life or the purpose of one’s life, and followed by a return to one’s physical body (Greyson 1999; Greyson & Harris 1989; Shushan 2009). Accounts of NDE are found in various cultures and periods (Bailey 2001; Fenwick & Fenwick 1995/2011).

From the onset of the discussion of spiritual emergency, NDE has been regarded a type of spiritual emergency. According to Grof and Grof (1989, p. 22 & p. 200), NDEs are often found to bring spiritual awakening and personality transformation to the individual. They suggest that NDE is a transpersonal experience in which the individual consciousness moves beyond the boundary of the personal ego confined in the physical body (attested by reports of out-of-body experiences), and as such may have a powerful transformative effect on the individual. However, the visionary experience and insight acquired from a NDE may not be validated by professionals and family, causing the individual to undergo ‘a profound psychospiritual crisis’ (ibid. p.200). In this case, Grof and Grof tend to focus only on the positive effect of NDE and its invalidation by medical professionals. Greyson & Harris (1989), however, argue that problems may be caused when high levels of expectation for ethical, spiritual, or even superhuman, values and abilities are imposed on NDEers. Either way, the second aspect of NDE as spiritual emergency is closely related to the socio-cultural context in which NDEs occur.

In the West, scientific explanations of NDE reduce the experience to a ‘hallucinatory result of a combination of neurophysiological and psychological events and processes of the dying brain’. Tibetan tradition also provides reductionistic explanations of some aspects of NDE and death process. For example, the foremost of these experiences: visions of being engulfed in earthquakes, flooding, burning and storms typically described in Tibetan NDE accounts are explained in terms of the dissolution of the four elements which constitute the human body, namely, earth, water, fire, and air (Powers, 2007, p. 343).

NDE in Tibetan culture

In Tibetan culture, NDE and NDErs are referred to as *delok* ('das log), which literally means crossing the border of death and coming back. Famous stories of some delok, for example that of Nangsa Öbum, have traditionally been made into plays and performed (Cuevas, 2008). Although there are no records of how frequently such cases of spontaneous experience happen, Tibetan lamas (those belonging to Nyingma Buddhist tradition and the non-Buddhist Bon tradition) are known to verify the authenticity of an NDE by checking the state of an orifice made from butter and barley flour on the individual's face while the individual undergoes the experience (Bailey & Yates, 2013). Tibedeloks may have premonitions of their near-death experience in their dreams, and sometimes remain in the state of appearing dead for hours or even for days. In other cases they may undergo a ritualised form of dying on preordained dates (Bailey 2001).

Tibetan NDE literature often begins with the individual being struck by an unexpected illness and then undergoing a quick death. The individual may observe his/her own body from the outside and be affected by emotional reactions of anger. In many accounts, a guide figure (for example, the bodhisattva of compassion Chenrezig) leads the person to otherworldly realms such as various Buddhist hells, bardo the intermediate realm where the deceased dwell between incarnations, and visits to the underworld of Yama, the Lord of death are frequently reported. Upon the delok's arrival, Yama evaluates his/her virtues and vices using the mirror of *karma*, or through reports given by the guide figure. When it is decided that the delok must return, Yama gives lessons to deliver to the living, and the person returns with those messages (Bailey, 2001, Cuevas, 2008). Hence deloks are called both 'messengers of the dead' and as 'preachers of the virtuous actions and of the effects of karma' (Pommaret in Cuevas, p. 5). These NDE motifs are mostly in line with the phenomenological description of the death process as described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, traditionally attributed to the 8th century Indian mystic Padmasambhava (Shushan, 2009).

Like hagiographies, *delok* accounts weave elements of Buddhist doctrine and metaphysics into the story of an individual life. However, unlike the heroes of hagiographies who demonstrate superhuman resolution and abilities as seen above in the story of Yeshe Tsogyal, *delok* accounts describe ordinary people's experience of, and reaction to, the realm beyond physical reality (Cuevas, 2008). In that sense, *delok* accounts may work as fitting examples of spontaneous spiritual awakening and the crisis associated with this.

The potential transformative effects of an NDE seem to be reflected in the change in role played by individuals in their communities after the event. For example, characters are described as gaining the ability to prophecy the future (Cuevas 2008, p. 4). Similar to the problems of re-adjustment resulting from the experience of spiritual awakening as discussed by Assagioli (1965, 1989) in chapter one, and by Greyson and Harris (1989) above, *deloks* are described as being unable to live in the way they had prior to their NDEs. Bailey (2001)'s observations that *deloks* are frequently suspected to be epileptics, charlatans, or shamans indicate that deloks may face similar invalidation issues as NDEers do in the West. Another noteworthy aspect of Tibetan *delok* accounts is that they often express a strong element of social criticism which is expressed through the medium of messages from *Yama*, thus positioning the delok in the role of prophet providing a new perspective for the society. For example, Kunga Rangdrol's story contains messages for Buddhist monks, government officials, nuns, non-Buddhists, and laity respectively according to their position in the social hierarchy (Pommaret 1989, cited in Bailey 2001, p. 150).

Summary

In the first section, I have reviewed the discussion surrounding the treatment of Buddhism as a system of psychological theory stated the degree to which this thesis follows such an approach, and described what distinguishes it from previous approaches. In sum, this thesis treats Tibetan Buddhism as a psychological system to the degree that it functions as a frame of reference for Tibetan Buddhists in making sense of their experiences.

In the second section, I have reviewed Buddhist doctrines of the spiritual path. I have discussed the absence of the concept of spiritual crisis within any of the orthodox theoretical positions. In so doing, I have adopted criticism from Buddhologists in order to illustrate why I believe that the developmental concepts of stages may not reflect the actual psychological development of individuals.

In the third section, I have examined the possibility potential of locating the meaning of spiritual crisis within Tibetan culture using examples of Buddhist hagiography and traditional delok (near-death) accounts. Contrary to what Grof and Grof (1989, 1990), Lukoff (1985), Bragdon (1990) and Lucas (2011) amongst others have assumed, the way spontaneous awakening and spiritual crisis are received in Buddhist traditional culture may actually be far more complicated than they imagine.

Chapter 3

Developing a culturally informed transpersonal methodological approach

In order to explore the concept of spiritual crisis among Tibetan Buddhists, it was crucial to identify a methodology which would facilitate an understanding of participants' spiritual and transformative experiences in their own socio-cultural context, and to appreciate the potential cultural and conceptual gap between transpersonal psychology and contemporary Tibetan Buddhist culture. Also, it was necessary that the methodological framework allowed flexibility in the procedures of data collection, in the case that ethnographic observation would yield valuable data (Braud, 1998).

As the major methodological frame, this research combines and utilizes two qualitative approaches: intuitive inquiry designed by Rosemarie Anderson (1998, 2011a, 2011b) and narrative analysis (Crossley, 2000; Josselson, 2011; Riessman, 1993, 2008). Intuitive inquiry was established within the field of transpersonal psychology and responds to the transpersonal nature of the research topic. However, examining the elements of socio-cultural context and language to understand human experience is not its major purpose. This limitation is addressed, and compensated for, by the methodological flexibility of narrative analysis which has as a strength the facility to draw from a wide range of data sources—interviews, written documents and literature.

The present research was carried out following the general procedures laid down in intuitive inquiry. In the following sections of this chapter, I will discuss my rationale for selecting these two approaches as the main methodological frameworks, then I will outline the theory and practice of both intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis. This will be followed by highlighting where and how the two have been combined at different stages in the course of this research.

Exploring a concept

As seen in definitions given by Grof (1989, 1990) and Lukoff (1995), the concept of spiritual crisis describes how intensely and rapidly an experience unfolds, and also to what degree the experience fails to be integrated with one's previous understandings of spirituality and one's own identity. Rather than dealing with a narrowly defined specific experience, the concept embraces a variety of experience ranging from *kundalini awakening* (both meditation induced and spontaneous) and possession to UFO encounters (Grof & Grof 1989). Exploring the concept of spiritual crisis in a culture where there are no obvious sets of comparable concepts suggests that experiences similar to those reported in previous works in transpersonal psychology will be sought after. However, it also suggests that understanding those experiences as they are, as phenomenologists would aim to do, is not the major concern of this research. The research question aims to locate a conceptual framework that is comparable to that which underpins the concept of spiritual crisis in transpersonal psychology.

Therefore, what was required was a particular methodological framework that would allow the researcher to use data to produce windows onto reality, and to move to the theoretical level rather than staying on the surface of data (Charmaz, 2011). This is one of the reasons why intuitive inquiry, one of the qualitative methods that focus on theory building, was identified as a primary methodological framework for the current study.

Some of the previous works on spiritual crisis (Bragdon 1990/2013; de Waard 2010; Grof & Grof 1989, 1990; Lucas 2011; Lukoff 1995) approach the notion as a conceptual structure that holds descriptive studies of relevant experiences and issues. This approach takes as its model the descriptive and philosophical approach William James used in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James adopted a descriptive approach to the vignettes of religious experience, on which he developed his theory of religious experience (Wulff, 1997). According to Wertz et al. (2011), James gives strategically a nebulous definition of religious experience avoiding the established Christianity-inclined definition, and he also gives his examples descriptive, comparative, and thematic analyses which he then theorises on. They further note that James identifies 'experiential patterns and themes by focusing on personal, subjective experience and view, pursuing cultural and historical variations' (Wertz et al, 2011, p.29). In his approach, the concept, rather than a specific experience, plays the role of central structure which connects diverse experiences in spite of their apparent irrelevance to each other. The present research follows a similar route, following and reshaping the designs adopted by previous work in the field of psychology. The concept of spiritual crisis is given a seemingly abstract working definition, and does not function as a theory to be tested upon, or projected onto, participants.

Where the researcher is situated in the research process—reflexivity

In regard to the researcher's position within the process of research, there is a spectrum of positions among qualitative research methodological theories. It is important to clarify where on that spectrum intuitive inquiry is situated.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1894/1977, as cited in Wertz, 2011, p. 80) argues that nature can be explained but that psychological life can only be understood. Description provides an 'unbiased and unmutilated' view of psychological life in its full, complex reality'. On this basis, interpretation can be introduced to understand mental life both in its parts and in its relation to the exterior context. However, this claim presupposes that a participant's mental life can be really known by the researcher, without questioning how the intention the researcher brings with him/her, and the choices he or she makes, shape the knowledge in the process of generation (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Constructive grounded theorist, Charmaz (2011, p. 169) points out that the early qualitative researchers in the 1960s and seventies assumed 'a neutral observer and a conception of truth as residing in, and discoverable in, an external reality'.

In the last few decades, however, there has been a growing awareness that the researcher's bias and preconceptions are an unavoidable part of formulating the research question and the process of knowing (Elliott and Timulak, 2005; Schwrtz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Norman Denzin (1997) argues that the researcher is not a neutral observer of the research subject and, in fact, is situated within the process of the study itself. Such awareness of epistemological limitation brings the researcher into a more visible position in the research process (Charmaz 1995).

Qualitative researchers increasingly tend to consider intersubjectivity between the researcher and participants. Wertz (2011) and Langdridge (2007) amongst other phenomenologists hold that the researcher can understand the psychological experience of participants by ‘bracketing’ their preconceptions and describing their experience as closely and in as much detail as possible. On the other hand, narrative psychologists (Crossley 2000; Josselson 2011; Riessman 1993, 2008) place more stress on the researchers’ previously acquired conceptual background and how it shapes and limits the research process and findings. Intuitive inquiry follows Dilthey in believing one can offer a faithful description of psychological experience, but it does not presume that the knowledge created in the process reflects the subject matter as it is. On top of the personal interests, social positioning, and theoretical affiliation, as noted above, intuitive inquiry considers that the researcher’s intuition plays a vital part in the research process (Anderson 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011). Intuitive inquiry consciously makes use of, and exposes, the unconscious thought processes of the researcher.

Intuitive inquiry

Intuitive inquiry, developed by Rosemarie Anderson (2011; Anderson & Braud, 2011, Broad & Anderson 1998), is one of the research methods which have been developed within the field of transpersonal psychology.

Transpersonal methods

Transpersonal research methods, which form a category amongst the various qualitative approaches used in psychology and the social sciences, have been developing and evolving since the 1990s. They aim to study ‘the nature of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena’, expanding the definition of ‘empirical’ data to include inner experiences which are unobservable to the external observer. Anderson and Braud (1998, 2011) argue that personal transformation acquired through the research experience of both the researcher and participants (if the research involves other humans as participants) is another aim of transpersonal research methods.

Other qualitative research methods such as phenomenological approaches also aim to study inner experiences. Transpersonal methods, however, are specifically geared towards transpersonal experience relevant to human potential and the transpersonal dimension of life and reality.

In data collection and analysis also, transpersonal methods utilize a wide range of unconventional ways of knowing. Braud relates how transpersonal research methodological practices enable researchers to use,

> many complementary forms of knowing, being, and doing—including conventional, tacit, intuitive, body-based, feelings-based, and direct forms of knowing; ordinary and non-ordinary states of consciousness; analytical/linear and nonlinear ways of working with data... (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 72).

Similarly, when presenting results, transpersonal research methods are in agreement in allowing researchers to make use of symbolic, non-verbal media, for example, poems, performances, and paintings.

Definition of intuition

According to Anderson (1998, 2011a, 2011b), intuition is the direct perception of the object which, as Carl Jung (1933) suggested, eludes the person's rational attempt to understand it; "a kind of sense perception via the unconscious or subliminal sense perception (Marie-Louise von Franz, 1971, p.37, cited in Anderson 2011b, p. 246); and related more to right-brain processes than to left-brain processes, and to creative processes rather than analytic. Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999) argues that while insight is not a research tool that can be freely controlled by the researcher, it can be cultivated by meticulous preparation of 'inner work' on the researcher's part. By looking at data intuitively, Anderson holds, the researcher can find meanings both explicit and implicit in the data.

Anderson (2011b, 246-248) argues for five ways of intuitive knowing, drawing on Roberto Assagioli (1990), Arthur Diekman (1982), Peter Goldberg (1983), Carl Jung (1933), Arthur Koestler (1990), and Frances Vaughan (1979). As seen in the description below, intuitive inquiry demands and presumes that the researcher be personally engaged in the subject matter.

1) Unconscious, symbolic processes enable researchers to live active symbolic lives in which dreams, imaginal processes, somatic experiences and visionary experiences are common.

2) Psychic or parapsychological experiences such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognitive experiences are less recognised as sources of valid insights in spite of their frequent occurrence.

3) Sensory modes of intuition such as visceral, kinaesthetic sensations can convey forms of information beneath the level of consciousness as they are too subtle for the rational mind to pick up on. Researchers are encouraged to develop awareness of such sensations via focused attention and other methods of transpersonal training.

4) Anderson (2011b, p.248) maintains that, by empathetically identifying with the experience under study, the researcher can "inhabit the lived world of another person or object of study". Another expression Anderson uses for empathetic identification is compassionate knowing, both of which terms seem to need further clarification. Anderson gives examples which describe experiences in which the boundary between subject and object dissolves, though she does not elaborate this. However, by empathetic identification, Anderson suggests that the researcher's mind can reach the participant's experience and uncover potential meanings there which the participant is unaware of.

5) Anderson maintains that the intuitive style adopted by the researcher adopts tends to be relevant to 'the fault lines or wounds in his or her personality. She compares the researcher's role to the concept of the wounded healer in religious, spiritual, and shamanic circles.

The way in which this aspect of personal engagement in the research process allows the researcher to make choices based on her intuition/feeling and how this affected my research will be described in the next chapter and chapter nine.

Five hermeneutic cycles

Anderson (1998, 2011a, 2011b) has established five iterative cycles of interpretation. As figure 3 illustrates, intuitive inquiry aims to build theories on the subject matter through five stages of research. Each cycle is associated with its own standard procedure of research: Cycle 1 is associated with the process of formulating the research topic; Cycle 2 with the literature review; Cycle 3 with data collection and descriptive analysis; Cycle 4 with in-depth analysis, and; Cycle 5 with presenting findings. In carrying out the standard procedure, the researcher is supposed to practice some form of meditation and be engaged in an imaginal dialogue in order actively to encourage insights to occur. The researcher is recommended to try to stay in touch with his/her own transpersonal dimension while investigating transpersonal phenomena (Anderson & Braud, 2011). Anderson (2011a) provides detailed instruction for a technique of meditation/imagination designed to suit the purpose of qualitative research. Experiential practices of each cycle are one of the major elements that distinguish intuitive inquiry from other qualitative research methods. Although practicing them gave me many thought provoking inspirations, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to introduce them, and they will therefore be explored in chapter eight. Experiential practices and their effects on my thinking and understandings of participants' stories will be mentioned only where they are relevant to the research process and its findings.

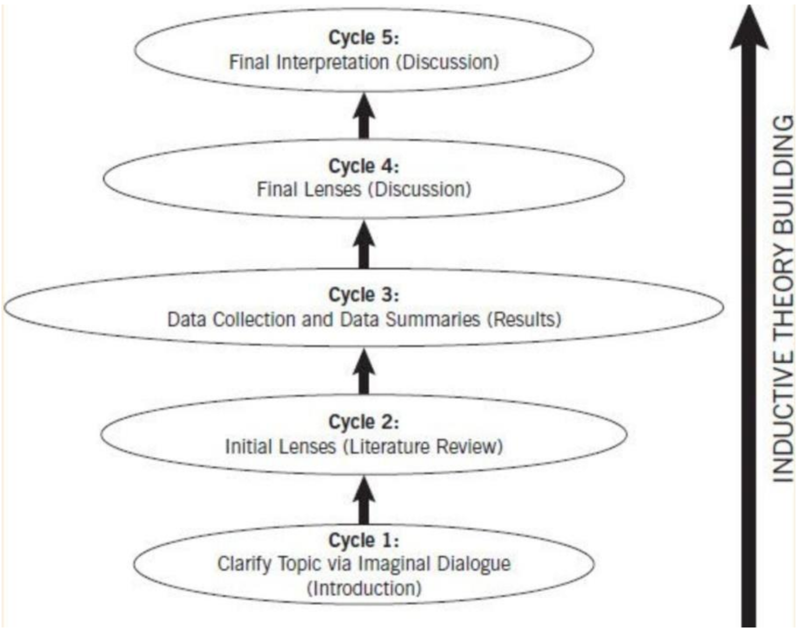
Cycle 5:
Final Interpretation (Discussion)
Cycle 4:
Final Lenses (Discussion)
Cycle 3:
Data Collection and Data Summaries (Results)
Cycle 2:
Initial Lenses (Literature Review)
Cycle 1:
Clarify Topic via Imaginal Dialogue
(Introduction)
INDUCTIVE THEORY BUILDING

Figure 3. Five cycles of intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2011a, p. 28; 2011b, p. 249)

In Cycle 1 the researcher aims to clarify the research topic, by becoming aware of the personal motives for choosing a certain topic. Anderson (2011a, 2011b) describes how the process of meditative imagination helps evoke a text for the researcher—which may be in the form of an image, art work, poem, song, written text, etc. Once a text has surfaced, the researcher must be daily engaged in an imaginal dialogue with it until the tension between the researcher and the text is resolved. Impressions, thoughts and insights are then integrated into formulating the research topic.

Cycle 2 involves the literature review, reflecting on, and generating the list of, one's previous values, assumptions and understanding of the topic as they are relevant to the literature on the subject. This process is also accompanied by the ongoing imaginal dialogue with the chosen text in Cycle 1.

Cycle 3 is associated with data collection and preparing the data for analysis. As with other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory and narrative approach, intuitive inquiry enables researchers to draw from diverse forms of data—interviews, published written accounts, art works and so on. Prior to data collection, the researcher practices meditating on and visualising various potential sources of data including potential participants and considers their relevance, effect and availability (Anderson, 2011a, p. 46-47). The essential point of this practice is that the researcher's rational mind stops being the primary agent, and that the researcher allows the images and concepts regarding the data to speak for themselves during his/her imaginal practice. Anderson (2011a, p. 47-48) reports that the most frequently employed forms of data used in intuitive inquiry are interviews and life stories of participants.

In order to prepare the data for analysis in Cycle 4, if interviews have been carried out, interview recordings are transcribed verbatim and a descriptive summary of each account prepared. Anderson (2011a) suggests that other types of qualitative analysis such as phenomenological description and analysis based on grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) may be used at this stage, while urging researchers to remain as descriptive as possible without adding their own interpretations to the data. In this thesis, prior to the analysis of interview materials, I will present portraits of my participants based on interviews, and secondary information gathered from other sources which will help the reader to place the participants' experience in its own cultural context. How practice of this stage unfolded will be discussed in the latter part of chapter four.

In order to prepare the descriptive data, Anderson (1998, 2011b) suggests that the researcher read the text (transcripts) several times until the overall meaning and atmosphere of the text emerges, which is in common with most other qualitative data analysis methods. Secondly, the researcher produces meaning units by highlighting the parts of the text which draw his or her attention. Although this can give the impression that the researcher's subjective judgement and preference might dominate the results, Anderson argues that the rigour and thoroughness of the researcher as well as many revisits to the data along with practice of meditation will address that issue.

Each meaning unit is coded by a key theme or expression, and is compiled verbatim as an example of the theme. This process is repeated until no more new meaning units emerge. The compiled meaning units are sorted into thematic categories. This process may be repeated several times in order to reconfigure and rename themes of meaning units (rearranging printed and cut prints) until the researcher recognises patterns emerging from among the themes. When the analysis is ready to be finalised, the researcher goes back to the original interview script and relevant notes to look for potentially overlooked dimensions of the participant's experience (2011b, p. 258)

In Cycle 4, the analysis carried out in Cycle 3 is presented, and new insights into the subject matter are developed. Each of the conceptual lenses sorted in Cycle 2 are now compared with those produced through engagement with the data. Anderson (2011a, 2011b) argues that the degree of change in the conceptual lenses indicates the generation of new knowledge. Confusion and bewilderment on the part of the researcher are, according to Anderson (1998, 2011a, 2011b), signals that new discovery is being made and that he or she is open to it.

Cycle 5 integrates and refines the findings from Cycle 4 with the empirical and theoretical literature relevant to the topic.

Narrative analysis

The present study aims to understand how Tibetan Buddhists make sense of the concept of spiritual crisis using interviews with participants from a refugee community in India as the main data collection method. Most of the data is in narrative form. Anderson (2011a) raises concerns regarding analysing data in narrative form using intuitive inquiry. This will be discussed in the following section.

One of the limitations of intuitive inquiry with regard to this study is that it pays little consideration to the role of cultural and contextual elements in human experience, which have been largely overlooked in transpersonal psychology. Narrative approaches are strong in understanding "personal, social, and historical conditions that mediate the story"

(Josselson, 2011, p. 226). Such strength is indispensible in studying the experience of people from other cultures.

While this study adopts narrative analysis as an analytical method, the research is not strictly based on theories of narrative enquiry. Lieblich, Mashiach and Zilber (1998) divide narrative research into three categories depending on whether narrative is the major methodological and theoretical subject of research, the research object, or a means to investigate the research question. This study falls into the third category. As such, it remains informed by the analytical protocol created by narrative theories but does not attempt to test or confirm these narrative theories.

In the following sections, I will discuss the issue of data form in intuitive inquiry, briefly outline the narrative approaches, introduce a working definition and constituents of a narrative, describe the major differences between intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis, and lastly outline the procedure of analysis.

The issue of data form in intuitive inquiry

Anderson (2011a, p. 68) suggests that if the data is 'inherently narrative in form', the analytical procedure laid out in intuitive inquiry may not be suitable because the process of creating lenses in the fourth Cycle can 'disrupt the structure of data that requires story or narrative for meaning'. In such cases, she suggests, it is more suitable to use narrative analysis. Such a brief remark makes it not entirely clear whether Anderson is suggesting that it is preferable to analyse such data in narrative form through narrative analysis or that the entire research process of seeking to understand experience expressed in the medium of narratives is incompatible with intuitive inquiry.

A useful illustration of this concern can be found in Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden (2011), a collaborative work in which five qualitative researchers analyse the same narrative. The authors, one each from the qualitative approaches of phenomenological description, discourse analysis, narrative analysis, intuitive inquiry and constructive grounded theory, review and compare their own methods of analysis with those of the others'. Such an unusual collaboration on the discussion of qualitative data analysis sheds light on commonalities and differences between approaches, and highlights the large role played by preconceptions that researchers bring with them. As the latest addition to the range of qualitative research methods, intuitive inquiry proves to be as viable a method as any of the others. Anderson's analysis of the text was regarded as providing an initially unexpected, but unique and penetrating insight by her fellow researchers.

It must be noted that the participant, when reviewing all the different analyses as part of the project, found it difficult to recognise her own voice in Anderson's. The participant's protest about "falling prey to rampant interpretation" (Wertz et al, 2011, p. 344) does not, by itself, invalidate intuitive inquiry's status as a valid method for qualitative research analysis. However, the participant's strong reaction to Anderson's analysis has made me more careful in examining intuitive inquiry's procedures. The procedures taken by Anderson were as systematic and meticulous as those of the other approaches. Anderson was not alone in moving towards inductive conceptualisation – as constructive grounded theorist Cathy Charmaz also took a similar approach. However, it is evident that the distortion perceived by the participant was particularly related to the theory of mind-body relation which Anderson as a depth/transpersonal psychologist had raised, and to the in-depth analysis of motivations that underlie the participant's emotions. Interpreting an acute case of cancer as the somatic manifestation of long-kept anger might have given the impression of passing the responsibility of having the cancer onto the participant, more precisely, onto the unconscious process in the participant's psyche. In other words, the worldview and the understanding of psyche which each of the researcher and the participant had were completely at odds with each other. It is that, rather than the inductive procedure about which Anderson expresses concern, that seems to account for the distortion perceived by the participant.

While respecting participants' own voices is considered an important matter in many qualitative approaches (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Wertz et al., 2011), interpretations made by researchers do not necessarily repeat, and conform to, participants' own observations and feelings. In narrative theories, Riessman (2008) states, it has long been acknowledged that storytellers are not necessarily aware of their intentions and the meaning in their actions – an idea which will be further discussed in the following sections about narrative approaches. Anderson (2011b) stresses that intuitive inquiry as an interpretive method attempts to grasp the potential meaning, of which the participant may not necessarily be aware and which may not be obviously embedded in the text.

Eventually I decided to interpret her remark as indicating a weakness inherent within intuitive inquiry when it comes to analysing narratives which recount more than one particular experience or incident. In order to compensate for this limitation, I chose narrative analysis as my method of data analysis for understanding participants' experience represented as stories. I thus located it within the third cycle of intuitive inquiry, which remains the major methodological frame of this research.

Background of narrative analysis

Within the field of psychology, the method of examining personal accounts of given experience goes back to founder figures such as William James, Wilhelm Wundt, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung. James (1902) studied a number of autobiographical accounts in the form of written reports (Wertz, 2011; Wulff 1997). He combined phenomenological description and philosophical analysis to understand 'religious experience' as a psychological phenomenon (Seigfried, 1990; Wertz, 2011). Jerome Bruner (1990, p. x) argues that Wilhelm Wundt, though well known for his contribution to the establishing of experimental psychology, emphasized 'a more historical, interpretive approach to understanding man's cultural products' which he regarded as a higher psychological process. Freud and Jung, founders of depth psychology, are well known for having analysed accounts of their patients as part of the process of building up psychodynamic theories (Crossley 2000; Josselson, 2011). Gordon Allport (1942, as cited in Josselson 2011), whilst prioritizing experimental and quantitative approaches, has acknowledged the value of qualitative approaches in data collection and analysis.

However, the detailed attention paid to personal accounts as an object of study in psychology is a relatively new development. This recent interest in narrative with an emphasis on its generation, forms and structure has been informed by the 'interpretive turn' in the social sciences in general, and in sociology and anthropology, from the 1970s onwards (Crossley, 2000; Josselson, 2011; Riessman, 1993, 2008). The stress on interpretation as a method to understand the human world rose as a challenge to positivism in the social sciences (see, for example, Geertz 1973; Polkinghorne, 1983, 1988, Rainbow & Sullivan 1979).

In the field of psychology, behaviourism and experimentalism have been challenged from a number of directions: Crossley (2000) lists humanistic psychology (Maslow 1968, 1970, 1971; Rogers 1961 amongst others), Bruner's 'cognitive revolution', and narrative psychology. Indeed, as early as 1986, Theodore Sarbin (1986) coined the term ‘narrative psychology’ to identify such areas of interest (Josselson, 2011).

Bruner (1990, p.xi) maintains that psychology as the study of ‘the nature of mind and its processes’ should study ‘how we construct our meanings and our realities’ and ‘the shaping of mind by history and culture’. For such purposes, he argues that anthropological methods—ethnographical observation and interpretation—ought to be utilized, as meaning is created neither biologically nor solely within the individual mind, but during interactions between individual and culture.

Although Bruner is not part of the later development of narrative approaches in psychology, his argument outlines the central issues debated within them. Narrative approaches present a wide range of understanding to the questions: to what degree the individual has agency; whether ‘the self’, ‘reality/world’ and subjective experience exist outside narratives; and how narratives are generated (Crossley, 2000; Josselson, 2011; Riessman 1993, 2008).

Reviewing all the relevant arguments in detail is beyond the scope of this section. However, their central points in terms of the concept of self will be introduced below.

Outlines of narrative approaches

Narrative psychology takes as a premise that people live and/or understand their lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot that has beginning, middle, and end points (Sarbin, 1986, cited from Josselson, 2011). In narrative approaches, Josselson (2011) notes that the self expressed in the stories is dialogical and multi-vocal. Similar to Bruner’s argument that meaning is always created and decided in public relation, Josselson argues that the self is always interpreted in relation to some other, “whether that other be another person, other parts of the self, or the individual’s society or culture” (Bakhtin 1986, p.33, cited from Josselson 2011, p. 232). By studying the stories that individuals and groups tell about themselves, narrative researchers take it as a premise that the manner in which individuals construct meaning of their experience and world can be studied (Crossley 2000; Josselson 2011; Riessman 1993, 2008).

Crossley (2000) suggests four movements of psychology based on the understanding of the self: experimental, humanistic, and psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychologies, and social constructivist approaches—which she divides again into narrative psychology and discursive psychology. She argues that experimental psychology treats the person as having an independent self in a social vacuum. She criticises humanistic and depth psychologies as not being free from realist assumptions of the self. Humanistic psychology still assumes an independent self delineated from the outer world, which can make an informed choice. Crossley (2000) argues that psychoanalytic/ psychodynamic psychologies re-examine the agency of the self by stressing the unconscious, and hidden layers of the self active in psychological processes. The constructivist approach attempts this by stressing the individual's relation to the exterior world, that is, socio-cultural context. She suggests that humanistic psychology and narrative psychology share the same emphasis on the uniqueness and agency of the individual. Together with depth psychologies whose model of the psyche narrative psychology does not share, they both study the individual and favour qualitative approaches to the experience under investigation (Crossley 2000).

Regarding the relation between narrative and experience, among narrative theorists there is a debate as to whether experience is organized by narrative from the beginning or whether experience is prior to narrative (Riessman 2008, p. 7). This debate parallels the wide range of understandings as to what degree the self has agency and to what degree meaning is constructed in social discourse. Such kinds of debate are also found in the study of mysticism and transpersonal phenomenon. Katz (1978) argues that mystical experience is culturally constructed and that there is no such thing as pre-conceptual experience. This will be further considered in Chapter nine.

Relation to this work

Riessman's observation is broadly applicable to work on spiritual crisis and transpersonal phenomena. As mentioned above in the section on intuitive inquiry, this study recognizes that most narrative approaches and transpersonal research methods have differing theoretical positions on the notion of self.

The theoretical position adopted by this study is situated somewhere between the two extremes. As a study based on transpersonal theories, it is sympathetic to the potential of the unconscious and the spiritual nature of the human being, allowing individuals to create their subjective and inter-subjective reality. At the same time, it recognizes the impact of language and culture, as Bruner (1990, p. 13) argues that the individual's way of life is culturally adapted from the very beginning through his/her participation 'in a larger public process in which public meanings are negotiated'.

One of the characteristics of narrative approaches is their methodological flexibility (Josselson 2011, Riessman 2008). Both in data collection and analysis, narrative researchers adopt what is suitable for the purpose of 'captur[ing] the lived experience of people in terms of their own meaning making and to theorize about it in insightful ways' (Josselson, 2011, p.225)

Narrative: definition, forms, constituents

Definition

Riessman (2008) states that it is difficult to define narrative in a clear and simple way. There are diverse forms of narrative. Different disciplines adopt different forms of narrative as the object of their research. Although oral storytelling is only one of many examples of narrative, Riessman (2008, p. 3) suggests, it can be used to propose a simple working definition of narrative: narrative is something that is created when the storyteller (individual or group) selects events and connect them 'into a sequence that is consequential for later action' in order to represent the meanings which the speaker intends to deliver.

Form

Riessman (2008) states that narrative should be differentiated from 'story', arguing that narrative is a bigger concept than story and can be found in many different forms.

In the context of social and psychological research, the text form often tends to be transcribed interviews and written documents. Forms of narrative are diverse and range from discrete units of discourse to entire life stories (Riessman, 2008, p. 5-6). In psychology long personal accounts developed over a few interviews are frequently used.

Essential elements of narrative

Narrative as the object of interpretation, Riessman suggests, needs to be differentiated from 'text', another often-used synonym of narrative. Texts are diverse and universal, anything that can serve as an object of interpretation. Roland Barthes (1977/2004,p. 65, cited from Riessman, 2008, p. 4) enumerates "myth, legend, fable, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, . . . stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation" as forms of text. To this list, Riessman adds organizational reports and personal documents such as memoir and biography. Mikhail Bakhtin (1986) also proposed that ‘any coherent complex of signs’ (cited from Riessman 2008, p. x) can serve as a text which is subject to interpretation.

While any form of text may be used to study socio-cultural phenomena or individual experience, it is not the case that all of these are narratives. Two criteria need to be satisfied for a text to be read narratively: temporality and contingency (Josselson 2011; Riessman 2008). Narrative should describe an experience that occurred in a particular time-space, as created by a particular storyteller. Citing Mishler (2004), Josselson (2011, p. 226) qualifies narrative telling as “not an exact representation of what happened, but a particular construction of events created in a particular setting, for a particular audience, for particular purposes, to create a certain point of view”. Hence the narrator’s perspective on the event and understanding of the self as they appear in narrative are open to change (Bruner, 1990). Paying attention to this temporality brings “the context (both relational and social) in which the narrative is constructed” to the attention of the researcher and necessitates reflexive awareness on the role of the researcher in the construction of narrative (Josselson, p 226).

The second element, contingency involves meaning and culture. To form a story, the events and other elements consisting of a plot must be arranged in a meaningful sequence (Crossley, 2000; Josselson, 2011; Riessman 2008). Internal and external experience is often chaotic, and seldom ordered in a way that is easily recognizable as meaningful (Josselson 2011, Riessman 2008). However, people construct narratives by ‘imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected’ (Salmon, cited from Riessman, 2008, p. 5).

Bruner argues that, to be able to tell a story, the narrator needs a certain awareness of whether the sequence is meaningful or not (Bruner 1990). This awareness is acquired through interaction with, and in relation to, others. Moreover, it can be shared by a group of people/ society—creating the context. What is regarded as a contingent sequence in one culture may not be understood as such in another. This is one of the reasons why Bruner (1986, 1990) argues for the value of anthropological methods in psychology.

Moreover, when the concept of contingency is applied to research, Riessman (2008, p. 5) explains, each discipline tends to refer to a specific narrative form ranging from “an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centred and temporally organized” to “an entire life story, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents” as is often used in the fields of social history and anthropology. In psychology “extended accounts of lives in context” produced during interviews are most frequently used along with biographical and autobiographical accounts. As narrative forms are diverse, approaching the research subject by this means does not require all the narratives be of the same type. The narratives presented in this study appear in a number of different forms: transcripts generated from research interviews, narrative extracted from lengthy talks on religious themes and reconstructed by the researcher, published personal accounts based on interviews, and lastly, biography. Not all of these are the kind of first-person account typically found in qualitative research in psychology in the West. The form of each narrative will be discussed in the relevant chapter in terms of the context of its construction.

Meaning

As stated above, narrative approaches take as a premise that stories about people’s lives represent the manner in which they make sense both of themselves and of their lives. The concept of ‘meaning’ used in narrative approaches differs from that found in humanist psychology. Humanist psychology was much influenced by existential philosophy. Frankl, Maslow, and May amongst others use ‘meaning’ as a synonym for ‘raison d’être’, ‘value’ and ‘purpose’. Such meaning is to be created, and/or fulfilled personally. Frankl (1992, p. 132, cited in Glassman & Hadad 2009) states that meaning of experience is ‘a personal outcome…related both to the immediate context of one’s experiences, and to one’s attitudes towards those experiences’.

However, meanings in narrative are produced through the process of selecting, connecting and integrating elements and aspects of experience (Josselson 2011). Meaning of something (a sign) in narrative approaches is related to what that sign refers to within the context (Riessman 2008). There is a continuum of perspectives on how meaning is generated. While it is largely agreed upon that ‘meaning is not inherent in an act or experience (Josselson, 2011, p. 225), Bruner (1990) and Crossley (2000) amongst others ascribe a greater role to the narrator as agent, compared to social constructivists who stress the role of social discourse. Josselson (2011, p. 225) qualifies this below.

> Meaning is generated by the linkages the participant makes between aspects of the life he or she is living and the explicit linkages the researcher makes between this understanding and interpretations, which is meaning constructed at another level of analysis.

Although it can't be said that those two are utterly unrelated to each other, they need to be used with due differentiation.

Integrating intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) comment that choosing a research method can be confusing and difficult because the philosophical theories behind the methods may be unintentionally brought into the research. While actual research procedures set out by different qualitative and interpretive traditions have more similarities than differences, the epistemological reasoning behind each step in data collection and analysis varies.

In this study I combine and use two different methods, intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis. I have already discussed from where each of these methods originates. Although both arose in response to the dominance of behaviourism and experimental psychology, as Crossley (2000) pointed out, they are grounded in different models of the psyche.

For many narrative psychologists, the self is constructed, in the ongoing process of being storied within the linguistic, socio-cultural context (Crossley, 2000). Crossley (2000) criticises humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1968, May, 1953/2009; Rogers, 1961 amongst others) for taking for granted the existence of a self, independent from the exterior environment and able to make a choice. Though less choice and agency is attributed to the 'ego' in depth psychology, the concepts of psyche such as the unconscious and the Self as the centre of the psyche are criticised as being a mere remnant of realist assumptions that positivist approaches in psychology and in the social sciences in general have shown (Riessman, 1993). If narrative psychologists had recognised transpersonal psychology, it is likely that similar criticisms would have been applied to central concepts in transpersonal psychology such as those of non-ordinary consciousness and human nature as a spiritual being.

However, I argue that the two methods can be combined despite such apparent incompatibility regarding the nature of the psyche. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, rather than there being any singular ontological position agreed upon by narrative researchers, it is more apt to say that there exists a wide range of understandings of self with varying degrees of agency (Crossley 2000; Josselson 2011; Riessman 2008). Not agreeing to the representative model of the self in narrative psychology does not exclude researchers from applying narrative research to investigate a subject.

From the perspective of transpersonal psychology, the concept of self in narrative theories is equivalent to (albeit not the same as) the concept of identity (how individuals perceive themselves) in humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Therefore I argue that as long as the concept of the self in narrative theories is not confused with transpersonal concepts such as Jung's concept of 'the Self', the two methods are not necessarily incompatible. In this study, having both points of view available will be particularly useful when we come to consider Buddhist discourse and theories of the psyche which will be discussed in relation to my participants' stories in later chapters.

Secondly, it should again be noted that narratives in this study are 'tools to explore. . . aspects of . . . human experience' not the major objects of this study (Bamberg, 2012, p. 2). In this thesis, intuitive inquiry defines the major methodological framework, while narrative analysis is adopted as a subordinate method used to access the participants' stories. In this way I bypass the potential concerns raised earlier in the chapter by Anderson. It is not therefore necessary for the purpose of this study for the two different ontological positions to be reconciled.

Inference and Researcher's role

When collecting data for narrative research, 'the researcher does not find narratives but instead participates in their creation' (Nelson 1989, cited from Riessman2008, p. 21.) For example, first person accounts generated from interviews have the researcher as their specific audience, and his/her questions and responses affect the stories being told (Josselson 211; Mishler 1986; Riessman 2008 amongst others). Such assumptions have been absorbed by other qualitative approaches. Intuitive inquiry does not deny that the researchers play such a role. Using his/her intuition as a tool, the researcher participates in the creation of narratives and this personal involvement both engages and exposes the unconscious of the researcher.

During data analysis, intuitive inquiry, as a research method rooted in transpersonal theories, promotes the use of intuition – a form of non-verbal inner knowing which originates from the level below/beyond the consciousness (Anderson 1998, 2000, 2004, 2011a, 2011b). Braud and Anderson (1998), Clements (2011), Hart, Nelson, & Puhakka (2000) and Valle (1998) amongst others argue that transpersonal methods of knowing enable researchers to know/experience what is below/beyond the surface of text/experience.

In intuitive inquiry, it is acknowledged that the researcher’s subjectivity including his/her preconceptions and intuition plays a primary role in the research process and interpretation. During the process of scanning for the implicit meaning of data, along with standard qualitative analysis, Anderson (2011a, 2011b) recommends that the researcher activate his/her intuition by first reaching a calm, concentrated mental state and then, while remaining in that state, engage with the data. In order to deepen his or her grasp on the subject, Anderson (2011b) also suggests that the researcher’s mind needs to be engaged with the topic as much as possible during daily life. Creating new lenses on the subject matter with literature in Cycle 4 is only possible through the insight acquired from conceptual inference generated in the depth of the researcher’s psyche, a highly subjective process of enacting the researcher’s own non-ordinary consciousness.

Josselson (2011, p. 227) summarises narrative analysis as a ‘creative process of organizing data’, ‘making the invisible apparent, deciding what is significant and insignificant, and linking seemingly unrelated facets of experience together’. The researcher is not regarded as a ‘neutral observer’ (Riessman 2008, p. 28). The knowledge generated in the course of investigation is ‘relative to his or her standpoint as an observer’ (Josselson, 2011, p. 226). However, the choices and judgement made by the researcher are securely harnessed by meticulously developed analytical protocols, which will be briefly outlined in the following section.

Inductive approaches for creating conceptual inferences from the study of instances have become well established in the social sciences and psychology. In terms of generalising and theorising the findings, narrative theorists in general agree that narrative analysis allows readers to explore ‘nuances and interrelationships among aspects of experience’ but not to theorise or generalise the findings to the broader population (Josselson 2011; Riessman 2008). Anderson (2011b, p. 324) argues that the intuitive researcher search for “possibilities embedded in the data that allow for new understandings of present and future events”. By shedding light on the complexities of the given experience portrayed in the narrative, researchers attempt a ‘generalization to theoretical propositions’ (Bryman, 1988, cited as in Riessman, 2008, p. 13). On the other hand, intuitive inquiry attempts to excavate what language fails explicitly to deliver (Anderson 2011a, 2011b).

Narrative construction

This section will describe how narrative analysis informs the preparation of the data in Cycle 3 of intuitive inquiry. In this study I use some published accounts (those of Lobsang Tenzin in Ch. 5, and Namsel Drolma in Ch.6,) and other accounts produced in the course of several interviews (those of Kelsang Lhamo in Ch.6, Lobzur-la in Ch.7 and Jangchup mentioned in Ch.8). In the latter case, as with a number of interviews for indirect information, I produced text by transcribing verbatim.

Riessman (2008, p. 29) demonstrates two different styles of transcription: 1) transcription that depicts the interaction between narrator and audience in detail including pauses, responses, and gestures, and 2) autobiographical narrative that primarily shows the narrator’s speech, organised as meaning units. Riessman (2008, p. 29) argues that the first type of transcript is based on the theory of ‘a co-constructed “self” produced dialogically, and that the second on the idea that a pre-existing self is reflected in the narrative. Without subscribing to either of these theoretical positions, I made use of both methods of transcription. In general, I chose the first method, considering that the greater detail it offered would assist my later revisiting the experience of interviewing. Furthermore, the second style involved transcribing only the participant’s words and immediately categorising them into thematic units. Coding and categorising along the way while transcribing an interview recording may be an immensely efficient way of dealing with lengthy and little-structured material.

Carrying out narrative analysis

The main strategies and questions relevant to the present study are as follows:

1) ‘General narrative thread’ (Josselson, 2011, p. 231) and content of each story.

2) Structural forms of narrative, sequences of events, and the reasons behind ‘the succession of events [being] configured’ in such a way (Riessman, 2008, p. 11)

3) What is the narrator’s intention in relating a story of the particular incident?

4) What purpose does the listener have, and what impact does the audience have on what is told?

5) What does the narrator achieve by telling the story?

6) Cultural resources the story draws on for its plot (Riessman 2008)

7) The effect the story has on the listener or reader?

8) Narrative analysis pays “attention to what is unsaid or unsayable (Rogers et al., 1999, as appearing in Josselson, 2011,) by locating ‘gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative, or counter-narratives (Riessman 2008, p. 11)’.

9) All four key narratives analysed in the later chapters cover a long period in the participants’ lives. Lieblich, et al. (1998, as cited in Josselson, 2011) outlines a holistic analysis which treats the life story depicted in the narrative as a whole. In this whole, each section describing incidents or experience is interpreted in relation to other parts of the whole (Josselson, 2011). Josselson (2011, p. 226) notes that this approach of examining ‘how the parts are integrated to create . . . meaning’ originates from Schleiermacher’s idea of the hermeneutic circle. : “an understanding of the whole illuminates the parts, which in turn create the whole”.

10) Where applicable, I will attempt to make conceptual inferences by categorizing sections thematically [or as a discursive unit] and make comparisons with similar texts from other narratives (see Josselson 2011, p. 226; Riessman, 2008)

The above list is by no means complete but provides a rough picture of how the analyses will proceed.

Chapter 4

Research Process

In the previous chapter, I described how and why narrative research has been employed within the methodological framework of intuitive inquiry for the purpose of this study. In this chapter I will outline the research process that I have followed, from its formulation up until data collection. It was necessary to employ various interview methods as well as questionnaires at differing stages of the study in order to facilitate data collection within a particular cultural setting. Consequently, the research process includes anthropological methods of participant observation, and ethnographic interviews focusing on gathering information. Research design was emergent, beginning 'with an initial focus of inquiry and an initial sample, and refin[ing the] focus of inquiry and sampling strategy as [I] engaged in an ongoing process of data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as appearing in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Although dividing the whole process into separate stages is artificial as tasks belonging to different phases were often carried out concurrently, for the clarity of presentation, the research process broadly falls into the three following stages:

Stage 1: Setting out

The first stage was roughly equivalent to the first two cycles of intuitive inquiry, and included the following four components:

- Identification of a key text of the research topic that personally appealed to me,
- Formulating the research question,
- Weaving the relevant strands of ideas from the available literature, and
- Designing the research project.

Stage 2: Data collection

There were two phases of data collection:

Phase 1 Preparing for fieldwork

1) Exploratory interviews were undertaken seeking cultural information regarding the topic of spiritual development and spiritual crisis, and advice on fieldwork process.
2) A questionnaire study was carried out as a preparatory step for the fieldwork, in order to locate participants for narrative interviews based on a snowballing sampling strategy.
3) Choosing an interview schedule and selecting suitable examples from Tibetan Buddhist hagiography: In order to invite participants to relate their life experience in relation to the concept of spiritual crisis without introducing the concept itself, six brief episodes from Buddhist hagiography were selected.

Phase 2 Fieldwork for narrative collection and ethnography

Fieldwork was carried out in the Tibetan refugee community of Dharamsala, India for three months in 2012. Participants, all of them belonging to the same Buddhist denomination, were recruited by theoretical and snowballing sampling methods.

The intention was to gain an understanding of Tibetan Buddhists' experience and understanding of spiritual crisis through their own narratives in their own terms and their own cultural setting.

Stage 3: Data Analysis

In adopting the approach to analysis discussed by Anderson (1998, 2011a) and Riessman (1993, 2008), two overlapping phases in the analysis of data emerged.

Transcription

Narrative interviews were transcribed by me as part of an analytical process and as a way of revisiting the data. Interviews were transcribed verbatim (an exception will be explained at the end of this chapter) including my questions and comments and participants' non-verbal expressions such as pauses, gestures, and sighs, etc.

Interpretation

All narratives, both published materials and transcriptions, were initially analysed to examine the degree to which they satisfied the following criteria:

1) They must exhibit an overall pattern of crisis and resolution,

2) They must be rich in their phenomenological description of the participant's experience,

3) They must possess information relevant to the subjective meaning of psycho-spiritual transformation.

Five narratives were identified as key for detailed further analysis. Primary analysis focused on the narrative elements (listed at the end of Chapter three). The second analytical step involved comparing certain meaning units within the various interview scripts as well as with other cultural resources to bring the participants' voices into clearer focus.

The details of this analytical procedure have been outlined in chapter three. Therefore further discussion in this chapter will primarily concentrate on the first two stages, and the process of selecting key narratives for analysis.

Stage 1: Setting out

Formulation of the research project –the very beginning

This research project was formulated through a combination of personal interest and an academic endeavour to provide a culturally and contextually informed understanding of spiritual crisis. In addition, my involvement with Tibetan Buddhist communities for several years prior to this research project contributed to the selection of the research context.

As was established in chapter one, previous research on the concept of spiritual crisis in the field of transpersonal psychology has largely viewed spiritual crisis and/or spiritual emergency within the broader conceptual context of individual psychological transformation and spiritual development (See for example, Assagioli 1989; Bache 2000; Bragdon 1990; de Waard 2010; Grof 1975, 1988; Grof & Grof 1989, 1990; Washburn 1994). Each theoretical position on spiritual crisis draws from a theory of the structure of the human psyche and incorporates diverse types of triggers and symptoms. Each position also claims the universal implication of its particular interpretation of the concept. The subject appeared to be a promising area for further investigation as it has not been researched outside the English speaking West, indicating a significant gap of knowledge.

Drawing from my previous academic and cultural engagement with Tibetan Buddhism and my knowledge of the refugee society in India, I opted to study the subject in the context of Tibetan Buddhist culture. After examining the list of articles in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* in editions up to that of 2009, one of the major peer reviewed journals in the field, I became confident that investigating transpersonal concepts in other cultures was a budding area of research. Based on these observations, I proposed to Dr. Elliot Cohen (currently director of this study) that I should explore Tibetan mendicants' experience of spiritual emergency in order to create more contextually informed knowledge of the experience of spiritual crisis, and enrolled in the PhD course at Leeds Beckett University.

My initial research proposal essentially aimed to test Grof's concept of spiritual emergency in the context of a Tibetan monastic retreat. The main research question then was what form of spiritual emergency the mendicants in a long term retreat might go through, and how those experiences would then be dealt with. With this objective in mind, I planned to interview mendicants and their instructors in order to produce a taxonomy of transpersonal experiences undergone during the retreat. Local permission was granted from a monastery in the Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism to interview monks and nuns in their retreat centre.[19] The initial design of this study was intended to be qualitative and exploratory, as it is now. Yet it focused on the phenomenological description of participants' experience of spiritual crisis, that is, the emphasis was on the diverse manifestations of spiritual emergency. This reflected the space given to enumerating the diversity of triggers of spiritual emergency in academic literature on the subject of spiritual crisis, as shown at the beginning of chapter one.

While maintaining the overall goal of this study which is the exploration of the concept of spiritual crisis amongst Tibetan Buddhists, the setting/context of research shifted from Tibetan Buddhism to Tibetan Buddhist culture, and my focus of inquiry from phenomenological descriptions of Tibetan Buddhists' experience i.e., 'What do they experience?' to the meaning making process in the narratives of Tibetan Buddhists, i.e., 'How do they understand their experience as spiritual crisis?'. This revision reflects the critical argument on psychologization and romanticisation of Buddhism reviewed in chapter two.

Reflexivity and the first cycle of intuitive inquiry

The reasoning behind the changes made to the research question was influenced by a developing reflexive awareness of my own assumptions about the subject, and of my role and position as researcher. There has been a growing awareness that the researcher brings with her preconceptions from her own socio-cultural background and personal experiences. Reflexivity, which requires the researcher to consider and expose her assumptions at varying stages of the research, has been emphasized by many (for instance, Charmaz 2002, 2011, Josselson 2011, Riessman 2008; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

In the case of this research, I personally formulated the initial research question and project which, in its design, was indicative of the central place of my assumptions on spiritual development and experience. Reflexive awareness was gained through reading literature on research methods, and applying the methodological considerations on the literature within transpersonal psychology. Thus I decided to re-examine my motivations and assumptions that underlay choosing the research topics, using the practice of the first cycle of intuitive inquiry: identification of a key text that expresses the gist of the research topic to the researcher. Although Anderson (2011a, 2011b) places this cycle at the very beginning of the research formulation, it was only when I was already engaged with literature that I encountered intuitive inquiry as methodology. Therefore, the cycle was carried out as a practice of reflexivity to clarify my preconceptions on the topic, rather than to choose a topic as Anderson had originally designed it.

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[19] A similar approach has been published in the field of parapsychology. See for example, Roney-Dougal and Solfvin (2006, 2011), and Roney-Dougal, Solfvin and Fox (2008).

The procedure consisted of two parts: first engaging in meditation until my mind was calm and relatively free from chains of thought, then focusing my attention on the concept of spiritual crisis and observing what arose in my awareness. Once an image surfaced, I would allow the image to unravel or waited for it to invite a further image. There were three central themes which arose, two of which were related to my previous experience, and the last to Buddha's life-story.

Fear and fascination towards the topic The first theme was related to the question of why the process of spiritual development should involve experiences of pitfall that may appear psychotic. One of the recurring images was that of a friend of mine who committed suicide in 2000. I had known him for several years beforehand, and had been introduced by him to *seon* (the Korean Buddhist meditation equivalent to the Japanese tradition of *zen*) meditation. At the time of his death, he had been in a *seon* meditation retreat for several months. One day a mutual friend received a short poem written in the style of a traditional Buddhist song of enlightenment. A few days later, I learned of his death which had been preceded by an escape from the retreat centre and inexplicable bizarre behaviour. The shock of the news overshadowed any grief that I felt.

Through engaging in an 'imaginal dialogue' with this memory and with the image of my late friend, the fear and confusion I had felt about his death turned into images of beckoning and invitation. As these images dissolved their place was taken by my memories of translating into Korean a contemporary American Catholic mystic's account of the experience of 'no-self' (Roberts, 1993) into Korean, which was published in 2006. I was reminded of how gripping it had been to translate each expression which described the author's experience of losing her self, that is to say, the loss of all sense of identity together with the resulting loss of emotions, and a change in sensory perception with ontological implications (or mystical vision that lasted for several months); accompanied by the hazardous progress of assimilating a new mode of consciousness. These images together with other memories that shared the common theme enabled me to become aware of my deep-seated fascination and fear in regard to the experience of spiritual crisis.

Emotions and energy The second group of images were related to my experience and observations gained during a number of *vipassana* meditation retreats that I attended in India and Korea. These retreats followed the Southeast Asian Buddhist meditation traditions. Initial images were related to memories of emotional turbulence which often alternated with spells of peaceful meditative absorption. Emotional turbulence would eventually provide an opportunity to re-experience a painful memory and reintegrate it from a different perspective as Kornfield (1989, 1993) and Salzberg (1995) amongst others have described. What drew my attention, however, were the two distinctive tiers of narrative which underpinned the advice offered by the retreat organizers for those meditators suffering from emotional turbulence.

Firstly, there were discourses and publications in the language of Theravada Buddhist doctrine which explained such emotional turbulence in terms of the manifestation of 'samkharas' a Buddhist conceptual term used to describe mental faculties such as volition, urges, and predispositions.[20] On these retreats samkhara was equated with experience of physical sensation. Those in the midst of turbulence were advised therefore to observe their sensations. Instructions for observing the intimate entwining of physical pain and unhappy memories were frequently followed by advice to meditators that they should apply Buddhist ethics in their daily lives.

Once reduced to sensations, however, emotions were ignored during meditation. The individual history or memory entwined with them was considered only a distraction from meditation. This attitude drew from the second tier of narrative used on the retreats, which employed the concept of subtle energy to explain the nature of sensations and how to manipulate them. Advice of this type was not published but communicated personally by the teachers to the disciples. In this, great caution was taken regarding the meditator's experience, which was broadly reflected by the level of the retreat, whether it lasted for ten, twenty, or thirty days, or even longer. By volunteering as a retreat manager or a translator for the teacher, I came to hear many kinds of advice which focused on ways to bring an active change to the experience of energy/sensations which one was presently undergoing.

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[20] *Samkhara* (a Theravada Buddhist term) was briefly mentioned in chapter two as one of the five aggregates that comprise a human being.

The gap between two separate sets of language and the strict secrecy regarding the latter made me rethink the way in which Buddhist doctrinal theories and practices of meditation weave the individual experience of meditation. These experiences helped me to formulate the idea of crisis within a Buddhist context and suggested the potential complexities that one would need to deal with in order to evaluate inner experience in terms of transformative effect or meaning.

Buddha's encounter with Mara The third theme was in some ways similar to the first, crystallizing as it did my inquiry into the conditions of spiritual crisis – what is it about the human psyche that makes spiritual crisis with psychotic symptoms possible. The central image here was that of Mara as was reviewed in chapter two, where I presented the account based on my interpretation made during the first cycle of intuitive inquiry. In that chapter, I commented on the discrepancy between the concept of Mara and the definition of enlightenment as it has become established in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, and introduced a psychoanalytic interpretation proposed by Batchelor (2011) and Epstein (2013). On the other hand, the allegory of Mara may represent an underlying barrier of the psyche which has to be transcended before one's awareness can move/expand to the transpersonal realm, a moment exemplified by the ability to see all one's past lives including every birth and death. According to traditional narrative, this shift occurred when Siddhartha touched the ground beneath the bodhi tree in order to prove to Mara that he deserved his place there and was worthy of enlightenment.

I found it a highly tense and moving experience to ask myself what would have happened if Siddhartha had failed to respond to Mara by touching the ground (see for the narrative, Karetzky, 1992, Keown, 2003, Olson, 2005, Thomas 1931/1999). I asked myself this question many times. Indeed it came to epitomize my inner dialogue on the subject of spiritual crisis. Instead of a straightforward progress toward enlightenment, maybe there is a Mara waiting at the doorstep of every new insight into or movement toward psycho-spiritual growth.

Clarifying my personal preconceptions based on the first cycle of intuitive inquiry enabled me to narrow down the wider discussion of spiritual crisis to the mechanisms of individual psychological transformation as proposed by James (1902) and others reviewed in chapter one.

Reflection on the process of refining research design

Through familiarising myself with the literature on research methods I was able to critique my original research proposal as being based on the assumption that spiritual crisis is a universal phenomenon. Such assumptions reflect the widely held assumption within transpersonal psychology that, in cultures outside the West, cases of spiritual crisis are more promptly identified with better support networks for those individuals concerned in cultures outside the West (for instance, Bragdon, 1990/2013, Grof 1989, Lukoff, 1985), yet this has not been evidenced.

Therefore, when these assumptions projected onto Tibetan Buddhist culture in the initial research design were identified, my supervisory team and I decided to focus on the process of constructing meanings of spiritual crisis. As Prof. Fairbairn in my supervisory team suggested, it was conceivable that Tibetan Buddhists might not recognise the concept of spiritual crisis as such. It is theoretically possible that Tibetans might have built an equivalent concept quite different from the one as it has been defined in transpersonal psychology. Taking this into account, it was decided to employ a narrative approach to fieldwork, focusing on the construction of meaning of spiritual crisis in order to reflect Tibetan Buddhists' own distinct voices and perspectives on their experience.

Designing data collection

The primary research question of this study was whether a concept of spiritual crisis equivalent to the one used in transpersonal psychology exists in Tibetan Buddhist culture. To answer this question, I chose to examine whether any equivalent concepts can be constructed in participants' narratives. When designing narrative research in a Tibetan cultural context, there are several factors that have to be carefully considered: 1) a research context to define where the inquiry is to be made both geographically and culturally, and or where to find participants, 2) a method of participant recruitment and 3) a way in which to ask questions during interviews in order to gain the information sought.

Selecting the field of narrative research

In considering the first factor, drawing from the critical arguments reviewed in chapter two, this study limits itself to Tibetan Buddhist culture, by which is meant a set of contexts wherein individual Tibetan Buddhists live their lives and with which they interact in order to make sense of their experience. Consequently it means that data may be collected, geographically, anywhere within the regions of China populated by Tibetans, in particular the area formerly ruled by the Dalai Lamas, which is now known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Equally validly, data might be collected from members of the Tibetan diaspora including those in Nepal and India, and various Western countries including Britain. Amongst these, the decision was taken to choose a refugee community in Dharamsala, India.

The foremost reason for this choice was that the central position of religious life in traditional Tibetan culture is largely maintained in communities in exile in India. Secondly, Dharamsala, as the seat of the Tibetan Government in exile and official residence of the Dalai Lama, functions something like a capital for the Tibetan refugee communities scattered throughout the Indian sub-continent, indeed all over the world. As such, Tibetan residents in Dharamsala tend to have a greater awareness of political issues, and have had more experience of contact with the West including tourists and researchers. This metropolitan characteristic suited my intent to explore individual experience and interpretation as shaped in the context of the spiritual and the socio-political. Furthermore, my previous experience of living in Dharamsala for nine years helped me to ‘seek out respondents who seem[ed] likely [to] epitomize the analytic criteria’ (Warren 202, p. 87) for theoretical sampling. For instance, I already had enough knowledge of the individuals of with certain Tibetan spirit mediums and local healers (either monk or lay) there. It also aided me with the practical preparations required to make data collection within a designated period feasible and realistic.

This location was also regarded as favourable for data collection in terms of how I as researcher would be perceived by my Tibetan participants. I expected that having the quality of my contacts, my knowledge of the area, and my ability to speak Tibetan would potentially help me, a non-Tibetan Asian female researcher from a Western university to be perceived if not as an insider, then not at least as a complete outsider.

How to find participants who would narrate their experience

As noted in chapter two, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition called *vajrayana* is well known for its taboos against publicizing one's esoteric practices and attainments. Although I did not intend to limit interview participants to esoteric practitioners, it was expected to be difficult to find potential participants who would be willing to talk about their transpersonal experience, whether induced by meditation or not (For instance, Roney-Dougal and Solfvin (2006, 2011) report that they were unable to find any participant in the first year of their work). Concepts such as psychological disorder and psychosis which are associated with the concept of spiritual emergency are also subject to cultural taboos, which only added to the potential difficulties of the recruitment process (Warren, 2002). Linking a stigmatized, sensitive subject with the concept of spirituality, predominantly identified with Buddhism by Tibetan Buddhists, was further likely to make the research look suspicious in the eyes of potential participants, as warned by Johnson (2002) amongst others. Therefore, a subtle and practical approach to locate and recruit participants was necessitated.

Other than the local sensitivity surrounding the research topic, practical matters had to be considered. Online communication, for example, was neither widespread nor universal amongst Tibetan refugees (except for the younger generation) making it pointless to look for participants online.

How to ask questions: issue of translation, and how to present the research topic

The risk of 'importing one set of linguistic and cultural assumptions into another' in qualitative research has been noted by many (Briggs, 1986, as appearing in Warren 2002, p. 97). This concern was first reflected when it came to translating and introducing the research topic. Firstly, there was the practical matter of research ethics which required that the participants be provided with a clear outline of the research topic and the manner in which the information they provided would be used. The purpose of my research also had to be given to the monastic authority.

However, the concept of spiritual crisis could not be adequately translated into Tibetan, as can be seen from the fact that this research departs from the question whether such concept can be found in Tibetan Buddhist culture. First of all, Tibetan language possesses no exact equivalent of the term 'spiritual' with its secular connotation distinguished from the 'religious' as defined by Wulff (1997). Spiritual/transpersonal development beyond the personal is described and discussed exclusively in terms of the Buddhist doctrinal ideal and experiential practices, examples of which have been reviewed in chapter two. If the meaning of spiritual crisis was introduced to Tibetan Buddhists using Buddhist terms such as *lam* (spiritual path), or *naljor* (practice including prayers and yoga), there was a risk that the research might eventually repeat doctrinal expositions while excluding narratives of any spontaneous, transpersonal experience from the outset. Furthermore, my intention was for the study to be inclusive of spontaneous experiences of spiritual crisis potentially including those outside of a monastic context.

Therefore I chose to focus on the three factors mentioned earlier as the information to be gained in the exploratory interviews carried out in phase one of the data collection to be described below.

Stage two: Data collection

The data collection process in narrative research is flexible, as noted by Riessman (2008), so much so, that it may appear relatively unstructured compared to survey based methods of data collection. At differing stages of this study, I relied on different methods such as exploratory interviews, questionnaires, semi-structured interviewing for personal narratives, and participant observation, adapting my methods as the need arose.

Research ethics

Ethics approval was granted by the School of Social Sciences of Leeds Beckett University in January, 2011. Approval at the local level in the fieldwork context was acquired from the office of the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, India in October 2009 and March 2012.

Participants were given an information sheet either in English or Tibetan and where necessary given further oral clarification about the nature of the research which they were to be involved in, how their information would be used and how their anonymity would be protected. The ethics application and approval, and the information sheets are included in the Appendices. Signed consent forms have been retained as hard-copy by the researcher. Participants who agreed to their real name being used were marked as such and the rest were given pseudonyms in the thesis.

A central concern throughout the preparatory stages and the fieldwork was the manner in which Tibetan Buddhists would perceive the research. As Liamputtong (2010) aptly points out, communities at fieldwork sites often view research as a Western enterprise that intrudes into their private life and makes them uncomfortable. In other words, the act of research, especially, the enquiry into those cultural matters which native communities themselves do not question may cause conflict between the researcher and the researched. As I note in chapter five regarding a Tibetan monk's participation in a scientific experiment in the USA, Tibetans in exile communities have ambivalent feelings about their interaction with the West. During exploratory interviews, one of my participants commented that Tibetans feel bitter about the distortions imposed on their opinions by Western researchers. In my research, questions asked to mendicants and spirit mediums about spiritual practice and transpersonal experiences were bound to be perceived as a violation to cultural norms regarding vows of esoteric practice (explained in chapter two, and illustrated in chapter five). As will be described in the next section, I attempted to carry out each step in a way that Tibetan Buddhists would find more acceptable by first acquiring support from members of the monastic community. As a minimal but essential measure, the letter of endorsement from the Dalai Lama's office was presented to potential participants, as had been recommended to me by a few of my informants. Yet it is difficult to judge the degree to which this was meaningful to my Tibetan participants and was fruitful for the research. In all interviews, my foremost intention to give a voice to the Tibetan Buddhists' experience and the respect I felt towards their cultural heritage and norms were empathetically stressed. Negative responses from potential participants were always respected, no matter how significant their stories may have appeared to my research.

Phase one: Preparing for fieldwork

As described above, preparation focused on gaining information in terms of locating potential participants, the way in which to present the research topic to potential participants, and choosing an appropriate interview method by means of exploratory, ethnographic interviews. Based on information from the initial interviews, I prepared a questionnaire for the purpose of locating participants.

Exploratory interviews

From the initial stage of formulating my research question up until the beginning of fieldwork, I interviewed sixteen informants. As Briggs (1986, cited from Warren 2002) notes regarding ethnographic interviews in research on other cultures, informants for these interviews were selected 'for their access to information and linguistic ability to deliver it' not for their own narratives of spiritual crisis.

Most of these informants were identified through a strategy combining snowballing sampling and theoretical sampling. Interviewees were divided into categories: there were six westerners (five of these in India) and eleven Tibetans (nine of these in India); in terms of ordination, there were ten ordained Buddhists, seven lay people, and one lay priest; by denomination, eleven of these belonged to the Geluk school and five to non-Geluk schools. The interview form also varied from short audiences in the case of religious figures of high rank such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa to hours of meandering conversations with some others.

Interviews for the purpose of preliminary exploration aimed to explore how my research concept would be perceived from the perspective of insiders and semi-insiders. By 'semi-insiders' I refer to those Westerners who had chosen to live amongst Tibetans for their own religious, academic, or personal fulfilment. In addition to information gained from the responses of interviewees, attention was also paid to how they initially reacted to the idea of searching for cases of spiritual crisis amongst Tibetans, and to the kind of questions they responded to and whether this was with greater or less ease, or with reluctance.

Interviewing 'the experts', and what that suggested for the next phase

It goes far beyond the available space in this thesis to discuss all the findings of these interviews. Rather than providing detailed descriptions in this section, I will integrate data from this stage into the analysis of narratives in later chapters. However, what I will point out in this section are a few themes that emerged during the phase, and which affected the formation and/or execution of the subsequent phase.

I first met five Westerners who had had been living in or around Dharamsala for several decades and who were involved in Buddhist studies and/or monastic communities. Most of them had had previous experience of helping Western academics carry out fieldwork in Buddhist and other fields of studies. The principal concern raised by most was related to the traditional Tibetan taboo about sharing individual experience. Secondly, it was noted that levels of suspicion in regard to western researchers had recently been on the rise amongst Tibetans. This concern was confirmed many times during further exploratory interviews with Tibetan participants.

This suspicion, according to one participant, was related to a perceived mispresentation in publication which had resulted in making the Tibetan informants feel they had been ‘betrayed’. This suggested a potential friction between researchers’ worldviews and those of their participants. This kind of friction in cross-cultural research has been noted by many observers. For instance, Liamputtong (2010) argues that research in other cultures is typically a Western male enterprise turning the researched into the object/other. She describes indigenous people’s perceptions of western researchers carrying out fieldwork in terms of poking around and asking questions which participants find uncomfortable to talk about. Indeed this resonates with what my participants’ facial expressions often betrayed when they learned of my research topic. Informants agreed with each other that I needed above all to meet leaders of religious communities, and gain written permission from them as a symbolic hallmark to suggest that I was a legitimate person to talk to, and also to encourage them to recommend me other potential participants. Because the cultural taboo against discussing one’s own inner experience touched the matter of esoteric vows, it was suggested that acquiring agreement from the teacher of any potential participant might make him or her feel less barrier about relating personal experiences.

It turned out, however, that agreement from teachers and religious leaders did not significantly reduce the problems of crossing this cultural taboo. I met (more precisely had an audience with) seven Tibetan *lamas* including the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa the leader of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Some of the lamas had experience of leading others for long-term retreats. A few were young but, in their role as head of a religious community and the latest reincarnation of a lama lineage, were considered figures of authority by older mendicants. Therefore Western participants regarded them as being in the position to name individuals who might have narratives of the kind I was seeking. From their pensive looks and the many pauses during audiences, it was not difficult to judge that this approach was unlikely to yield me much success in terms of finding participants. Interestingly, no one mentioned vows or other traditional, cultural taboos as reasons for the difficulties they perceived.[21]

There was one exception, however, the Dalai Lama made the suggestion that narratives of former political prisoners in Tibet ought to be explored if my interest lay in symptoms of apparent crisis signifying a step in spiritual development. Although the source of this suggestion had almost absolute authority within the community (for example, I was universally congratulated on the fact that ‘His Holiness’ had made a suggestion about the research), I was initially cautious as this direction of research did not immediately fit the theoretical lenses of spiritual crisis. However, the link to experiences of imprisonment was to consistently reappear during later exploratory interviews in terms of distress, regression on the spiritual path, and spiritual development.

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[21] Throughout the study, I encountered only one individual who actually stated that he could not tell me about his experience because I did not share the same monastic and esoteric vows.

Suggestions of using stories: One Western ordained nun’s response succinctly sums up the issues which were raised verbally and non-verbally during interviews. She responded to my inquiry by, “If someone comes along and asks you about your sex life with your husband, what will you say?” The taboo against sharing one’s inner experience with the non-initiated makes the act of sharing highly intimate. It was a sense of privacy that put into question my position as a non-initiated Buddhist female. As Johnson (2002) has suggested, in-depth interviewing is in general most feasible when the interviewer is considered an insider as well as someone who has a similar story to tell to the interviewee, likewise, when the interviewer and interviewee have developed a rapport regarding the subject of the interview. Even if the level of information that I sought was not particularly in-depth, the private nature of the topic forbade me from asking questions too directly.

Exploratory interviews were carried out with some expectation that participants would help to locate others through their own social networks. Although the method of snowballing sampling was considered suitable to the local situation given its low population and sensitive nature of the subject, as suggested by Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003), it did not prove productive in terms of locating participants with narratives interesting to me. The failure was not utterly unexpected because I was already aware of the secrecy issues in Tibetan esoteric Buddhism.

This result inspired me to adopt a less direct and seemingly less private approach. Firstly, rather than relying on the spiritual elite in the community, I made the decision to question people who, though they may have less information on the subject, may feel more comfortable to talk about it. By asking people to describe others’ experiences, I could gain a summarised account of someone else’s experience and examine the theme to see if it resonated with the topic of spiritual crisis. From there, I could proceed to locate the relevant individual and ask them directly about their experiences. For this purpose, I devised a questionnaire and selected hagiographic accounts from within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition to illustrate examples of spiritual crisis.

The questionnaire as a method of finding participants

Questionnaires are usually regarded as a quantitative research tool, and as such are often employed for testing hypotheses and carrying out surveys (Gillham, 2007). During this phase, however, I used a questionnaire as a tool for qualitative data collection as part of preparation for my fieldwork.

The main objective of the questionnaire was to identify potential participants for narrative interviews and in so doing to fulfil the same function as for exploratory interviews. Exploratory interviews had cost considerably more in terms of time, budget, and emotional investment without yielding much result.

A questionnaire was expected to be an economic alternative to interviews. As I planned the fieldwork to last for three months, a relatively short period of time, it was necessary to find a way to expedite the initial process of finding participants. However, it should again be noted that the questionnaire was not employed in order to triangulate, either back up or compare with, findings from other phases, as is often done in mixed method approaches in social research. Therefore, employing a questionnaire for the purpose of finding participants was not considered a deviation from my overall research design and its epistemological stance. As will be discussed below, the process of developing the questionnaire and analysing responses to it was qualitative.

The questionnaire was developed through exploratory interviews with two Tibetan monks (a Buddhist teacher in the UK and a teacher of modern Tibetan literature in India) and two lay Tibetan men (in the UK) which focused on terms, communication, and interviewing methods. The questionnaire was written in English, and then translated into Tibetan. Once it had been distributed, however, some respondents preferred to fill in the English version. Therefore, both Tibetan and English versions were distributed.

Target respondents

Questionnaire respondents were students of a monastic college, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala, India. The college differs in several ways from other monastic colleges in the Geluk tradition. Established on the initiative of the Dalai Lama in the 1970s, it has gradually opened its doors to a wider public including lay people, high school matriculation being one of the entrance qualifications, and also to foreign monks and nuns. For this reason, many students apply as a result of a conscious and personal decision (in other words, they have not been sent in their childhood by their parents as was the traditional practice). This suggested to me that there was more of a chance of coming across respondents with some personal, conscious interest in their own spiritual development, than might be found amongst the general public. Many of the students possess some command of English. Also, they have had more exposure to the West, including some acquaintance with the term 'spirituality', which however did not necessarily mean that they would be familiar with the ways in which the term is generally used in the West. Students also had good access to information about hermit monks who come down to the monastery twice a month and about lamas held in high esteem by the locals.

Developing the questionnaire

While designing the questionnaire, I decided to use open-ended questions in order to invite respondents to describe a person in their own terms. This decision goes against the common strategy for designing questionnaires—making questions very specific so the respondents do not need to spend too much time in answering them, as Gillham (2007) has described. Taking that into account, I asked respondents to ignore questions which they did not wish to answer or found incomprehensible or simply nonsensical.

Questions covered the following topics:

1) attaining a positive outcome from spiritual practice,
2) being spiritually developed,
3) evidence or disproof of individual spiritual development
4) a life changing event—psychological and/or physical illness or accident that may have oriented someone to be interested in, or committed to, spirituality, and
5) depression or feelings of meaninglessness or other psychological problems experienced while engaged in spiritual practice of whatever form.

Themes were presented as a description of a person using simple, abstract expressions. For each description, respondents were asked if the description reminded them of anyone. They were then asked a few further questions about details of that person. Each description was arranged so as to gradually lead respondents to the last description of a person in spiritual crisis. By starting with a topic which respondents would feel confident and comfortable to answer, the intention was to lead the respondents gently towards the main topic without posing questions too abruptly. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were invited to comment on the overall task, by mentioning, for example, which descriptions they had found interesting, difficult and/or uncomfortable to answer. Respondents were encouraged to skip sections about which they had no relevant information.

That responses might not be comparable with each other, and might not form any consistent finding had been taken into account in advance. This however was not a problem for this study at this stage of preparing fieldwork because the main purpose of the questionnaire was to locate potential participants and to sieve through the seminal terms used by the respondents in making sense of spiritual development.

Distribution: The questionnaire was distributed in printed form and collected by a Korean nun on my behalf who was also a student in the monastic college. She gave out twenty five prints to her fellow students who had agreed to fill it in, and asked them to return it to her within two weeks. Fifteen were returned and were sent to me about five months prior to the scheduled beginning of fieldwork.

Analysing the questionnaire

Analysis was primarily qualitative, but quantitative judgement was not entirely excluded as themes and expressions appearing repeatedly were paid attention to. I examined the responses according to the following criteria:

1) whether any persons and their stories described in the responses match the kind of theme I sought,

2) what kind of expressions appeared in those answers in terms of the concept of ‘spiritual’, and

3) whether anyone mentioned paranormal experience in connection to spiritual development.

Among the fifteen responses, seven showed a potential link with the concept of spiritual crisis. All of the seven respondents agreed to be contacted for further information. Some of them had described people who lived in and around the community, and seemed possible to get in touch with.

The theme of political imprisonment in Tibet under Chinese occupation, earlier mentioned as having been recommended to me by the Dalai Lama, appeared in six responses in terms of either crisis in spiritual practice or proof of spiritual development. Even though the idea of imprisonment did not fit the theoretical lenses of spiritual crisis, I decided to explore the theme further.

There was only one respondent who actually mentioned the hagiographic account of Drukpa Kunley (introduced in chapter two in terms of spiritual wisdom against social norms) and a near-death account as spontaneous experiences leading to spiritual awakening. One respondent described a monk’s spiritual realization through an experience of the loss and then the regaining of the meaning of his spiritual practice. A few responses described two fellow students’ journey to ordination while in their twenties as a form of spiritual awakening. Including those two, ten participants were recruited for further interviews.

Selecting the interview Schedule & hagiographic accounts

A qualitative, semi-structured interviewing method was identified as being suitable for the purpose of acquiring narrative which expressed participants’ own voices, perspectives, and values (Atkinson 2002, Charmaz 2011; Warren 2002) regarding the question of how a seeming crisis might bring about spiritual development. In terms of participants’ own experience, I decided to guide the flow of the interview according to the common structure of narratives of spiritual emergency: 1) phenomenological description of crisis, 2) trigger of the given experience, 3) the result or transformative effect of the given experience, and 4) the underlying mechanism of the given experience (the explanation which participants offer to explain their experience).

As part of the interviewing schedule, my supervisory team and I decided to introduce hagiographic accounts during interviews and use them as an invitation for participants 1) to relate the stories to their own experience and to narrate it, and 2) to relate them to someone else’s experience and to narrate that person’s story or to recommend them to me as a possible interviewee. Such an approach is widely used in combination with other methods of data collection in qualitative research for exploring values, cultural beliefs, social norms, and sensitive topics (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003; Barter & Renold 1999, Finch 1987/ 2003).

The method used during this phase differs slightly from the vignette method in the sense that the stories were distilled from hagiographies (except for one question), and were thus not completely hypothetical. They provided concrete examples of situations that bridged the concept of spiritual crisis with the participants' own culture. Some of these stories were selected based on the way Tibetan participants used them to make points during interviews of the first phase. As a result, it was hoped that they would also work to help participants open up with their own stories. It must be noted that the stories selected at this stage were mainly used to facilitate narrative research, and were not designed to yield a result independent from the rest of study.

Selection of stories

Primary criteria for selection for the hagiographic entry points were their theoretical relevance to the concept of spiritual crisis. Descriptions below refer to spiritual emergency as defined by Grof (Grof, 1989) and others – that is, psychological distress that may be a signal of spiritual awakening. Stories were usually presented in Tibetan as part of the conversation. The wording presented below only roughly outlines that used during interviews.

1) When the Buddha was still a prince living in the palace, it is said that he saw four signs: a sick man, an old man, a corpse and a wandering yogi. Pondering over these signs, he decided to leave home to devote himself to ascetic practice.

2) On the night before the Buddha attained enlightenment, Mara appeared in front of him to tempt and to threaten him.

These two themes were chosen based on interpretations of them as symbolizing i) Buddha's existential crisis and ii) Buddha facing his own personal psychological issues prior to enlightenment.

3) Rechungpa fell ill with *zé* (mdze) disease sometime after meeting Milarepa his future master. Later his illness was cured by engaging in tantric practice.

Grof and Grof (1989, 1990) list physical illness as a potential trigger of spiritual emergency. Using episodes of *zé* (leprosy) as an example of physical illness and the resulting social ostracisation, I asked participants if they could think of anyone who had been through a similar kind of hardship and had afterwards become spiritually motivated.

4) *Delog* (revenant) stories tell us of people who, having been dead for days, come back to life. When the *delog* returns to life, he or she suddenly becomes very knowledgeable about the world of buddhas and bodhisattvas. A famous *delog* left her husband and family, after waking from death. She travelled around the country preaching to people about the need to practice Buddhism sincerely.

By introducing *delog* accounts, I intended to introduce the idea of spontaneous transpersonal experience not induced by meditative training.

Whichever version of the story was used, it was followed by questions such as: 'What do you think is happening to that person?' 'What kind of problems would make one unable to practice?' 'When do people struggle with, or give up, their practice? 'Do you know anyone who has been in a similar situation?', and 'What do you think the person would have felt?' These questions were used flexibly as was fitting to the interview situation at the time.

Phase two. Fieldwork for narrative collection and ethnography

> *The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world, and converse with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as 'wandering together with'. (Kvale, 1996, p. 4, cited from Warren 2002)*

This phase consisted of three months fieldwork in Dharamsala, India, in 2012. During this time I interviewed over thirty participants. On top of this, much information was gained through participant observation, and informal communication. However, given the limited space of a PhD thesis, I cannot present a comprehensive account of fieldwork in this section. In the following section, I will provide a brief account of the fieldwork location, sampling strategy, and the forms which the interviews took. Further significant material will be integrated into the three chapters of narrative analysis.

Dharamsala: the fieldwork location

Most of the fieldwork was carried out in Dharamsala, the small town in northern India, which is the seat of the Tibetan Government-in-exile. The current Tibetan exodus to India began at the end of the 1950s when the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army invaded the country. In 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama fled into exile in India. Since then, major centres of spiritual gravity have moved to refugee settlements in India while the religious heritage within Tibet has been systematically undermined by the Chinese authorities.

Fieldwork was mainly carried out in the upper hill station of McLeod Ganj together with the surrounding area of higher hills where many Tibetan Buddhist hermits live. The residence of the Dalai Lama and a large monastery directly associated with him are located in McLoed Ganj. Thus the community includes a large population of monks and lay followers of the Geluk tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (to which the Dalai Lama belongs). Although there was no initial intention to limit participation to this particular tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, this factor being peripheral to sampling strategy, geographical context dictated that most of my participants did indeed belong to this tradition.

As stated in chapter two, the research context of this thesis is defined as that of Tibetan Buddhist culture situated within a particular spatio-temporal context. The period from March to May 2012 was a sensitive time in the Tibetan refugee community. On 26th March, fatal repercussions of a succession of self-immolations carried out by Tibetans in the TAR finally reached the Tibetan communities in India. A Tibetan refugee burned himself to death in Delhi. His funeral was performed at Namgyal monastery in McLeod Ganj where most of my questionnaire respondents lived. Most interview appointments were cancelled. Even the few participants who agreed to keep their appointments with me were not really focused on talking about their personal life. A sense of collective political trauma had been re-ignited and people were disturbed. It is possible that the particular atmosphere of the time might have been a factor in participants' so repeatedly bringing up imprisonment narratives, so interweaving spirituality with the current political context.

Interviewing

I began my work by interviewing the seven questionnaire respondents and asking them about the figures they had described. By means of these interviews, I was able to locate eight further individuals to conduct narrative interviews. Although not everyone individuals agreed to be interviewed, the snow balling method worked well in general during fieldwork.

I also met four spirit mediums and two local healers. These were people I already had information about prior to beginning fieldwork.

Most interviews occurred in locations of the participants' choice – in their houses, in monastic dormitories, or in cafés. This choice broadly reflected how personal the participants' account would be. Interviews took various lengths of time, ranging from a single interview of forty minutes to three sessions that each lasted two hours. They also took various forms which ranged from a single interview that focused on the experience under investigation to a personal account that was embedded in a course of personal religious tuition. This diversity was never my aim, however, in order to acquire the type of narratives I was seeking, it was necessary to negotiate with, and respond to, participants' preferences, as far as it was possible to do so.

The method of data collection, however, was not strictly limited to interviews. In some cases, acquaintances of my participants who had seen them filling in the questionnaire or being interviewed by me would join in the conversation, adding a joke or offering a comment which later turned out to be a valuable piece of information. Any relevant material acquired through these interactions has been integrated into the narrative analysis in the following chapters.

Hagiographies: How did they work?

The rationale behind the selection of hagiographic episodes was to avoid asking directly about abstract concepts, and to invite participants to discuss a situation 'in their own terms' (Barter & Renold, 1999, p.1) and to facilitate discussion of sensitive subjects (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003). However, the hagiographic accounts did not bring the expected results during interviews. Most participants immediately suggested a better educated monk – often one of their teachers, or a recognised lama in the community, claiming that I must 'learn properly' from such figures. On a few occasions, it provoked a rather aggressive response about my hidden intentions in asking about such 'peripheral' issues of saintly figures. For instance, ordained participants perceived my question about the Buddha and Mara as evidence of lack of an education on my part because the life of the historical Buddha was a manifestation (mzad pa in Tibetan) of Buddhahood, one that was predestined by the pure being of perfect wisdom according to Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Nevertheless, hagiographic accounts did play a role as an ice breaker during interviews, which was one of their intended goals.

Interpreter

I worked with two interpreters for all but five of the interviews. One of them, Tenzin Tsepak, works as resident translator for the Dalai Lama during his teachings in Dharamsala. The other, a Korean Buddhist nun, has been studying in the monastic college in Dharamsala for many years. On top of his linguistic competence, Tsepak's knowledge of geography and Tibetan history was in some cases instrumental in understanding the participant's story (particularly so in the case of Lobzur-la's narrative considered in chapter seven). In cases where the participants were young and it was clear that they would be narrating their own story, there was an agreement between participants and myself that interviews would proceed without an interpreter in order to protect their privacy and anonymity.

Interview results

By the end of fieldwork, I had collected fourteen narratives of various types of life crisis acquired through interview. In addition, I had three pre-published interviews: the late Lobsang Tenzin (chapter five) a hermit, Namsel Drolma (chapter six), and Thubten Ngodup (chapter six), both of whom are spirit mediums. A copy of Lobsang Tenzin's narrative was given to me by a friend of one of the questionnaire respondents. At first I intended to use it as a tool to find more interview participants. However, after having five interviews with the editor of the material, and fellow hermits, I decided to use it as one of my key narratives. Namsel Drolma's narrative was originally recommended by a British participant during the phase of exploratory interviews. Thubten Ngodup's pre-published material was given to me by himself during an interview.

In order to select key narratives to analyse, I first listened to the recordings, read the printed materials, and made descriptive summaries. Although I tried to transcribe every interview – it soon proved to be too time-consuming a labour with little value, as there were so many lengthy recordings. For example, there was a series of religious tuition in which the participant's story was inserted as an illustration of a doctrinal point. Narrative interviews and secondary interviews were noted in terms of content, theme, and narrative pattern. I applied two primary criteria: the richness and detailed information given about the experience described, and the clear sense of crisis and its resolution, leading to psycho-spiritual transformation. Eventually, only those interviews that satisfied these criteria were fully transcribed while other interviews were partially transcribed and the relevant material extracted.

Chapter 5

Crises along the path of bliss and emptiness

May I die alone in my cave
With no one around,
As a wild horse dies in an uninhabited valley;
If this prayer is fulfilled for the benefit of all beings, I'll be satisfied.
- A prayer by Milarepa as it appears in Lobsang Tenzin's biography[22]

General Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the life-story of the tantric practitioner Lobsang Tenzin, whose account has previously been mentioned in academia regarding his participation in experiments carried out to measure *tummo* (gtug mo) energy as a rise in body temperature at Harvard during the 1980s (Lopez 2008, Wallace, 2003, Williams, 1989/2009).

Tummo, better known as *kundalini*, is a form of psychic energy said to reside in its dormant state in the area around the genitals which, once awakened, moves upward until it reaches the crown of the head (Sanella 1989). Kundalini awakening constitutes a well established mystical experience in Hindu mysticism (Khalsa, Newberg, Radha, Wilber, & Selby, 2009; Khrishna, 1967/1970).[23] The phenomenon of tummo as a trigger of spiritual crisis has been proposed by Grof & Grof (1989, 1990) and Sanella (1989) amongst others. However, tummo as a manifestation of spiritual awakening per se is not the major concern of this chapter. In Lobsang Tenzin's narrative, distinctive examples of spiritual progress and regress, of spiritual attainments and pitfalls, emerge and intertwine with one another as the narrator's spiritual life progresses. In these, the development and attainment of tummo plays a central role. Thus the focus of this chapter is on the question, from a tummo practitioner's perspective, of how the meaning of spiritual crisis is generated.

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[22] The first three lines are as they appear in Lobsang Tenzin's biography, *Chö Yang, Vol. 3*. The fourth line was re-translated by me from p.15 of the Tibetan edition of the biography (Karma Gelek, 2011)

[23] Amongst branches of Buddhism, the idea and practice of the awakening and development of tummo is unique to Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism, the tradition of esoteric practice.

Before considering the narrative in detail, a broad map of tantric practice needs to be given in order to clarify why tummo is practiced. Tibetan vajrayana consists of two consecutive stages: the generation stage and the completion stage. Practice in the generation stage largely concerns visualization of deities and their retinues. These are known as mandala and are representations based on manuals of practice for each of the individual Buddhist esoteric deities. One initially aims to visualize the mandala in front of oneself, making the image more vivid and detailed as one's practice improves. Once this is achieved, one proceeds to visualize the deity as oneself. According to one of my participants Tashi Tsering (2012, Loc 582), the goal of this stage is to achieve 'divine identity' with the object of meditation, i.e., to develop a 'strong sense that [one is] indeed the deity' with all its qualities internalized within oneself. Practice of tummo, which brought Lobsang Tenzin his fame, belongs to the second or completion stage. Meditative practice in this stage broadly consists of training oneself to control one's psychic energy to induce particular types of visionary experience in which one realises the fundamental nature of both oneself and the world as emptiness.

The concept of obstacles

While Lobsang Tenzin's progress is broadly mapped by doctrinal exposition, events particular to individual practice that may potentially signify a spiritual crisis are labelled idiomatically as bar-ché (spelled as bar chad) in Tibetan, meaning 'obstacles'. In particular, those central to this narrative draw from the idea of *bar-ché-gek* (bar chad bgegs), which means disturbance caused by malevolent, invisible nature spirits. It is a wide-spread belief that mountain spirits (tsen) and water spirits (lu) may, if annoyed by human activity, take vengeful action, such as causing illness. These spirits are often described as being hostile towards hermits. As we will see in greater detail below, Lobsang Tenzin frames his injuries, nightmares and psychological discomfort as intentional injury done him by a local natural spirit, which he combats via the means of esoteric meditation. I offer an alternative interpretation in which the narrative of *bar-ché-gek* is interpreted, through illuminating its relationship with other parts of his narrative of ongoing spiritual development, as a form of ego death, i.e., a key theme in the concepts of spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof, 1989, 1990), and of Jungian individuation.

To this purpose, I illuminate the connection between themes presented by the narrator to create a concept of crises at the spiritual/transpersonal level which intertwine with each other as the narrator's spiritual life advances:

- Psychological distress leading to 'renunciation' as a form of spiritual awakening viewed from the Buddhist doctrinal perspective; ordination as an identity shift,
- The role of trauma in tummo/kundalini awakening,
- The breaching of vows (dam tshig) and its relevance to esoteric practice and monastic identity,
- Lack of understanding of emptiness as a potential pitfall on the spiritual path, and
- Disturbances encountered on the spiritual path as the result of disturbance from an antagonistic external force.

Before proceeding to investigate how different concepts of spiritual crises and awakening may weave a narrative of spiritual development, I will explain how I encountered this narrative and why I thought it particularly worthy of analysis for the purpose of the present thesis.

Encountering Lobsang Tenzin through participant observation

As noted in chapter two, publicizing one's practice of tummo is considered taboo in Tibetan Buddhist society (Schaeffer, Kapstein & Tuttle, 2013). The taboo in the form of a religious vow forbids those with experience from disclosing it to the uninitiated, and in turn disqualifies those who are not bound by religious vows from either practicing it and/or discussing the experience. So strongly held is this taboo that it makes the kind of narrative presented in this chapter extremely rare, and its pursuit in the form of research tremendously difficult. Thus this taboo regarding publicising esoteric practice permeates the entire process from my first encounter with the text, to my eventual choice of it as a key narrative, despite the fact that the interviews were not carried out by myself, which would have been the preferable method of data collection. At the same time, such a cultural context also justifies why Lobsang Tenzin's narrative is such a valuable source for us to use to investigate a Tibetan Buddhist's inner experience and interpretations of spiritual crisis. Following is a brief account of how I encountered the narrative during the fieldwork.

One day, at a café nearby Namgyal Monastery, I came across two monks, whom I had interviewed a few days earlier. Their names had been suggested by several respondents to my questionnaire as examples of people who might have become drawn to spirituality as a result of stressful experience. Both of them had joined the monastic community in their twenties. I will give them each a pseudonym Tshering and Dondup. Tshering decided to become a monk while he was serving in the Indian Army in the Hymalayan region of Ladakh, while Dondup had problems related to alcoholism during his twenties. Questionnaire responses revealed little else about periods of emotional turbulence or whether their ordination signified any sense of personal transformation. Despite the lack of detail, the responses that referred to them by name seemed a promising stepping stone to locate interview participants. This was because the questions regarding life changing events and the link between traumatic experience and spiritual opening often met short, faltering, and reluctant response. Yet here the responses seemed to show a potential link with the concepts such as loss of meaning (Frankl, 1984), thirst for wholeness (Grof, 1994), and suffering as entry to the spiritual path (as illustrated in chapter three).

While both of them had agreed to meet me for an interview, they had been neither willing to tell me their own stories or nor interested in hagiographic accounts which I related to them. Without detailing his sudden decision to become a monk, Tshering summarized the event by suggesting that reading a book about Buddhism by chance 'awoke [his] *bakchak'* (bag chags). Bakchak in Tibetan is often translated as mental imprints left by previous activities. According to the Buddhist version of the theory of the unconscious as introduced in chapter three, bakchak is a part of what is transferred along with one's rebirths. Does it then mean that Tshering was actually implying that he had had an inkling of his past life and so had decided to become a monk and pursue a spiritual life? Tshering would not reveal anything more.[24] Dondup, on the other hand, struggled to find a place to begin, without over elaborating on of his traumatic early years. He was evasive, punctuating his silence by advising me that to study the story of a one-time 'crazy drunkard' such as himself was not going to help me to understand Buddhist spirituality: 'You should see Teacher such and such and ask him to help you to understand properly'.

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[24] Later I found through interviews that bakchak could be used for merely rhetorical purpose, strategically to avoid any further explanation.

Reluctance to discuss telling personal feelings in Tibetan culture has been noted (See for example Holtz 2009). However, considering my previous experience with Tibetan friends and acquaintances who had willingly shared with me their personal wounds, I put Tshering and Dondup's reluctance down to the lack of rapport between us to share their personal life (as their stories had been fairly well shared among their friends). Furthermore, Tshering's reaction could indeed have been due to his perception of research, that is to say, proper knowledge must be based on normative doctrinal Buddhism, what Tibetans call the 'right understanding'. Thus, my explanation that his individual experience and understanding were important to my research project only contributed to raising his levels of suspicion about my research. Similar reactions in regard to research were in fact the most common responses (especially, amongst younger monastic members) encountered during fieldwork.

Therefore, when I bumped into them in the café sitting with another friend of theirs who also happened to be also an acquaintance of mine, I felt rather awkward. However, I soon discovered that my responsibilities as a researcher to respect the confidentiality of my participant meant nothing to them. What kind of questions I had asked them and how they managed to avoid telling me their stories were all openly discussed. Our mutual friend – whom I had not informed about my research – had already heard how the interviews had gone from the participants' perspective and she began to make a fun of them. In the informal conversation that followed, the three different themes of our interviews, that is, army service, heavy drinking, and spiritual practice were combined as a joke. Then Lobsang Tenzin's story was raised as a typical example of such a combination of characteristics, the story of a yogi who used to be an alcoholic and a soldier.

Using Lobsang Tenzin's narrative to interview mendicants

The fleeting frown on Dondup's face, at the mention of Lobsang Tenzin, immediately drew my attention and I wondered what he was disapproving of. Later, on reading the English edition of Lobsang Tenzin's biography, I was struck by the unusual individuality of his voice that was able to deliver his emotions, and dreams as well as the rich detail of his practice and experience and his own interpretation of these.[25] However, his experiences did not seem immediately to fit in the theoretical lenses of spiritual crisis which I had at the time, and which was centred upon the psychological mechanism of spiritual crisis. The idea of black magic and natural spirits stressed by Lobsang Tenzin seemed to belong to the general culture of Tibetan shamanism. My familiarity with Tibetan culture and with shamanism in Korea obscured the potential link between his account of evil spirits and the Grofian concept of spiritual emergency.

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[25] While the dreams of Tibetan Buddhist meditators are often carefully analysed for indication of achievement or danger, they are rarely documented for publication. There is, however, some intra-

Consequently, my focus remained on Lobsang Tenzin’s tummo practice. His advancement in more clearly doctrinal spiritual practices such as kundalini awakening seemed to progress relatively evenly without any obvious psychological or physical disturbance. His perseverance in spiritual practice was admirable and impressive. I judged it might be a potentially useful opening to invite the tantric practitioners living in caves on the higher hill above McLeod Ganj to interviews, which I had been struggling to organize.

For the cultural reasons mentioned on p.146, carrying out interviews with tantric practitioners required much care and pre-planning. I had initially hoped to encourage them to narrate their experience by stories of mystics well known for their tantric practices and attainments such as Milarepa (c. 1052 – c. 1135) and Gampopa (c. 1079 – c. 1153). However, it gradually emerged that participants did not relate to Milarepa’s story in the way I had hoped. Responses were typically ‘go and find a teacher to give you the correct information’. In hindsight, mention of tantric practice during research interviews may have made people feel that their knowledge was being tested, thus making them uncomfortable. Another explanation may have been disconnection due to the temporal distance between these figures from the past and the present day Buddhists. Also, figures like Milarepa and Gampopa are associated with the Kagyu, a different tradition from that which my

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cultural variation amongst different schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Dreams tend to be more actively cited in writings by figures from other sub-schools of Tibetan Buddhism such as the Nyingma and Kagyu (See for example Khamtrul 2009 where he refers to his dreams in terms of guidance, prophecy and validation). This may be the result of the practice of dream yoga, using lucid dreams as meditative technique, which is common in these schools. However, this technique is not actively practiced in the Geluk tradition, which is well-known for its emphasis on scholasticism. As seen in the previous chapter, my participants all belonged to the Geluk school commonly and often dismissed my questions regarding dreams by resorting to the concept of emptiness: ‘Dreams are empty and have no permanent substance. Then, why bother to think about them?’

participants belonged. Thus using the story of someone who was either known in person or by reputation as living in a cave nearby was thought to be an easier topic for participants to relate to.

As Schaeffer, Kapstein and Tuttle (2013) observe, recognizing a recluse as a tantric master based on his ability to survive freezing temperatures is not considered taboo. Yet it was uncertain to what degree talking about such a person would be taboo. In general, taboos serve to uphold the boundary between the initiated and the uninitiated, and the central concern here being to protect the secret from the uninitiated (Urban, 2003; Welbon 1987). During interviews, this naturally positioned practitioners as defenders against me/the researcher who was understood to be the uninitiated/transgressor, thus making discussion of tummo practice, even in case of someone else, unacceptable, once it reaches the finer details. For example, one monk who climbed down the hill for an interview (at the request of his rinpoche to ‘help’ me) said that he was bound by his vows not to share details of practice with the uninitiated. On another occasion, as the conversation reached the more technical part of Lobsang Tenzin’s secret practice, the interviewee, an elderly meditation teacher was amused by my apparent ignorance of the preposterousness of my mentioning tummo practice in spite of my seeming knowledge of Tibetan language and Buddhism. Interviews seldom moved on from talk about Lobsang Tenzin. These occasions raised certain questions: if speaking about one’s own and others’ practice was considered cultural taboo, why did Lobsang Tenzin’s text exist at all? How had it come to exist in spite of the rigid conceptual barriers of tantric secrecy kept amongst Geluk monks?

Why promote an introductory account to a key narrative for analysis?

The questions of the text’s rarity and the unique context of its generation, while interesting and illuminating in terms of understanding Tibetan culture, are not the principal reasons why Lobsang Tenzin’s narrative was selected as a key narrative for the present thesis. While organising interviews, I read the text several times, making notes for potential topics of discussion and questions that could be raised with participants. This worked as an initial analytical process, equivalent to Cycle three of intuitive inquiry, focusing on descriptive data and identifying themes, as discussed in chapter three. Empathetic identification with Lobsang Tenzin enabled me to notice the pattern of crises and triumphs delivered in the text, and which I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. As an intuitive inquirer, I observed how deeply the text touched me. My emotions were powerfully affected by his sorrow, frustrations and mystical visions. When my fieldwork was over, I discussed the use of pre-published material with my supervisory team, and decided to choose it as a key narrative for further analysis.

Considerations from narrative analysis[26]

1) Generation and public consumption of text: the social context

As mentioned earlier, Lobsang Tenzin's narrative is a rare Tibetan account of a first person experience of tummo and the realization of emptiness. During my fieldwork, I examined the biographical accounts of a number of contemporary meditators published in Tibetan but did not find any others that provided similar episodes of personal meditative experience.

The taboo of publicizing one's experience in tantric Buddhism influenced Lobsang Tenzin's biography in both its formation and its contents. In this section, I review the process of narrative generation and, in so doing, touch on the concept of breaching one's vows (dam tshig) and the consequences of doing so as an example of crisis at the spiritual level as it is perceived in the context of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism.

The formation of the narrative is situated in a particular historical context – the beginning of the dialogue between Tibetan Buddhism and Western science. Lobsang Tenzin was one of the earliest participants in experiments that aimed to measure the effect of meditation on the body. These were initially carried out in Dharamsala by Herbert Benson (Lopez, 2008, Wallace 2003). Lobsang Tenzin was the first Gelukpa monk to travel to America in the 1980s to participate in Benson's experiment to measure body temperature change induced by meditation. The experiments as well as his participation had been previously endorsed by the Dalai Lama. On his return from America, he was interviewed by the staff (including at least one Westerner) of the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Government in Exile, the publisher of the journal *Chő Yang.* It should be noted that, the government at the time was headed by the Dalai Lama and that the editor of *Chő Yang* was a Westerner. Strictly speaking, the journal is aimed at a non-Tibetan, English speaking, readership. Therefore editorial perceptions on the suitability of publishing a tantric meditator's inner experience cannot be said to reflect the general attitude of Tibetans including tantric practitioners.

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[26] The information in this section regarding the interviews with Lobsang Tenzin was obtained through personal correspondence with the editor of *Cho Yang* at the time, and through an interview with Karma Gelek (2011) who edited the Tibetan text of Lobsang Tenzin's narrative and also accompanied Lobsang Tenzin as interpreter on his trip to America.

The absence of such contextual information leaves the reader to assume that the publication of such a narrative was considered culturally acceptable at the time. Certainly, when I first read the text, it made me think that the strictness about the secrecy surrounding tantric practice and individual experience was maybe less than I had been led to believe. Talking about one's tantric practice, however, still remains a sensitive issue within Tibetan culture. Issues surrounding the publication of the Tibetan edition of Lobsang Tenzin's biography in 2011 reflect the conflict between Tibetan practices of secrecy and proponents of modern scientific research. These will be discussed in the following section.

In his introduction to the Tibetan edition of Lobsang Tenzin's biograhy, Karma Gelek (2011) who accompanied Lobsang Tenzin to Harvard in 1985 as his interpreter, states that many recluses fear revealing their practice to the non-initiated, even if limited to external symptoms such as body temperature. At the core of this fear is the matter of tantric vows. If breached, it is feared, they will lead to obstacles (bar chad in Tibetan, pronounced as bar-ché) to spiritual development. Therefore, Lobsang Tenzin's participation in the experiments to measure tantric meditation's effects on the human body was generally viewed as a breach of his vows. Furthermore, Karma Gelek (2011) suggests that Lobsang Tenzin's premature death in 1988 hint at the legitimacy of such fears. Thus his participation in the experiments at Harvard is viewed as a 'noble sacrifice' that deserves to be remembered.

2) Relational context of the narrative generation

When we consider the relational context of this narrative, there is much left unconfirmed. Yet it is highly probable that Lobsang Tenzin, as an advanced adept of tantric practice, was treated with considerable respect by the interviewers, who were lay Buddhists.
Furthermore, the fact that the interviews were carried out after Lobsang Tenzin returned from participating in the experiments at Harvard, suggests that the interviewers held him in a great respect as someone who had helped to pioneer the opening of a dialogue between Tibetan Buddhism and modern science in spite of a dominant prejudice against it. I think, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the way in which he connects the different events and aspects of his life and the choices he makes about what to narrate

represents Lobsang Tenzin's genuine voice, even if the narrative was guided by questions from the interviewers.

Preparing analysis

In the initial stage of analysis, Lobsang Tenzin's narrative did not require transcription as it is a published document. However, I compared the English and Tibetan texts from the perspectives of philology and narrative analysis in order 1) to ascertain if either text has any part omitted in each text, a result of possible bias on the part of the editors (one being westerners and the other Tibetan) who were preparing texts for different audiences, and 2) to ascertain if both texts faithfully render the genuine voice of the narrator.

To a large degree, the texts consistently match each other. The English text presents his life from the time he was in Tibet up to the point of the interview, whereas the Tibetan text has most of the narrative of his life before monastic ordination removed but does provide some answers on the question regarding his tantric practice. The significance of such omissions will be discussed in a later section when discussing the importance of the pre-Buddhist narrative in regard to understanding the construction of meaning of psychological transformation in the latter part of his narrative. Other than this, the two texts provide matching accounts for the major part of the narrative to be analysed here. I used the English text as the main material.[27]

Summarised narrative

Lobsang Tenzin's narrative considered in this chapter was originally published as in English by the Tibetan Government-in-exile in 1990,[28] with a Tibetan edition following in 2011. What follows is a short summary of Lobsang Tenzin's narrative extracted from the article in *Chö Yang.* The focus is on his life from early adulthood up until the episode of his crisis, so does not, therefore, include material pertaining to his trip to America. At the time of the *Chö Yang* interview, he was already in his mid-fifties and had been living as a hermit for several years in caves around Dharamsala, practicing the generation and completion stages of Buddhist tantra.

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[27] On several occasions, however, I found that some expressions, possibly adopted for a more natural sounding English, did not reflect the narrator's experience closely. For that reason, when quotes appearing in this chapter include my own translation, they are marked with square brackets.

[28] *Chö Yang* (1988) 3: 101-111.

Lobsang Tenzin was born into a poor family in 1930 and given the name Tse-chu, meaning 10th day. During his first marriage, he lost three children, each of whom died in infancy. His wife followed soon after. For the benefit of his late wife's soul, he made an offering of a kettleful of butter to the shrine of buddhas. The serenity of a recluse who helped him to melt the hardened butter there left a strong impression on him but this was soon forgotten. He re-married his late wife's sister, who then gave birth to a child which would again die in infancy. He asked the help of a local lama, who performed a ritual. After that the couple had another child who this time survived.

Around this time, the Chinese invaded. His outspoken protests against the invasion gained him the attention of both fellow Tibetans and the Chinese authorities and he was appointed as a local official. Using his official position, he hatched a plan to murder high-ranking Chinese officers. However, this plan got out and he was forced to run away. He tried to persuade his brother to come with him, only to find that it was his brother who had betrayed him and informed the Chinese army of his whereabouts.

He was arrested and imprisoned. Later he escaped and fled to Lhasa. Having no option of returning home, he discussed his future with a lama and decided to cross the border in pursuit of the Dalai Lama. He battled hunger and exhaustion in order to reach India. Once there, he was disappointed to realise that winning the country back was not the major concern of the community in exile. Still full of resentment towards the Chinese occupiers of Tibet, this realisation set him into a spiral of heavy drinking and fighting. After a while, he joined the Indian army where he was positioned on the Indo-Tibetan border and where he believed he would be fighting the Chinese. However, his continual drinking and fighting followed by punishments for indiscipline made him physically unstable. He sought help from the Tibetan Buddhist army chaplain, who traced the cause of his psycho-somatic problems to an incident when he was hit by a stone many years before. The monk's ability arouses faith in him, and he decided to start religious practice under the monk's guidance.

After a few years, he was ordained and took a vow to dedicate the rest of his life to practicing esoteric meditation. As he settled down in a small cave on the upper hill of Dharamsala, 'various signs [in his dreams] gave [him] confidence that [he would] never suffer from lack of food'. Living conditions were harsh with the extreme dampness particularly difficult to bear, yet his meditation proceeded with 'positive signs'. Following the example of the 11th century mystic, Milarepa, he tried to transform any complaint arising within him into the wish for enlightenment. Unlike other hermits in the same area, he never managed to find a permanent, stable residence and moved from a cave to a vacant hut, to a shed built for keeping animals during summer. On one expedition to search for a new cave, he was disappointed with his lack of luck, and prayed that he be ready to die in the middle of nowhere if that contributed to saving other beings from suffering. That evening, he experienced a glowing light and found tummo energy arising within him. When he became more adept at controlling this energy, he was summoned by the Dalai Lama who questions him about the doctrine of emptiness. His answers based on his own experience did not satisfy the Dalai Lama, who advised him to study certain doctrinal treatises. He avoided doing so for some time before, eventually, feeling obliged to read the Lam-rim of Tshongkhapa. On the day he finished the text, he experienced visionary dreams. He applied his meditative absorption to following the logical reasoning of the text he had just read. Soon after this, his understanding of the emptiness of self and phenomena was finally approved by the Dalai Lama.

Once again, he moved to a new cave, a move which was preceded by dreams of limbless people. While staying in this new cave, he suffered continual problems: back pain, a minor injury from slipping over rocks, and an encounter with a poisonous snake, etc. He concluded that these must have been caused by a local spirit whose intention was to disturb his practice. Following the meditative practice of a cycle of tantric texts, he visualised himself in the form of a wrathful manifestation of the bodhisattva of wisdom. Then, in three consecutive dreams, he had a battle against a ‘dark man’ who he threw to the ground while reciting a prayer. During the third dream, he tried to bury the ‘dark man’ who has now shrunk to a tiny size. He was stopped by a crowd of wandering Indian yogis and Bhutanese. After these dreams, he suffered no further injury, and his meditative experiences of emptiness and tummo energy became more stable. Having made that journey, he now felt that he has become a genuinely happy person.

Psychological distress leading to ‘renunciation’ as a form of spiritual awakening

The first part of Lobsang Tenzin’s life story revolves around various misfortunes and psychological turmoil which leads to his ordination as a monk at around the age of forty. The Tibetan term *rabjung* (short hand for rab tu ’byung ba) ‘genuine birth’ refers to one’s ordination as a monk and signifies the beginning of one’s spiritual life. It also conveys the Buddhist perspective that pursuit of the ideal of enlightenment is the only meaningful way of existence.[29] As Deikman (2000) suggests, renunciation and its more institutional form, ordination, have received less attention than meditation as varieties of spiritual practice within the field of psychology. Renunciation of one’s worldly life is common to many spiritual traditions. It may be understood as the continual experience of letting go of what one feels attached to, as Suzuki (1970/2006) has defined it. However, the form of renunciation found in Lobsang Tenzin's narrative marks a complete shift of identity, a shift of goal, and a regeneration of the meaning of life, which involves letting go of his past trauma.

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[29] Traditionally in Tibet, it was common for children of an early age to be sent to monasteries for all kinds of social and economic reasons. Therefore the significance given to ordination in this narrative as personal awakening cannot be generalised to all cases of renunciation and ordination.

Personal meaning of ordination reflected in the structure of the narrative

Lobsang Tenzin describes the early part of his life before he became a monk at the age of 41 as 'wasted time'. Despite the previously stated meaninglessness of his life as a layman, however, the pre-ordination part of his narrative takes more than a quarter of the whole story as it is documented in *Chö Yang*, and this reflects its importance in terms of how he defines himself and puts his life into perspective. As we will see later in this chapter, Lobsang Tenzin repeatedly read the biography of Milarepa (c.1052-1135), probably the most renowned mystic in the history of Tibetan Buddhism in order to console himself and to renew his resolve for the reclusive life. It is very probable that he both compared and connected his life to that of Milarepa whose early life is said to have been laden with misery (his father's death followed by maltreatment by an uncle) which threatened Milarepa's physical and social existence. Milarepa even resorted to learning black magic in order to take revenge on his uncle, whom he murders before finally choosing to seek salvation through commitment to meditation as a recluse. Lobsang Tenzin's narration of pre-ordination life at such great length and detail may have been informed by this particular hagiographic text. In describing his life in this way, Lobsang Tenzin situates himself 'as part of a lineage' of practitioners of Tibetan esoteric meditation who live as hermits in caves (Cook, 2009).

It is, therefore, intriguing to note that, this part of his life story has been largely edited out of the Tibetan version of his narrative except for his period of military life during which he met his first Buddhist teacher. Lobsang Tenzin's evaluation of the early part of his life as a waste appears to have resulted in the editor treating it as such. Although the editor of the Tibetan version, Karma Gelek, states that he cannot remember details of the relevant stories (in his foreword and during his interview with me), I suspect that the omission may have been deliberate because short episodes relating to religious experience or involving Buddhist lamas from this period remain in the text. This omission, thus, appears to be indicative of the way in which doctrinal Buddhism treats individual experience which does not fit into its doctrinal framework. It also serves to obscure the significance of ordination as an event of spiritual awakening which is emphasized by Lobsang Tenzin.[30] Furthermore, it obscures the sequence of the transformative process and decontextualizes Lobsang Tenzin's emotional struggle in the latter part of his narrative.

At the beginning of his story, Lobsang Tenzin frames the context of his life with the statement that he was born into a poor family which explains why he had little exposure to religion during his childhood. This makes his later choice to become a monk a conscious choice, a shift from one phase of his life to another.

The first events he describes are those of the death of his children and of his first wife. There is the suggestion of tremendous sorrow which he cannot express. Then, from the onset of the Chinese occupation, expressions and episodes of anger appear consistently and repeatedly: 'I was so angry with them that any natural feelings of fear and concern for my personal safety totally disappeared from my heart'; 'I directly challenged such traitors'. Emotions which were suppressed when facing his own personal trauma are now released as anger about the fate of his country, as the social realm becomes dominant in his psyche at this time of great social upheaval.

It is this passionate anger that creates a change in his social status, and plays a role in the flow of his narrative: election as a local official, his plans to murder Chinese officials, chase and arrest by the Chinese army. His anger as a driving force enables him to test his abilities at the social level but it also separates him from his former life. This separation becomes irrevocable when his own brother betrays him and he is arrested. Consequently, his imprisonment which includes torture and beating represents for him a coerced form of renunciation.

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[30] The evidence for my argument that the editor deliberately removed much of the pre-ordination narrative is as follows: from the section in the *Chő yang* article that describes Lobsang Tenzin's time in the army up to his meeting with the army chaplain, two parts (several lines apart) are missing in the Tibetan text – one about his habitual quarrelling with other soldiers, the other, his confession of illiteracy. The remaining text between them is too short to support the idea that the editor could have lost some part of the transcription.

This makes it possible to assume the major events describing his anger, heavy drinking and fighting were also removed for the same reason. Reasons for such omissions can be guessed from Karma Gelek's presentation of Lobsang Tenzin elsewhere (Dalai Lama & Chan 2004) as a forgiving, compassionate lay person who intuitively understood the causal relation of his activities and their consequences. The result of such a presentation is that Lobsang Tenzin is depicted as a noble minded person who deserved to succeed on the path of tantric practice, someone who personified the ideal image of a monk of the Geluk tradition. Such misrepresentation of Lobsang Tenzin provides a small window into Tibetan doctrinal perception of individual crises.

In the narrative of his escape from prison followed by his flight to India, the target on which he projects his anger, China seems to lose its potency, as he begins to feel that return to an independent Tibet is something unlikely to happen in the near future. His description of life in India largely focuses on random acts of explosive violence and alcoholism. He appears to be completely disoriented having lost the source of meaning of his former life: first his family, then his country identified with the expanded self, both of which are now geographically distant. Anger gives way to a strong sense of loss and disorientation: ‘in order to suppress my anxiety and sadness, I started drinking and became well known in the town as a drunkard’; ‘being single…I drank off my day’s earnings’.

Lobsang Tenzin’s suffering, now devoid of any meaning or hope, turns into despair. It is noteworthy that he tries to compensate for this loss of meaning by enrolling in the Indian Army: ‘now fight the Chinese.’ When this unconscious move is thwarted by political reality and he discovers that the meaning of life cannot be restored by serving in the Indian army, he begins to develop psychosomatic illnesses including depression, frequent bouts of diarrhoea and he starts to have regular fights with his colleagues.

As above, an emotional undercurrent of anger and frustration flows through these events until they turn into despair and depression. Despair and depression have been identified as symptoms of spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof 1989); a signal that may precede a spiritual awakening (Assagioli 1965, James, 1902). Based on her own experience of alcoholism, Christina Grof (1994) argues that the ‘thirst for wholeness’ underlies alcoholism and addiction. Diamond (2011) considers despair as a form of ‘psychospiritual crisis, and as a prolonged “dark night of the soul”.

How the spiritual intervenes in one’s suffering

Lobsang Tenzin’s loss of meaning is indeed restored by embarking on a religious career. What is lost is not regained, nor is the loss immediately reinterpreted from a wider perspective. Instead, it is replaced by an entirely different kind of meaning – life as an opportunity to achieve enlightenment. In order to understand how this shift occurs, we need to look at the way he had previously related to Buddhism.

On examining his story more closely, we find a particular pattern of events. Misfortune endlessly repeats itself until he seeks help from a Buddhist lama; he can neither hold nor express his sorrow until a hermit offers him a cup of tea; life closes in on him and he is depressed, once again he seeks/receives help from a Buddhist teacher. This pattern conveys what Buddhism as spirituality signifies to him: a last resort to turn to. This pattern continues, until in the midst of depression and through dissatisfaction with life expressed by his conflicts with his colleagues and physical ailments, a karmic link between his present turmoil and a previous act, is brought to light through a divination performed by a lama serving as chaplain in the Indian army.

> When I sought his divination about my problem, he clearly mentioned an old injury which I sustained when I was hit by a stone during a fight many years before. Struck by his insight I gained a great faith in him and requested him to give me religious instructions.

Although this statement does not appear to represent an inner realization about the destructiveness of his behavioural pattern, redirecting his attention from the external to the internal enables Lobsang Tenzin for the first time to stop blaming others for his problems and to focus on what is happening to himself at the present moment, and to take action to free himself from the negative influence of his past actions: ‘in order to alleviate my health problems I performed one hundred thousand prostrations.’ In the narrative above, the stone symbolically conveys the strong current of anger that had been central to his life up until that point. Awareness of this, though without conscious understanding of its cause, results in a profound experience that leads to his surrendering himself to the chaplain’s spiritual guidance.

Lobsang Tenzin’s account of undergoing traumatic life experiences before becoming committed to spiritual practice shows a link to a nadir experience of ‘confrontation with human predicament or existential dilemma’ (Maslow, 1971, p. 136) followed by the emergence of a spiritual dimension of life.

The role of trauma in tummo/kundalini awakening

Meditation is often described in terms of ‘allowing rather than making something happen’ (Deikman 2000, pp.311-312). Such a description is largely derived from an understanding of mindfulness meditation. Tibetan tantric meditation, however, is based on an opposite principle, that is to say, one rigorously follows a manual with an aim to generate an image of something or a psychic phenomenon (see for example a full description of a meditative session in Lopez, 2008, pp. 197-210). Lobsang Tenzin lists as his primary practice a number of deity yoga tantra cycles, which, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, centre on the visualization of a deity and his/her mandala as the primary part of the practice (Keown, 2003; Tashi Tsering 2012). His account of visualization practice and tummo awakening does not involve any serious crisis. However, it is important to follow the sequence of events within this account as well as the relation between this account and the rest of his life story so that the latter can be located on the scale of progress of Lobsang Tenzin's spiritual development.

Regarding the initial few years of his life as a recluse when he moved around from one cave to another, the first element he narrates is that of physical security: 'various signs gave me confidence that I would never suffer from the lack of food'. The effect of ordination, fills him with a zeal that is not weakened by his harsh living conditions: for example, taking joy from poor food and not 'losing heart' over a narrow damp cave where snakes enter during the night.

At a number of places in his narrative, he notes the proverbial saying that the harsher the living conditions, the greater are one's spiritual achievements. In the same vein, he contrasts his harsh living conditions with 'auspicious dreams' of meeting the Dalai Lama and other *lamas* and of 'ladies offering me delicious foods'. However, if we closely examine his narrative of meditation up to the point of his tummo awakening, we find that his harsh living conditions repeatedly make him revisit his emotions related to his traumatic events in his past, making events more complicated than he claims.

The subsequent period of his life reveals three distinctive threads which parallel and interweave with one another: 1) a successful retreat and progress in his visualization practice; 2) a regressive movement in his emotional condition: 'great sadness' (skyo snang in Tibetan), during which he is discouraged by the 'miserable condition' of his environment; 'not wanting to stay'; and 3) renewal of his refuge to various spiritual teachers and reading texts such *Lam-rim* and the hagiography of Milarepa for the purpose of coping with difficult emotions. Lobsang Tenzin attributes his feelings of sadness to having to spend his morning hours on manual chores, mainly in working on his cave (appearing in Tibetan text, p. 11). However, judging from the narrative, his living conditions do not appear to have deteriorated since his first days of his life as a hermit.

The only difference, or new element introduced at this stage of his narrative seems to be the practice of visualizing himself as a deity.

To date, deity visualization with its techniques of identifying oneself with the object of visualization has been discussed mainly in terms of its efficacy in realizing spiritual potential. However, little in the way of explanation about how deity visualisation produces psychological change has been proposed. Berzin(1998)'s mention of the potential side effect of ego inflation seems to be the only exception.

Therefore, it is worth stressing that Lobsang Tenzin's engagement in deity yoga appears coincidental to his various bouts of depression. Hypothetically, it is possible to accept, as Assagioli (1986, 1989) proposes, that identifying oneself as a deity creates a connection/channel between the conscious self and the deity regardless of its nature – whether it be an inner archetype or an external entity. Through this channel, psychic energy moves from the representation of the deity to the practitioners' own conscious self. The energy is initially absorbed by the unresolved issues (the unhealed trauma in Lobsang Tenzin's case) which it then delivers to the conscious mind.

From this perspective, Lobsang Tenzin's daily practice of re-establishing his motivation for practice which includes reading Milarepa's hagiography may be understood as an example of a coping mechanism, in which sadness and dissatisfaction are not faced directly but are instead gently repositioned with a different set of meanings. By means of prayer, he first consolidates the connection between his spiritual teachers and himself, and then invokes the aspects of his psyche which those spiritual teachers represent. Also, he repeatedly regrounds himself on the lineage connecting Milarepa to himself. This is created by the resonance between Milarepa's life presented in the biography and his own life as he understands it. Thus, a dialectic pattern emerges between advancement in his visualization practice and the sense of vulnerability and anxiety which he suffers about his physical survival. This pattern is synthesized in the form of the prayers he repeats until his first experience of *tummo* awakening. The account cited below describes his search for a new cave since the owner of the hut he had been borrowing was due to return. In this narrative, feelings of despair are linked with *bodhicitta,* the strong altruistic wish for the enlightenment of all beings as prescribed by Buddhist doctrines, and with the sudden awakening of tummo.

> On reaching the valley, instead of finding a cave, I found it was a very poor place, covered only with rocks and more rocks. Amidst all of these rocks, I was completely disheartened. Generally I would begin the day by reciting the Six Session Guru Yoga Prayer. Then, after having tea, I would establish my motivation [for spiritual practice]. [While doing it] if it doesn't happen that I cannot help shedding tears, my meditation that day would never be successful, let alone feeling at peace in my mind. Therefore, I have always tried to transform harsh mind (sems gyong po) by the motivation of the morning. So it was like that since I went up the hill. At that time, in the crevice I had a good cry. I prayed following Milarepa's prayer: If I die like a wild horse in a remote cave with no one around, my wishes are fulfilled. However, around there, I could not find anywhere to stay or any summer-places [for animals]. That evening I came back to some rough ground on this side of the hill. That evening I had a vision of light.

The 'good cry' presented as evidence for the generation of bodhicitta signifies catharsis as an experience of the synthesis mentioned above. With the vision of light, the pattern of sadness and depression (skyo snang) disappears from the narrative. The first occurrence of light, bliss and heat is spontaneous. However, his practice focuses on training him to generate them intentionally, which marks his graduation to the 'completion stage' during which he aims to guide the heat/energy 'into the central psychic channel' of his body.

Dreams

In chapter one, it was noted that Jung observed that confronting the unconscious during the process of individuation brings many moments when choices have to be made, and that the unconscious responds to the conscious ego's choices in the form of dreams which signify whether a right choice has been made. Similarly, Lobsang Tenzin understands his dreams as a significant and reliable reference to his progress and crisis. The symbolic meaning of his dreams and the sources of his dream interpretations are not provided within his narrative because he regards them as being self-evident. In this section, I will provide one example of such a dream and the cultural connotations of the symbols within it which enable us to understand the way in which he regards them as signs with a definitive meaning.

Let us go back to the beginning of his practice of deity visualisation. At the time, he has a dream in which an old lady pours him some white liquid that looks like *chang*[31] with melted butter in it in a triangular cup, which he happily empties. Lobsang Tenzin states that he immediately interpreted this dream as a precursor to his tummo rising.

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[31] Chang is an alcoholic drink made from fermented barley or rice.

> Thus, I felt very hopeful that if I practised my potential would surely ripen, so I made the firm resolution to practise genuinely.

It is likely that he associates the elements from his dream with the symbols of tummo arousal mentioned in the manuals of meditative practice that he has been reading: the old lady, the chang and the triangular cup can all symbolize tummo. In Buddhism, images of old people in dreams are often considered symbolic of wisdom (see for example, the Indian mystic Naropa's story in Snellgrove, 1987/2002). Tummo itself is regarded as being feminine, and is the Tibetan translation of the name of the Indian goddess Chandali who is often mentioned in Hindu mystical literature. Chang can be drunk warm or cold. The melted butter indicates that in this case it is warm which implies a sense of celebration[32] as well as bodily warmth/heat. In both Hindu and Buddhist trantric symbolism, the form of the triangle refers to the fire element (Benard 1990; Beer 2003). Normal body heat is considered the result of gross fire whereas tummo is considered the result of subtle fire. The navel area, often referred to by its Sanskrit name, manipura chakra, is symbolically represented as an inverted triangle, and this is what the cup in the dream is implicitly held to symbolise.

In his dream interpretation, we see that the old lady is not regarded as an aspect of his own psyche but as an external entity who has come to bless him. Her being an external being however does not diminish her relevance to his psycho-physiological experience of tummo energy. We will come back to this point when we examine another dream episode later in this chapter.

Lack of understanding of emptiness as potential pitfall on the spiritual path

Lobsang Tenzin successfully raises tummo energy, and masters its flow through the body so as to induce bliss. This is considered a major milestone in the completion stage of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism. Due to lack of space and because this success has little relevance to his crisis, this process is not reviewed in detail here. The present section focuses on how this achievement is received socially and doctrinally, and in turn, how this reception leads the mystic to reinterpret his experience.

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[32] Warm chang with melted butter, and occasionally an egg yolk, is a drink which Tibetans prepare as a treat, for example, when celebrating *Losar*, their lunar new year.

The cultural kudos attached to one who has awakened tummo and gained the mystical vision of light is reflected in the fact that he is advised to report his experience personally to the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama does not comment on his spiritual progress at all but instead demands that Lobsang Tenzin give a correct exposition of the doctrinal concepts of emptiness.

The concept of emptiness as held by the Geluk tradition can be broadly summed up as follows: all phenomena including the self lack inherent existence, and thus exist dependent on conditions (Powers, 2008). The Dalai Lama and Berzin (1997) state that the purpose of tummo practice, the work on one's subtle energy system, is to experience the subtlest state of consciousness, the clear light mind, as it is called in the Tibetan Vajrayana system. This particular state of consciousness is instrumental in realising the ultimate nature of reality, the non-conceptual cognition of emptiness. They further note that two factors, the doctrinal understanding of emptiness and bodhicitta, the motivation to achieve enlightenment for altruistic purposes, are required for a mystical experience and its vision to be regarded a genuine Buddhist realization. For a Buddhist mystic, the failure of one's mystical visions to conform to orthodox doctrinal positions carries the risk of one's falling into heresy.

Lobsang Tenzin's Tibetan biography suggests that he had had a direct experience of emptiness prior to his meetings with the Dalai Lama, yet that he could not communicate this experience due to lack of doctrinal training, particularly with regard to the *Lam-rim* texts. As mentioned earlier, Lobsang Tenzin's illiteracy and the fact of his ordination in adulthood, which, although an essential factor in forming his spiritual awakening, meant that he lacked a monastic education. This hints at the possibility that his description and interpretation of his new visionary experience may not have been strictly based on Geluk doctrinal positions. It also suggests that Lobsang Tenzin found this experience of bliss and 'emptiness appearing in the light' self-sufficient and self-evident, and that he did not see the need to pursue any further clarification of them by means of doctrinal training.

The Dalai Lama's indifference to what Lobsang Tenzin regards as his great spiritual achievement, together with pressure given to him to read an extensive text on emptiness seems to take his practice in new directions. After three audiences with the Dalai Lama, he moves to a new cave carrying with him a copy of the Lam-rim text and he spends a year on reading it. The following two dreams show how his conceptual understanding of his experience – having his experience integrated into the orthodox doctrinal exposition of emptiness – is treated by his unconscious.

> I saw men and women indistinguishable from each other, men wearing women's clothes, women wearing men's robes, and so forth, which indicated the nature of suchness.

> In a dream someone showed me a scripture, saying it was *the Eight Thousand Verses (Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*). However, as I could not read the title, I interpreted it as meaning that my understanding was not yet complete.

Cross-dressing implies that opposites are expressed/manifest/known only through the other. He links this symbolic image of men and women with the notion of suchness, the concept of the ultimate nature of reality in Buddhist doctrines, and this concept is the central theme of the scripture he sees in the second dream.

After reading the *Lam-rim* text for a year, his understanding of it is largely approved by the Dalai Lama. However, it also results in a significant change to his meditation methods. Based on the doctrinal expositions in the Lam-rim text, he begins to practice analytical meditation (spyad sgom in Tibetan). Somewhat contrary to what the term suggests, analytical meditation is an engagement with the reasoning in the orthodox doctrinal arguments which one practices up until the point when all the logical steps are so deeply ingrained that they become intuitive (Berzin, 2012). In the Geluk tradition, one usually learns how to practice analytical meditation prior to esoteric meditation. Analytical meditation has not been studied in terms of its effects in the field of psychology. Phenomenological descriptions of experience induced by analytical meditation are, as with descriptions of tantric meditation, few. In that regard, the following incident and its two associated dreams may be a rare account of mystical experience shaped by the practice of analytical meditation.

While engaging in analytical meditation, a dream during which he receives a cut of meat from the Dalai Lama wakes him up. Spontaneously, he finds himself absorbed in analysing 'the nature of the 'I''. Some kind of peak experience resulting in a profound sense of intuition is suggested by the generalised statement:

> ‘When all these analyses are relied upon together with the logical reasoning of dependent arising, then our understanding of the true nature of phenomena can be really profound.’

Soon after, he falls asleep again only to have another dream, this time of receiving a gift from the Dalai Lama.

> I was approaching a house where there was plenty of food and many girls were singing a …song …. Then I found myself sitting in a room and a girl came up with a jug full of *chang* and a cup. She told me that this was an offering from His Holiness, So I should drink it then and there. As the cup came into my hand, I awoke.

This dream implies his success in arriving at ‘the right view’ which will indeed meet the approval of the Dalai Lama. The significance of this episode lies in the sense that direct experience of emptiness marks one as having started the third of the five paths which define spiritual development in Tibetan Buddhism (see chapter two on the five paths). The third path is particularly important as it is considered as the first stage of becoming a bodhisattva as reviewed in chapter two. Therefore, discussing such experience is a highly sensitive matter. Thus, Lobsang Tenzin’s narrative describes his entering the third path assisted by the Dalai Lama.

Shifting from narrative analysis to following intuition

Interpretation up to this point mainly relies on contextualizing what is explicit in the text in terms of social context and the Buddhist doctrines. However, I could not reach a satisfactory level of interpretation in the following section by the same method. Although the narrative of an evil local spirit could be approached from the perspective of culture-specific syndrome, and thus interpreted as a type of spiritual emergency, I had a growing sense of being stuck whenever I tried to work on it. When I had finished an initial analysis of Lobsang Tenzin’s narrative, one based entirely on Tibetan cultural resources I had a dream in which I was in a refectory of a large monastery, and through a window, I could see a small hermitage on top of a hill. This encouraged me to spend time considering possible interpretations of the three dreams in terms of his own psychic manifestation.

Later, when I had finished an early draft of the section that follows below, I again had a dream in which Lobsang Tenzin was standing in front of me and offering his hands to hold mine. In the dream, he was twice as tall as me, dressed like an Indian bodhisattva in the murals inside the Ajanta caves. He was scorched black. The second dream gave me the confidence to consider that the personal meaning of the local spirit may be beyond what is embedded in the text and that it may deviate from the typical cultural perception of such phenomenon. In the following I ground my intuitive interpretation in the traditional Buddhist resources.

Disturbances on one's spiritual path from an antagonistic external force in the form of physical injury

The Tibetan word *barché* (bar chad), meaning obstacle, has a wide range of uses. In daily life it can refer to any kind of obstacle, disturbance, and difficulty which one may face while trying to accomplish something. As a Buddhist term, it refers more particularly to any detrimental factor that renders one unable to achieve the state of buddhahood (Powers, 2007). For example, each of the traumatic events from Lobsang Tenzin's life that were discussed earlier in this chapter might well be called barché. However, the particular type of barché explored in this section is called a *barchégek* and involves an antagonistic, or at least unhelpful, external force whether that of a human or a disembodied spirit. This concept of obstacles draws from the belief that the individual psyche is open to, and may interact with, its environment.

Lobsang Tenzin narrates three different kinds of barchégek: black magic, influence from disembodied souls, and disturbance caused by a malicious local spirit. When obstacles are perceived to be invasive, one's attitude towards them is defensive. He consistently chooses an aggressive way to deal with them. He does this by engaging in intensive medidative retreat on Yamantaka, a wrathful deity. Focusing on this particular idea of overcoming obstacles on the spiritual path by means of meditation on a wrathful deity, this section offers a detailed examination of the third item in the list above, barchégek caused by a nature spirit.

Compassionate killing or facing the 'I' as the shadow in the unconscious

Lobsang Tenzin's encounter with this malicious spirit occurs after he has undergone his mystical vision of emptiness and successfully integrated it into his doctrinal understanding.

> Again I climbed to a very remote place, deep in the forest, where no Tibetan or any other person had ever visited. Before moving there, I dreamt of lepers and sick people without legs and arms. However, without paying attention to these dreadful signs, I continued to stay in that remote cave. . . Generally for a spiritual practitioner, his inner practice develops as his external surroundings become more dreadful. . .While I was staying in this cave, I dreamt of lepers without legs and arms continuously for several days. In addition, from the time I reached there, my back started aching severely. . . Following the example of the great Kadampa Lama who cured his own leprosy in this way, I meditated rigorously on giving and taking, the practice of visualizing giving benefit and happiness to others while accepting their harm and unwholesomeness. After one month, my pain had gone and the illusions caused by the local spirit were also pacified.

In the above narrative, Lobsang Tenzin first chooses to use ‘giving and taking’ *tong-len* meditation, in which one visualises absorbing illness, negative karma, dark energy, etc. from either another person or the whole world, and giving out love and compassion in return.

Later, he falls three times at the same place while carrying 20 litres of water, slips backward into a stream after washing his robes; he also slips over twice outside the entrance of his cave; and he dreams of various poisonous insects and animals. After enumerating these incidents which he regards as evidence of the presence of an evil local spirit, he also emphasizes an encounter with a huge black snake. Lobsang Tenzin states that he became ‘slightly angry’ with this ‘local spirit’ for making him fall over so repeatedly. He then goes on to conclude that this ‘local spirit’ is an ‘exceptionally powerful’ ‘master of all the spirits in the region’.

> I reflected that even the buddhas and bodhisattvas had to manifest themselves in wrathful forms in order to tame unruly sentient beings. In the past I had been able to overcome any kind of interference by meditating on giving and taking. But I had exhausted those peaceful means. So now in order to dispel these interferences I generated the divine pride of Yamantaka and recited his fierce mantra, Yama Raja, for one round of my rosary, every evening and night.

To scare off or subjugate the local spirit, he visualises himself as Yamantaka, the Bull headed ferocious manifestation of the bodhisattva of wisdom, Manjushri. In Tibetan Buddhism, buddhas and bodhisattvas are considered to be symbols of ideals and values as well as individual entities. As mentioned earlier, in rituals identifying oneself with a deity the meditator aims to internalise the deity's qualities and capabilities.

The idea of taming/subjugating 'unruly sentient beings' draws on the myth of Rudra. The myth has some resonance to the general atmosphere of this narrative, therefore I introduce it in brief below. The myth of Rudra as it is narrated in Tibetan tantric Buddhism (Dalton, 2011, Kapstein, 2000, pp. 170-176) is summarised below from Kapstein's version:

> A master had two disciples: a rich man's son Tharpa Nakpo and his servant Denphak. Each of the two practice meditation based on their teacher but reach contradictory conclusions on the key doctrine of the nature of mind. In order to resolve their dispute, they go to their teacher, who confirms that the servant's view is correct. Outraged, Tharpa Nakpo murders his teacher on the spot and leads a life of drunkenness and debauchery. From then on, Tharpa Nakpo keeps being reborn in non-human form until he is finally given birth to by a demonic prostitute. When his mother dies of illness from the delivery, the child survives by eating its mother's flesh. It eventually grows into a nine headed demon who is feared throughout the universe. Buddhas and bodhisattvas gather to take action. Amongst them are the buddha Vajrasattva and the bodhisattva Vajrapani. Their previous incarnations had in actual fact been Tharpa Nakpo's teacher and his servant. The assembled buddhas first transform these two into the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshvara and his consort Tara, then in turn, into their wrathful forms, Hayagriva and Vajravarahi. Hayagriva makes himself tiny, enters Rudra's body through his anus, and explodes in size until he is gigantic, scattering Rudra's body into pieces. Now, disembodied, Rudra makes a pledge to be a protector of the buddhas' teachings and the fragments of his body are turned into sacred objects for use in tantric practice.

The historical process by which the Vedic storm god Rudra became transformed into an allegory of 'ego centric rebellion of the will' and 'Buddhism's closest approach to a myth of original sin' (Kapstein, 2000, p. 176) is well beyond the scope of this chapter. However, there are two points which should be noted. Firstly, as Dalton (2011) has suggested, the Rudra myth is related to the concept and practice of compassionate killing or ritual killing which is carried out for the purpose of preventing harm to the Buddhist religion and its practice, actions which may once have been much more prevalent than Tibetan Buddhists might care to admit. Although Dalton (2011) cautiously restricts the implication of the Rudra myth in tantric practice to the Nyingma tradition, Lobsang Tenzin who claims to have had no religious exposure prior to his ordination also draws from it.

Secondly, the motif of killing in the Rudra myth is open to a number of possible interpretations. Dowman (1997) considers Rudra’s subjugation to be a symbolic and mythic representation of the transformation of ego into an emanation of a buddha through the forced experience/realisation of emptiness and compassion, the ultimate values of Mahayana Buddhism. Ray (2001), a student of Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan teacher well known in the West, identifies Rudra as a symptom of ‘religious megalomania’ (Ray, 2001, Loc 1330) in a tantric meditator, an obstinate tendency to ‘attempt to build up and fortify ego’ (Ray, 2001, Loc 1330). Contrary to this interpretation of Rudra as symbolic of elements within the human psyche, Tibetan Buddhists may understand the Rudra myth in rather literal terms, as a factual record of actual events. This interpretation may be fortified by Tibetan beliefs on the variety of spirits that are said to disturb hermits and cause them physical illness and delusion. In the version of the Rudra myth presented by Dalton (2011), Rudra is completely killed and his body and mind are collected and put back together by his destroyer to form a new being. This regeneration is performed by reciting a mantra[33] that is believed to have special powers. Dalton (2011) observes that disruptive spirits or demons may first be pacified and persuaded, but if that does not work, it is permissible to put an end to them by means of a ritualised killing in order to cause them to be reborn in a more virtuous form. This agrees exactly with the procedure of Lobsang Tenzin’s decision making.

I do not mean to suggest that Lobsang Tenzin chose to destroy this ‘local spirit’ by visualizing himself as Yamantaka, a powerful wrathful deity. My intention rather is to shed light on the process by which Lobsang Tenzin grounds his idea of warding off the ‘local spirit’ by assuming a powerful, and perhaps even more terrifying, psychic form based on cultural beliefs which draw on the kind of myth about the origin of wrathful deities narrated above. The results of the practice are narrated in the dream quoted below:

> One night, soon after beginning to do this, I had a dream of fighting with a huge dark man. He did not appear to be the manifestation of any god or spirit and I myself was also in my ordinary form. . . I had been circumambulating a small circular area, at the centre of which were some children holding fine cords in their hands. The ropes wound round my legs and got tangled. I became annoyed and demanded that the children tell me who had told them to do this. They pointed at a huge dark man. Then I asked him why, and when he did not

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[33] Mantra refers to verses of varying lengths which are believed to have special properties and which are central to tantric Buddhist practice.

> answer me we began to fight. After a while he backed off and accepted defeat. Then I cut off nearly all the cords with my vegetable knife and broke the remainder with stones though they did not need to be completely severed. I won that fight and dreamt the same on two more occasions. I would often throw him to the ground while reciting the words taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. After his third defeat the dark man shrank in size until he was so tiny that I could put him into a hole in the ground. I started to cover the hole with stones to put an end to him, when I was prevented by people, some of whom looked like Sadhus, while others looked Bhutanese.

Lobsang Tenzin interprets the dark figure as the disruptive 'local spirit' and the ropes as the various accidents of slipping and falling. In this dream, he attacks the figure while reciting the prayer of taking refuge. The second verse of this prayer says 'by the virtuous act of such and such, may I achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings'. It seems that he intends to 'put an end to' the spirit as he does not stop attacking the figure until he is stopped by other figures who appear to be neutral observers. His identification of the dark figure as the local spirit is immediately confirmed by succeeding events. The incidents of slipping cease. After this resolution, his narrative proceeds in a smooth and positive manner with his meditative accomplishments growing.

It is not my intention to undermine Lobsang Tenzin's own interpretation of his dream encounters with 'the local spirit-dark man' as he calls the figure. Conquering natural spirits of the mountains and lakes is a familiar and popular motif in Tibetan culture. Padmasambhava, one of the key transmitters of Buddhism to Tibet, is said to have forced all the nature spirits of the country to surrender and make a pledge to protect Buddhism (Snellgrove 1987/2012). So it is possible that Lobsang Tenzin understood this encounter as a milestone of spiritual development, even if not one formally required by the tantric cycles that guided his practice.

Reconsidering dreams of the dark man

A few points about this particular dream within the general sequence of Lobsang Tenzin's narrative suggest at least the possibility of an alternative interpretation, that of, a drama of his internal psyche. Firstly, on examining the sequence within the narrative, we find the event located after his experience of the realization of emptiness through the analytical meditation on the emptiness of 'I'.

Secondly, he consistently associates dreams of ‘good signs’ and pleasant images with forthcoming experiences in, and progress of, his meditation while linking unpleasant images of lepers and limbless people with external forces that have no implication to his psyche. Dreams are a channel through which divine beings communicate with his mind. Even though they are not understood to be expressions of his psyche, they are still interpreted as representing his experience. On the other hand, nightmares are consistently held to have no implication at all to his psychological condition but rather to be the result of minor nature spirits who wish to harm him (a meditator and practitioner of Buddhism) out of ignorance and the natural maliciousness of their nature.

In the first dream, walking in a circle around a group of children may indicate a problem that repeats itself as well as feelings of frustration that no progress is being made. The problem or issue appears to originate with the children in the centre. These may represent unnurtured parts of himself, or unresolved emotions from his earlier life. Here the children are not wild, nor do they try to trick him, they merely stand together holding threads, which cause him to stumble. The threads are neither thick nor strong, as he is able to break them with a small knife which suggests that the problem, though recurring, is on the surface and is not as such fundamentally endangering. The more critical origin of his problems is represented by the dark man. Must the identity of the dark figure be that of the spirit of a mountain? Considering the highly ritualised content of his dreams with their motifs of walking repeatedly in circles, being tied up, and then freeing oneself from those ties, all of which can easily be understood as metaphors for typical Buddhist concepts such as the bondage of samsara (the circle of endless rebirths) and liberation from it, it may not be unreasonable to associate his dreams with liberation – liberation from the dark man.

If we suppose that the incident with the dark man was not a random occurrence but had a relevance to his psyche, it may be possible to imagine that the figure symbolises the ego’s protest against the philosophical denial of its existence. Furthermore, Lobsang Tenzin’s own aggressiveness in the dream may indicate his attitude towards his past trauma in his life. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the dreams are highly ritualised and charged with Buddhist symbolism, thus resonating Tharpa Nakpo’s anger in the Rudra myth.

It was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that meditation techniques in Tibetan Buddhism aim to achieve a certain result by meticulously following a certain protocol. Similarly, meditation on emptiness requires the doctrinal concepts be worked through logically until their understanding is so instant and automatic that they are experienced directly without conscious effort. Lobsang Tenzin’s spontaneously engaging in the analysis of the ‘I’ during a period when he had two dreams of receiving offerings from the Dalai Lama, as was mentioned in the section above would be a similar such example.

Little is known about the psychological impact of analytical meditation of this type which goes beyond the prescriptive texts. Thus, it is difficult to know whether this unusual combination of bliss and the doctrinally grounded vision of emptiness had a powerful impact on his ego, causing it to rise to the surface of consciousness in the form of the dark figure. If this indeed were the case, his account of disturbance caused by a local spirit might be called an example of psychological distress induced by a realisation of emptiness.

Conclusive remarks

In the beginning of this chapter, considerable space was given to the cultural conception of communicating spiritual/transpersonal experience: the manner in which it affected my fieldwork as well as the way in which it shaped Lobsang Tenzin’s text into its current form, an autobiographical account of a tantric practitioner with a very unique place in Tibetan Buddhist history.

The biography published in *Cho Yang* was a direct result of his participation in Benson’s experiment. The perception of this among Tibetans was that in doing so he was ‘sacrificing his practice and health in order to fulfil the Dalai Lama’s will’ (Karma Gelek, 2011, p.vii). Regarding this, it must be noted that the breach of esoteric vows is perceived to be a trigger of crisis, an obstacle for one’s spiritual practice, in future. The context of text generation alerts us to the personal implication for Lobsang Tenzin of narrating his life while ignoring prevalent cultural norms. Lobsang Tenzin states that, at the time of tummo arising, his dreams showed ‘signs’ that foretold his participation in the experiment, where he would demonstrate his tantric attainments in the presence of non-initiated. Likewise, his narrating/revealing his experiences in the Chö Yang must also be understood as a personal disclosure to the non-initiated. Because the ‘signs’, which he interpreted probably in retrospect as being relevant to the experiment, occurred under the auspicious circumstances of tummo arising, to go against the dominant social perception of the vows of secrecy need not have been a breach of taboo, but a fulfilment of his potential and destiny.

Two major themes have been explored: Lobsang Tenzin’s ordination as a monk as a form of spiritual awakening and his disturbance by an antagonistic spirit. For the purpose of analysing these as a part within, and pertaining to, the whole narrative, we followed the development of Lobsang Tenzin’s spiritual practice.

The first theme of renunciation/ordination considered as spiritual progress is largely reflected in the narrative form – the manner in which Lobsang Tenzin narrates his life. He locates his suffering within the broader context of his life which closely follows the format of the hagiography of Milarepa. Thus his life as a layman becomes an account of a nadir experience that later results in a new spiritual dimension. Withdrawal of psychic energy, as noted by James (1902) and Assagioli (1965, 1989), appears as depression, bouts of anger, and loss of meaning. The intervention of the spiritual appears in his narrative in the form of an interaction with people who are spiritually more advanced and provide him with a psychological space in which to embrace his traumatic experiences. This is a characteristic of narratives that weave the spiritual into everyday events, and will be discussed in chapter seven. Ordination does not imply any mystical vision or ecstatic experience in the manner that James (1902) described for the conversion of the sick soul. Yet, it generates a new meaning of life, as a goal which Lobsang Tenzin seems to arrive at towards the end of his narrative – happiness from the sense of having a direct experience of the doctrine of emptiness.

As a doorway to that happiness, we have explored an account of obstacles caused by malicious spirits and of the manner in which wrathful deities’ tame such spirits. Along with Lobsang Tenzin’s own interpretation of events based on native Tibetan cultural beliefs, I offer an alternative one which tries to understand the incident as a purely psychological experience. For Lobsang Tenzin, his encounter with the spirit constitutes a critical situation at the transpersonal level, which requires a suitable transpersonal measure to counter it – visualisation of a wrathful deity. My alternative interpretation views the spirit as a projection of his ego, in more specific Buddhist terms, self-attachment (bdag ‘dzin in Tibetan). According to this interpretation, his attribution of various pains, nightmares, and injuries to an external deity may be delusional, a psychological disorder, which makes a genuine case of culture specific syndrome, a highly ritualised personification of ego-attachment that has to be overcome. It is also of particular interest to this study because it occurred to someone who has had an experience of ‘seeing the nature’ of things as they really are and who is considered to have entered the path of the bodhisattva.

Chapter 6

Spirit possession

> Goddess is formless. She comes and goes, but I don't remember.
>
> – Kelsang Lhamo –

Conceptualizing possession as spiritual crisis

In his transpersonal interpretation of anthropological data on shamanism, Walsh (2007, pp. 15-16) broadly defines the phenomenon as ‘a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves or their spirit(s) interacting with other entities, often by travelling to other realms, in order to serve their community’. The key elements in his definition are altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and the interaction between an individual in an ASC and his/her surroundings. Walsh (2007) locates spirit possession within this broad definition of shamanism, with the distinction that mediums, unlike other shamans, do not undergo a conscious, visionary journey but fall into an unconscious trance. This unconscious trance, a phenomenological description which characterizes spirit possession has been interpreted as psychopathological by many anthropologists from the Western psychiatric perspective (Lewis 1971/1989; Peters 1976/1994; Walsh 2007).

The argument that spirit possession needs to be located within the discussion of spiritual crisis originates with Grof & Grof (1989, 1990). In their seminal work *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis,* however, there is no contributing chapter on spirit possession. Nevertheless, a small number of studies on the concept of spiritual emergency within the field of transpersonal psychology have focused on it drawing on either conceptualization or empirical research.

In their typology of spiritual emergency, Grof and Grof describe the category of possession states as one of the most critical types of spiritual emergency, an experience of ‘a distinct feeling that their psyche and body have been invaded and are being controlled by an entity or energy with personal characteristics', with symptoms such as 'antisocial behavior, suicidal depression, murderous aggression or self-destructive behavior, promiscuous and deviant sexual impulses, or excessive use of alcohol [and/or] drugs' (Grof & Grof, 1989, p. 24).

Interpretation of possession may broadly be grouped into two categories: explanation in terms of 1) psychological mechanism and 2) invasion by an external spirit(s) (Bragdon, 1990, Stephenson, 2009, Walsh, 2007). Firstly, Jung explained possession in terms of a weak ego temporarily being taken over by a complex which dominates the whole personality during a traumatic experience (Stephenson, 2009). According to this explanation, the nature of the possessing spirit is none other than the complexes and archetypes in one's own psyche, and to posit the presence of an external spirit(s) is merely an attempt to demonise psychic forces due to a lack of understanding of their proper function (Jung as appearing in Stephenson, 2009). A variant version of this type of explanation is, as Palmer (2014, p.5) suggests, that 'a self-created thought form' could 'take on demonic characteristics' and dominate the personality.

While Jung suggested that cases of demonic possession could be explained by this concept of autonomous complexes, the positions found amongst contemporary transpersonal psychologists and post-Jungians such as Bragdon (1990/2013) and Grof & Grof (1989, 1990) amongst others tend to limit application of the Jungian interpretation to cases of possession with less critical symptoms such as obsession and addiction. They appear to accept the ontological validity of various types of spirits and non-physical beings of higher intelligence. Possession, therefore, is viewed as a form of contact with an external psyche, which may occur in either of two different ways, as channelling or as demonic possession.

Channelling, understood as contact with non-physical beings of higher intelligence, is often associated with the production of texts with a spiritual profundity (Bragdon 1990/2013, Grof, 1993, Walsh, 2007). It is viewed as a transpersonal experience but not as one that causes a spiritual crisis. What Bragdon and Grof consider as examples of spiritual emergency are those cases of demonic possession where there is a link to psychopathology. Symptoms of aggressive, destructive behaviour are often interpreted as evidence of a demonic spirit by Bragdon (1990/2013) and Grof & Grof (1989, 1990), this they clearly view as a case of spiritual pathology which requires active intervention through means of exorcism in order to restore the psychological and physical health of the patient. Rather than as a result of demonic spirits, Baldwin (1992) and Palmer (2014) suggest, possession may be caused by deceased family members or others who attach themselves to the living out of emotional attachment or even by accident, for their own self-serving purposes.

If possessive states are understood as an invasion by demonic spirit or spirits who are no wiser than the living, how does one make a case for possession being an example of spiritual crisis? Baldwin (1992) regards possession as a psychological disorder that cannot be addressed by the measures available in mainstream psychotherapy and psychiatry. He proposes a transpersonal psychotherapy which aims to exorcise the possessing demons or souls. The need for this kind of intervention dependent on transpersonal expertise seems to be one reason why possession is regarded as a type of spiritual emergency.

Grof and Grof (1989, p. 25) argue, drawing on their own psychotherapeutic practice that made use of a form of exorcism, that a sequence of ‘choking, projectile vomiting, and frantic physical activity, or even temporary loss of control’ during the eviction of the possessing spirit may involve a process of ego death which brings about ‘a deep spiritual conversion’ of the individual. This transformative effect of possession and its resolution seems to provide further evidence for Bragdon (1990/2013) and Grof and Grof (1989) to ground their argument that possession is a type of spiritual emergency. Reflecting on the discussion above, Cortright (1997, p.156) suggests that, regardless of the philosophical and epistemological issues involved in the phenomena of possession, ‘how the psychological structures of the self respond to such an attack or to a powerful influx of energy is one of the most fascinating areas of inquiry in the transpersonal field’. This serves as a suitable departure point for our discussion of spirit possession in Tibetan Buddhist culture.

General introduction to spirit possession in Tibetan culture

British anthropologist Lewis (1971/1989) observed that shamanism and spirit possession are not clearly differentiated in many cultures. In Tibetan culture, spirit possession often denotes the initiatory crisis of a spirit medium who accepts the calling and is trained to go into trances voluntarily in response to the needs of others (Avedon 1997, Belleza, 2005, Diemberger 2005). In Tibetan culture, spirit possession is believed to long predate the introduction of Buddhism to the region (Belleza, 2005, Diemberger, 2005, Samuel, 1993/1995). Spirit possession occurs in the form of a trance called *lha-baap* (*lha 'bab*) and is performed by male (lha pa) and female (lha mo) mediums. Mediums are ubiquitous in Tibet where they are present in the highest government circles as well as amongst nomadic communities in remote plateaus and valleys. In his seminal work, *Shamanism,* Eliade (1964) mentions only Buddhist lamas as shamans. However, many Tibetan spirit mediums in regions of Tibetan culture fill the role of priest, physician, or advisor in their communities where lamas are unavailable (Diemberger 2005).

In order to understand Tibetan narratives of possession, it first needs to be noted that, from the point of view of Tibetan culture, possession is caused by external entities. It is held that some of these entities need to be exorcised from their host while others must be encouraged to come to more accommodating terms with their medium. There are three principal types of spirits which may possess an individual and demand him/her to take up the vocation of medium: *lha*, *tsen*, and *lu (klu)* (Samuel, 1993, Diemberger 2005). *Lhas* in general include buddhas, bodisattvas, and other deities belonging to the Buddhist pantheon as well as others incorporated from Indian myths. However, only some of the minor deities of esoteric Buddhism, rather than the primary buddhas and deities seem to be involved in spirit possession. When the term *lha* (gods/goddesses) is used in terms of possession, it usually refers to *tsen* (btsan) and *lu* (klu) spirits which are often associated with particular mountains and lakes. According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition, they were forced to pledge themselves protectors of Buddhism by the Indian mystic Padmasambhava who played a significant role in spreading Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th century.[34] There are also classes of demons called *dü* (bdud) and *dön* (gdon), possession by whom is regarded merely pathological with no implication of spiritual or social value (Gutschow, 2009). In terms of symptoms, there are no significant differences between categories of possession by different spirits. Symptoms, broadly speaking, are in agreement with those noted by Grof and Grof (1989). Consequently, identification of the possessing spirit and its class becomes a crucial, if confusing, matter when an individual shows symptoms of possession. This shows a certain parallel with the problem of distinguishing cases of spiritual crisis from those of genuine psychopathology as was mentioned in the discussion on spiritual emergency.

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[34] *Lus* (klu) as minor class of nature spirits, are believed to cause various types of skin disease and to cause disturbance of various types to hermits who live alone in caves.

Meeting the mediums, and a brief introduction to their stories

In this chapter I offer an analysis of two female spirit-mediums' narratives informed by the narrative of one male spirit-medium. My focus in this thesis is upon the generation and communication of the meaning of psycho-spiritual crisis and its transformative effects within a narrative. Yet anthropological description and discussion of spirit possession are indispensible for that purpose, and these will be introduced whenever relevant, given the space limitations of the present chapter.

From my previous experience of living in Dharamsala, I was to some degree familiar with the phenomenon of, and the literature on, Tibetan spirit-possession, and had already attended a trance performed by the male medium whose narrative is introduced in this chapter. My familiarity with Tibetan spirit-possession and access to the relevant literature facilitated theoretical sampling based on personal knowledge, as described by Warren (2002). It should be noted that the questionnaires and the selection of hagiographies (described in chapter four) were not designed to recruit spirit-mediums. Interviews were envisioned to be semi-structured, focusing on their experience of becoming a spirit-medium, beginning with the onset of possessive symptoms.

Four spirit-mediums were contacted but only two of them agreed to talk about their experience, Kelsang Lhamo and Thubten Ngodup. Khadro Namsel Drolma did not agree to be interviewed on the grounds that she had been refusing interview requests for the last few years, and that she would not make an exception for me. Her narrative as I presented in this chapter is taken from a pre-published material. I will describe the process by which I came to choose it when I introduce her below.

Kelsang Lhamo

Kelsang Lhamo is a female spirit medium, who was eighty years old at the time of our interviews. I met her three times at her house which is located in the old people's flats just below the Kora – the ritual circumambulation path surrounding the main temple in McLeod Ganj. Spontaneous possession first occurred to her when she was twenty five, though it was about ten years before she was ready to embark on her vocation as medium of the goddess Yudronma (g.yu-sgron-ma, goddess of the turquoise lamp). Her possessing spirit, Yudronma, is one of a group of twelve goddesses called Tenma in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. As a medium of a Buddhist protectress, she used to enter trance at the request of various clients, who would include monasteries and individual lamas. At the time of interviewing, she was more or less retired except for her official trance, which she annually underwent on New Year's day of the Tibetan calendar.

Kelsang Lhamo's narrative of how she became a spirit medium is brief and sparse in detail. This may have been partly due to the fact that she was being asked to narrate events that had happened about five decades earlier. At the same time, she tended to repeat the same answer to different questions, which suggests my questions could not make her deviate from her usual self-presentation. According to Diemberger (2005), the female mediums she met in Tibet narrate their story of becoming a medium at the beginning of the ritual to invoke their particular possessing spirit. Kelsang Lhamo's narrative, when all the repetitions have been removed, appears similar to the brief accounts presented by Diemberger (2005). In spite of its brevity and lack of richness, Kelsang Lhamo's narrative succinctly delivers how she made sense of the experience.

Khadro-la Namsel Drolma

The text of her life-story analysed in this chapter is extracted from an interview[35] published in *Mandala* (Kunsang & Namsel Drolma, 2009) and footage of her in a documentary about Tibetan oracles (Cherniack, 2010).

I first read the interview on the recommendation of one of my Western participants during the exploratory interviews, as an example of someone who had undergone spiritual crisis. Namsel Drolma's story drew my attention for a number of reasons. Firstly, the validation of her possession as a genuine example of spiritual experience rather than as a case of

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[35] The interview was published in *Mandala*, a monthly web magazine published by an organization led by Lama Zopa, a Buddhist teacher who belongs to the Geluk tradition. The interview was originally an in-depth conversation between close friends and members of the organization which was later published. The readers of the magazine are generally members of the organization.

‘madness’ was a central narrative thread which corresponded exactly with my research interest. Secondly, her story and her voice captivated me with their clear sense of a journey full of risks, uncertainties, and ‘signs’ in the form of dreams which indicated to her the direction she ought to take. Lastly, the way in which she was presented as a ‘higher being’ in *Mandala* was intriguing. Although I used to live in Dharamsala, I had never met her in person. Nor had I heard much about her other than a brief summary of how she had become a medium for the Dalai Lama. What drew my attention to her was that I had never met any native Tibetan who had mentioned her in the same reverential manner as she had been presented in this English medium magazine. It was an intriguing question: what had made the editors of *Mandala* publish her interview, and what had they meant by presenting her as a ‘higher being’?

As mentioned above, Namsel Drolma did not wish to take part in my research. There would have been no reason to delve further into her story and to carry out analysis of the material in a more conventional research context. Unlike Lobsang Tenzin’s biography which I was working on in order to use it as part of my interview scheme, Namsel Drolma’s pre-published interview was not to be used for any ulterior purpose during fieldwork. However, a gripping experience which I had while I was with her to ask if she would be interviewed for my research urged me to consider revisiting her story and immersing myself in it. I wrote in my field notes later that day,

> There was no me. There was only gentle sadness (or was it sadness?) that was shredding my being into numerous strands flowing through and seeping under the floor. There was nothing but awareness of all the tears I shed. Utterly helpless. It was like I was facing a glacier topped high mountain right in front of me. It was so clear and pure, glowing with cold light.

This explains why I gave up trying to persuade her to participate in my research. Let alone carrying out an interview, I struggled to formulate a full sentence in her presence. Making sense of the nature of this experience is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, my emotional, unconscious reaction to her presence persuaded me to revisit the material and to look again at the significance of the text as a record of personal transformation through the experience of spirit-possession.

I came to a conclusion that, through analyzing narratives of these two female mediums, the comparison of Namsel Drolma’s story with that of Kelsang Lhamo might shed light on the response of the individual to 'a powerful influx of energy' (Cortright, 1997, p.156). In order to highlight the role of the socio-cultural elements in their experiences, I decided to contrast their narratives with a very different narrative, one given by a socially established male medium. Presenting these narratives together may offer a more nuanced approach to the diversity of experience and the ways in which the individual may integrate it than would be otherwise possible.

Nechung Kuten Thubten Ngodrup

Thubten Ngodrup is a monk and at the time of interview was 54 years old. I carried out one interview with him at his residence within the monastic complex named after the spirit who possesses him. He is commonly known as 'Nechung Kuten'. Literally meaning physical support of a deity, kuten (sku rten) refers to the mediums of a select numbers of high status spirits in Tibetan Buddhist society.[36] Consequently, differences between his narrative of initiatory crisis and those of the two female mediums, disregarding differences in individual temperament, may be a result of the particular status that his possessing spirit enjoys in Tibetan society.[37]

His narrative as it is used in this chapter comes from two sources: 1) the script of an interview that I made with him during fieldwork, and 2) a pre-published interview (Thubten Ngodup,1992). Using the pre-published material was the participant's own suggestion, as he thought that my questions often overlapped with those answered in the published material. This also reflected the fact that our interview schedule was very tight due to the many demands on time of such an important public figure. Each source will be marked accordingly when used.

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[36] Tibetan language has different classes of vocabulary – honorific terms and ordinary terms. In the case of the term kuten (sku rten), the honorific term 'sku' strictly refers to the possessing deity/spirit, while the medium is the reference point for the overall term.

[37] Historically, Pehar Gyalpo, the Nechung spirit and his mediums have maintained a close relationship with the government of the Dalai Lama and as such have played a significant role in Tibetan politics. It should be noted, however, that this spirit is originally a nature spirit and affiliated to the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (Avedon, 1997). As well as the spirit playing a role in the decision making process of the Tibetan government and the Dalai Lamas who would (still do) consult him through trance, the Nechung medium was always a cabinet member of the cabinet of the Tibetan government. On top of these responsibilities, to become Nechung kuten means to take the position of abbot of Nechung monastery. Lack of space does not permit me to delve into all the social aspects of Thubten Ngodup's narrative. However, the social context of the Nechung spirit is reflected throughout his narrative, and imbues his experience with a greater degree of certainty and clarity as he recalls the steps in his progress of initiation. This is contrary to the uncertainty and confusion that permeate the narratives of the two female mediums.

Each of the three mediums has a distinctive individual life story, and each occupies a distinctive position in his/her relationship to particular Tibetan Buddhist monastic institutions and the local community. Their narratives share a common pattern. Each begins with an initial illness followed by experiences of spontaneous possession, the undergoing of a process of diagnosis and initiation, before finally being officially recognized as a medium. Similar patterns have been noted in anthropological studies carried out in Tibet and other areas under Tibetan cultural influence by Bellezza (2005), Diemberger (2005), Gutschow (2009), and Samuel (1993) amongst others.

Narratives of crisis, confirmation and initiation

Samuel (1993, p. 291) observes the way in which Tibetans become spirit-mediums as:

> a classic shamanic initiation process, in which they fall seriously ill, undergo a series of visions, and discover through the diagnosis of a lama or an experienced medium that they must take on the career of a spirit-medium.

Narratives of becoming a spirit-medium, consequently, consist of three major parts: before, during, and after the diagnosis – the process of determining the nature of the individual's illness. The first part consists of a description of the psycho-spiritual crisis and its trigger: that is, the initial experience of possession together with description of its psychological and physical symptoms, and reactions to these. The middle part centres on the diagnosis of possession followed by an initiation rite prior to becoming a recognized medium. This demonstrates how such a critical condition has been resolved and how the meaning of the experience is socially determined. The last part primarily focuses on how the individual constructs their later life as a medium.

Onset of initiatory crisis

Being possessed by a spirit, as will be seen from the three mediums' stories below, first appears as lha-né (*lha nad)*, a divine illness or illness from the gods. Typical symptoms of lha-né are involuntary seizures, losing consciousness, emotional disturbances, physical pains and the exhibition of varying degrees of erratic behaviour of diverse kind. The list of symptoms does not differ greatly from those proposed by anthropologists and psychologists (see p.175-177). Lha-né may manifest itself in the form of unusual powers such as the spontaneous ability to read minds or the power of prophecy, though with little control over such powers, such as Namsel Drolma describes in her narrative.

The narratives of the three mediums we are here concerned with broadly share these symptoms while each weaves the narrative into patterns that give priority to different elements. Each of the mediums presents his/her symptoms of divine illness while they are reflecting on their process of initiation. They also present dreams and other events that they understood, at the time, as ten-del (rten 'brel), 'signs', revealing the meaning of their physical symptoms and psychological states.[38] Each of the three mediums reflects on two distinct types of signs. The first type refers to dreams, visions, or other varieties of mystical experience that foreshadow imminent possession by the deity. The second type refers to his or her unique personal details which may include personality and date of birth that link them to the possessing spirit. This second type, albeit nebulous, is mentioned as having been present in them since their childhood (or is interpreted as such in retrospect) and is used to explain why the possession occurred to them in the first place.

Physical symptoms

Lha-né, divine illness, neither exclusively manifests itself as psychological disorder nor is it always initiated by trauma as anthropological studies on Tibetan mediums have stressed (Samuel 1993, Gutschow 2009). For both Namsel Drolma and Kelsang Lhamo, the relationship with their spirit is described as commencing with various types of physical pain: 'prickly eyes and joint pains like elderly people's problem' (Namsel); 'It just hurt everywhere day and night' (Kelsang). Thubten Ngodup also describes various symptoms ranging from rapid heartbeat, to nose bleeding and fainting. In Western medicine such symptoms could be categorised as conversion disorders, as Walsh (2007, p. 95) notes, in which psychological conflicts are unconsciously converted into physical symptoms.

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[38] The word *tendrel,* often translated as sign, originally means conditioned or dependent arising and is a Buddhist doctrinal concept of causality. However, it is exceedingly versatile in its usage. Idiomatically, *tendrel* means a symbolic representation through which the meaning of an event or the potential outcome of a current action (or an action being considered) is indicated to a person. It will be discussed again in the context of karma in chapter eight.

In the three narratives, physical pain are not associated from the beginning with spirit possession, but is in retrospect interpreted as having been a signal of its onset. It is only as a result of traditional explanations offered during and after the process of diagnosis that the three mediums acquire an understanding of the nature of their physical pains and begin to interpret it as *lha-né,* divine illness*.* While physical illness and pains may not appear in themselves to have spiritual implications, they are considered to be an element that distinguishes lha-né from *nyomba* (snyom ba), madness. Buddhism has a dualistic theory of mind-body. According to traditional Tibetan medicine and tantric Buddhism, for an individual mental stream to be reborn as a human being, it must enter a fetus which has already begun physical development but which is not yet a sentient being in its own right (Garrett, 2007). The immaterial mind cannot affect the body directly so it combines with the subtlest of the body's physical elements, wind/energy (rlung). Wind/energy transports the mind through 72,000 different channels (rtsa) that pervade the human body (Avedon, 1997, Stein 1972). This principle is utilized for the purpose of explaining possession. The possessing deity is considered to enter the medium through certain of these wind/energy channels. If the channels are clear and unblocked, the entrance/possession is considered to be smooth and not to cause much physical pain or psychological disturbance (Avedon, 1997, Gutschow 2009). Thus the presence of physical pain and ailments when combined with visions and dreams is interpreted as an indication of the presence of a possessing spirit, an influx of alien energy. It does not necessarily disappear with the successful initiation of the medium-to-be, as will be described later.

Visionary dreams

In Namsel's narrative presented in Cherniack (2010), the onset of her initiatory crisis is marked by a week-long coma induced by a fall down a steep slope which occurred while she was herding sheep as a child. In one of the visionary dreams she had during her coma, she is placed on a throne by female figures, who are surrounded by light and whom she understands to be goddesses. The figures offer her flowers and ritual cakes called *torma* (*gtor ma*). The presence of the tormas is particularly significant. Tormas are made from barley flour and butter, a Tibetan staple, and are used as offerings during various mundane, monastic and esoteric rituals to pacify, to propitiate, and to symbolically represent, spirits and/or deities (Beer, 2003). Without further information on the shape and degree of decoration of the tormas that she was offered, it is difficult to state for certain what they implied. However, it is probable that Namsel Drolma's dream portrayed her as a deity to whom the formal (torma) and festive (flowers) ritual is offered, seeing that tormas were offered to her rather than being torn into pieces and scattered randomly around.

Kelsang Lhamo, who fled Tibet with her family while suffering from her divine illness, weaves into her dream accounts descriptions of various sites of mystical power which she passed through while heading into exile in India.

> I had good dreams in some places. [In some dreams I was] in the residence of the gods (gnas), or on mountain tops, or in fields of peas. One dream had a large walnut tree and there were the symbols of Yudonma's costume. The dreams were very clear. I was happy roaming hills and lakes. In a dream there were big prayer flags on top of hill and there was also a big lake.

'The symbols of Yudonma's costume' she saw in the dream were an arrow and a mirror, and this particular dream appears later to have played an important role in confirming her connection with the goddess Yudronma. Another element to be noted in understanding Kelsang Lhamo's relationship with the spirit Yudronma is that, as a goddess of divination, Yudronma is traditionally associated with a cycle of texts for divination using a mirror (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956/1996). She is invoked by mediums or fortune tellers who practice this particular method of divination. Becoming a medium of Yudronma does not imply that one has an exclusive one-on-one relationship with this spirit or deity, in the same way as male mediums called *kutens* like Thubten Ngodup have with their spirits. To see Yudronma's symbols in one's dreams could merely suggest that one has the ability to divine or that one has a connection with the lineage of practice of divination. However, for Kelsang Lhamo, it denotes a symbolic sign, *tendrel,* which implies her personal link with Yudronma because this dream was situated within the context of her physical ailments of pain and dizziness, as well as what she describes as her 'crazy behaviour'.

Dream 'signs' appear to be more informative and specific when the medium-to-be is located in an environment where experience of possession is to be expected. As mentioned earlier, the Nechung spirit has an exclusive relation with one medium who also heads the monastic community that serves him. After the previous Nechung oracle passed away in 1984, Thubten Ngodrup who was already a monk at Nechung Monastery and had served the late medium as a ritualist, started to dream that he was watching a medium fall into a formally ritualized trance. Sometimes the medium appeared to be the previous Nechung medium, at others the medium's face was blurred. This series of dreams initiated his lha-né. However, his very familiarity with observing trances of the previous kuten seems to have conditioned him against attaching any potential meaning to this dream. Also, as finding a new kuten for the Nechung spirit was a central concern of the community at the time, any potential personal implications of the dreams need not to have been obvious to him at the time. Therefore we discern a different kind of uncertainty from that of Namsel Drolma's dream narrative: She sees the personal implications of her dream but cannot locate them in any framework, whereas Thubten Ngodrup sees the contextual implications of his dreams but fails to notice their relevance to himself.

Another dream he narrates in the same interview portrays, like Namsel Drolma's, a prophecy of his own spiritual development as an upcoming event – a promotion of his status and the acquisition of a visionary ability that sees into a realm other than the ordinary.

> I dreamed of a long staircase where a lot of monkeys accorded a ceremonial welcome. The monkeys were holding fruits in their hands, and one of them held my hand and led me through the higher steps. Upon reaching a platform, I saw a big tree which had a hole into which I was led (1992, p. 26).

As with Namsel Drolma and Kelsang Lhamo, he mentions that he was unable to make a connection between the contents and symbolic meaning of his dreams and the potential that the spirit would possess him, while in the midst of his divine illness. The dreams in themselves did not enlighten any of the three mediums to the nature of their experience. None are from families of hereditary mediums, thus they found it difficult to communicate their dreams, and so remained uninformed of the potential meaning of the 'signs' that were appearing in their dreams. However, the exceptional nature of these dreams was stressed in terms of emotional response. Dreams were associated with feelings such as deep pleasure, freedom, peace, and intense degrees of serenity.

Coming close to death

Physical pains and ailments climax in an experience of coming close to death. Grof and Grof (1989)'s argument for possession as a transformative experience is grounded in the sequence of their patients' physical symptoms which resonated with the concept of ego-death. In the three mediums' narratives, each experiences coming close to death, though this experience serves a different function for each individual. Kelsang Lhamo who suffered from dizziness, lack of energy, and pervasive physical pain along with random bouts of weeping and running about, describes the prospect of death as a threat from the spirit.

> No one around me knew what was happening. There were no *rinpoches* in my home town or on our way to India. Wherever I was, I was ill. Goddess made me run around and do odd things. I suffered a lot. Often I was unable to move out of my bedding. Sometimes people like me who hadn't got confirmation, went mad and jumped off rocks (to kill themselves) when the gods abandoned them *(chos-'brel-zhag)*. The god can throw you into a river. If I hadn't received the god, the god would have harmed me.

In the narrative above, Kelsang Lhamo's failure to communicate her experience to an appropriately qualified person who might have given her support is ascribed to the political situation at the time. Although the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, Buddhist teachers in her area south of Lhasa had been steadily crossing the border into India and Nepal even before then. This political context plays a significant role in her narrative because she considers the delay in diagnosis and the rite of initiation due to the absence of suitably qualified Buddhist lamas to have been the cause of her decade long period of suffering.

Kelsang Lhamo's experience of looming death was on the one hand a physical symptom she experienced daily. On the other hand, it was the fear that she would be killed unless she surrendered to this alien energy which was entering her against her will. Cho-del (chos 'brel) originally means link of dharma (Buddhist teaching), and refers to the relationship between teacher and pupil in Buddhist practice. In the case of a spirit medium, as Diemberger (2005) observes, this relationship is viewed to be predominantly initiated and severed by the deity-spirit. Thus Kelsang Lhamo defines her relationship with the goddess Yudronma as the threat of 'death', a predicament from which she can neither escape nor stop resisting. From this viewpoint, there is no choice left for her but to surrender to the will of the alien energy. From the perspective of Grof and Grof (1989) and Jung (1983, 1963), the battle between contradicting wills and the surrender of Kelsang Lhamo to the spirit could be considered as a form of ego death. Arguably, the extreme physical weakness and the feeling and/or fear of impending physical death function as the turning point when Kelsang Lhamo accepts her experience and begins to accommodate it, even if it does not bring a complete personality transformation.

The prospect of death brings not only fear but also the promise of rebirth. In the account of Tubten Ngodrup (1992, p. 26) cited below severe physical symptoms are associated with the opening into a new dimension of the psyche. He spontaneously suffers an enormous nose bleed during one of the largest gatherings for tantric initiations given by the Dalai Lama. His psychological resistance promptly yields and he surrenders to this incomprehensible experience.

> In between [bleedings], I lost hope of survival, although I felt no special fear of dying. I also had a very special emotional experience, though I could not understand what it meant at that time. I began experiencing more and more unusual signs and wondered what these emotional feelings could mean to me.

In general, in Tibetan culture, becoming ill during the grand occasion of a religious teaching is viewed as a manifestation of negative karma from past lives and its purification. It is based on the belief that such events together with the supernatural powers of the doctrinal text being expounded as well as the presence of the spiritual teacher can have a strong psychological and karmic effect on the psyches of those present. Therefore, even if he remained unsure of the meaning of the nose bleed and the unusual signs, the significance of these would have been taken for granted as being auspicious, without any further implication indicating spirit-possession. After the nose bleed yet, during the same religious event, he had the dream of monkeys mentioned earlier. Subsequently, the sequence of dreaming of ritualized trances, of becoming progressively more ill until the point of accepting death, of undergoing ecstatic emotions and a visionary dream suggest to him the possibility that he may have been chosen by the spirit as the next medium.

Searching for validation or following unknown forces: Namsel Drolma

Narratives of psychospiritual crisis introduced by Bragdon (1990), Grof and Grof (1989, 1990), and de Waard (2010) often describe the conflict between the individual who undergoes a spiritual crisis and medical professionals; the conflict between the meaning which the individual ascribes to the experience and the label given to the experience by the psychiatrist. Invalidation of one’s experience has frequently been pointed as being disruptive to the process of spiritual crisis as a transformative experience (see p. 2-4 and p.17-18). Diagnosis also plays an important role in the narratives of Tibetan spirit-mediums. A narrative of diagnosis is what typically follows the description of symptoms in the Tibetan mediums’ narratives collected by Belleza (2005), Diemberger (2005), and Gutschow (2009) amongst others. Once the nature of the ailment is confirmed to be a case of spirit-possession, the process of initiation into spirit-mediumship can begin.

However, as we have seen in the case of Kelsang Lhamo, diagnosis and confirmation might be delayed due to the failure to locate an appropriate authority. Similarly, Namsel Drolma undergoes a prolonged journey in search of confirmation of her experience. Within the broader narrative of her lha-né, this section constitutes a narrative comparable to that of the hero's journey (Campbell, 1949/1993) with a call, an encounter with a mentor, a submerging into the unknown, and an arrival. It is also comparable to the motifs of the night sea journey as analogy of confrontation with the unconscious, favoured by Jung (see p.46). Associating Namsel Drolma's journey described below with these may help to shed light on those elements of the shamanic journey that are not psychologically experienced but which are lived out in her narrative.

One may find her narrative of an apparently aimless journey irrelevant or insignificant in a discussion about spiritual crisis. It could be also argued that the long journey to Dharamsala for diagnosis is merely a result of the political context and peripheral to the process of her personal transformation. This part of her narrative is, however, significant for our understanding her experience and her relation with the possessing spirit, in which her conscious will regards to the signals from the will of an unknown source.
This journey narrative also sheds light on the deviation of her narrative from typical lha-né narratives leading to her atypical role as a medium.

We learn from her narrative that she leaves home without money and without any clear sense of a destination, relying only on her dreams to guide her. It is notable that this departure is presented as an outcome of her week-long coma during which she had the visionary dream quoted above: 'from that time, I became unhappy about living in my home area' (Cherniak, 2010). What this unhappiness implies is not clear from the text. The social reception to her symptoms may have been a factor: feared as a 'mad person' by many yet revered as 'khadro' a woman of spiritual achievement and/or a medium by others. However, her statement that she was not even aware that Tibet was under occupation by China tends to suggest a low level of awareness and/or interest in the wider environment, and evidences her statement that she just left home relying on 'signs'.

> I followed a sign that came in my dreams. There was a bus blowing its horn indicating its departure, and until I was on the bus I was unaware of where I was heading.'

She gets on a bus headed to Lhasa (the captical of Tibet, but also traditionally a sacred site for pilgrims). Once on the bus she finds her fellow passengers are making a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, and she decides to follow them. It is notable that the route she has chosen is that of a traditional pilgrimage, one that is believed to purify much of one's negative karma. After arriving at Mount Kailash, she circumambulates the sacred mountain and then heads to Lhasa. The narrative of her pilgrimage is punctuated by accounts of possessive seizures and the way in which these were received by those around her. The purpose of her journey is expressed only through an encounter with an 'old man wearing an Indian dhoti' (a man's lower garment having the shape of a long wrap skirt) whom she meets in a city not too far from the border between Tibet and Nepal.

> This complete stranger gave me 2000 *gormo*. He asked me to sit beside him..., told me that India was just beyond this mountain, and that I should be meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other lamas.

For Namsel Drolma, this encounter is understood as a significant 'sign' ten-drel which indicates the direction of her journey, and suggests an answer to a question which one wonders if she had ever asked before the encounter: 'as I have a problem of going into craziness sometimes, I merely wanted to know from [the Dalai Lama] whether that was good or bad'.

The significance of this incident is attested in several places in her story. Firstly, when her various appeals to receive an audience with the Dalai Lama are repeatedly denied, her despair originates from the fact that she could not fulfil the tasks the old man had set out for her such as: 'making a long life offering and some other secret thing'. It is also corroborated by her statement that this incident was one of the few things she reported as an important 'sign' to the Dalai Lama when she did finally get to meet him.

In the story of the old man, the Dalai Lama is mentioned for the first time in her narrative and becomes the destination of her journey. At the same time, it also hints at a link between the identity of the unconscious force behind her possessive states and the Dalai Lama. Once her goal becomes clear, she undergoes a succession of trials: extreme hunger, exhaustion as a result of illegally crossing the border on foot, and an infectious disease which leaves her 'like a corpse' for many days, let alone disgrace and ostracisation.

The final stage of her journey also includes an element which distinguishes her narrative from those of Tibetan spirit mediums: her mystical experience.[39] The event described below, which observers mistook for a suicide attempt, may not be entirely free from the influence of her possessive state.

> As [the Dalai Lama's] car passed by Namgyal Monastery, I saw a very bright light radiating on the front window of the car and inside I saw him with many hands around his shoulders! It was the first time I had ever seen His Holiness and I just jumped towards the car to prostrate, and I fell unconscious, almost under the car.

The above narrative describes a particular type of vision not unknown amongst Tibetan Geluk Buddhists. According to Tibetan tradition, the Dalai Lamas are reincarnations of the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshwara (Chenrezig in Tibetan), the iconography of one of whose manifestations is characterized by eleven heads and a thousand arms, each with an eye in the centre of the palm.[40] To see the Dalai Lama in this particular form is regarded either as evidence of a personal karmic link with the Dalai Lama or as a significant mystical experience.[41] In an account of a further mystical experience, the Dalai Lama's presence is again described as the catalyst.

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[39] I do not intend to suggest that Tibetan spirit-mediums do not normally have mystical experiences other than during their possessive states of which, of course, they retain no conscious memories. It is possible that anthropologists have merely failed to ask the relevant questions.

[40] Tradition states that the bodhisattva made a pledge to save all sentient beings from suffering. However, after eons of work, he found the universe full of beings in torment. The disappointment caused him to give up on his pledge and his body is shattered into a thousand pieces. The Buddha Amitabha set out to restore him though this time with eleven heads and a thousand arms in order to respond to the suffering of beings more effectively.

[41] According to a participant, a Tibetan child shouted out while the Dalai Lama was passing 'Look, he's got many arms!' That incident brought about an investigation into whether the child was a reincarnation of an important person. 20th century Tibetan mystic Lobsang Dargye (1988) is known to have had a similar experience when he first saw, from amongst the crowds, the young Dalai Lama sitting on a throne. How one should interpret the iconographic manifestation in these visions remains to be investigated. Although the cultural context, such as exposure from childhood to religious paintings or traditional descriptions of Avalokiteshwara, no doubt plays a central role in forming such an image, it is questionable whether the experience can be reduced entirely to cultural context, as is argued by Katz (1978). For example, I once met a Korean Buddhist meditator who was overwhelmed by a vision of the Dalai Lama as a figure with innumerable arms. Brought up in a non-Buddhist secular family and having become interested in Buddhism through her interest in meditation, she was not very familiar with Buddhist esoteric iconography. Consequently, she found her experience difficult to explain and believed that it had been triggered by the Dalai Lama's presence.

> The teaching began with the recitation of the Heart Sutra. I could hear His Holiness chanting, and as he was saying “no eyes, no nose,” etc., I started to have a very strange feeling. By the time he was saying “form is empty and emptiness is form,” I felt rays of light were showering on me, entering from the crown and filling my whole body. I felt lifted up in the air. I had a strong feeling of joy and sentiment.

Namsel Drolma distinguishes these experiences from possessive states, and appears to be aware of the deviation of her experience from that of more typical lha-né symptoms. This departure from the norm suggests to some, including the editors of *Mandala* who published her interview, that she is ‘something more important than just an oracle’. Such a remark is an indication of a social perception that spirit-possession is not a source of spiritual knowledge and development in its own right. Furthermore it suggests that the monastic hierarchy and the predominant emphasis on scholastic approach to the doctrinal tenets are internalised in Namsel Drolma’s understandings of her experience and her self.

Returning to the importance of the journey narrative in understanding the transformative effect of her possession, there is something else that needs to be noted. According to Diemberger (2005), the lack of lamas in the TAR due to the destruction of Buddhist culture and the exile of many lamas since 1959 has caused some female mediums currently active in Tibet to be initiated by other experienced mediums, if a suitably qualified Buddhist lama was unavailable, or even to initiate themselves. This posits an interesting question in regard to Namsel Drolma’s narrative: why did she not pursue diagnosis in her home area? She does mention that there were some Buddhist lamas nearby who respected her possession as something of religious significance. Therefore it is very likely that the pursuit of confirmation in her local area was not entirely impossible. However, the unconscious ‘urge’ to leave seemed not to be directed at the confirmation/diagnosis per se, but rather at the right person to carry it out and the right context for it to be carried out. In other words, Namsel Drolma repeatedly indicates that her possessive experience could become a transformative event – psychologically and socially – only through the Dalai Lama. We will return to this subject when discussing the long term transformative effect of spirit-possession.

Diagnosis – determining the identity of the possessing spirit

Diagnosis in this section refers to having the presence of a spirit involved in one's symptoms confirmed. In this process, the meaning of one's experience is determined at the level of the social. This in turn affects the course of the event.

1) General description

As observed by Diemberger (2005) & Gutschow (2009) amongst others, symptoms such as seizure, coma, and aggressive and destructive behaviour are not always considered evidence of spirit possession in Tibetan culture. In Tibetan medicine, madness (snyom ba in Tibetan) is considered to arise from one of the four causes: i) imbalance between, or disturbance in, body humours, ii) disturbed emotions, iii) poison, iv) spirit possession, and v) karma (Clifford, 1984/1994). Amongst these, *karma* can either be an independent causal explanation or a mechanism that underlies another of the causes (Gutschow 2009). In general, when an individual displays such symptoms, they are viewed with shock, fear, disdain, and confusion. Sooner or later, they are either taken to a local Buddhist lama, a figure who traditionally plays the roles of physician and shaman, or to a spirit medium, or to a practitioner of traditional Tibetan medicine, depending on availability. As Gutschow (2009) illustrates, the process of diagnosis is not always straightforward.

As Diemberger (2005) notes, the process and criteria of diagnosis, i.e., confirmation of the presence of a possessing spirit at work, are kept largely secret from the general public. However, this level of secrecy is not uniform. Various elements such as the narrator's social position, age, duration of their career, and the specific context of narrative generation may influence the level of secrecy.

2) Diagnosis instigated by the possessed spirit

In Namsel Drolma's narrative, the manner in which she was confirmed to be the medium of the goddess Tsheringma is altogether absent.[42] What remains in great detail are descriptions of how the critical contact is made with the figure of authority who will diagnose her symptoms, validate/invalidate her experiences, and reveal their meaning to her. As stated in the section above, validation of her experiences, i.e., wanting confirmation that she is not mad, is a major theme that runs through her narrative. However, the measures taken by her conscious mind do not bring about the desired result. Instead, we find her repeatedly and despairingly attempting to catch a glimpse of the Dalai Lama or to receive an audience with him only to fall unconscious or become possessed as soon as she arrives in his vicinity. Her mystical experience cited on p.196 occurs in the context of her being 'possessed by the protector [spirit]' and being taken outside the venue by the security guards. It is notable that it is ultimately her seizures, her possessive or ecstatic states that eventually bring her to the attention of the Dalai Lama.

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[42] Namsel Drolma's narrative is originally private conversation amongst friends which later was edited for publication within a Buddhist community. One of my Tibetan participants who happened to one of her friends, knew about the publication story but had not a chance to read the actual text. I gave him a copy during our interview. On reading, he looked relieved and commented 'It's okay. No important secret there'. I could verify only as far as that what he meant as 'not to be there' was mainly regarding the process of confirmation and initiation, and Namsel Drolma's service to the Dalai Lama. This incident informs us the way information on spirit-possession is controlled in the

Likewise, Kelsang Lhamo's diagnosis occurs as a result of her running into the middle of a religious teaching, while tearing off her clothes and throwing them away in her possessive state. In both accounts, contact with a qualified authority figure is made through the will of a force unknown to them, not through their own will. Even the case of Thubten Ngodup is not very different. He is aware that possession by the Nechung spirit is an event which has been anticipated by the community, and he feels assured that the psychological disturbances he's been suffering from must be due to possession. However, he does not communicate this to anyone until he falls unconscious under the influence of the spirit during the occasion of a grand ritual. All three mediums describe the process of diagnosis in terms of a communication between the possessing spirit and the figure qualified to recognise it. Whether one cannot deal with the possession (Kelsang), or makes the best effort to facilitate it (Namsel), or keeps waiting for more definite evidence about it (Thubten), it is the spirit who decides when and to whom to reveal itself.

3) Procedures of confirmation

Knowledge regarding the procedure of diagnosis of spirit possession has advanced little since Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1956/1996, p. 417-420) provided general outlines for the diagnosis of possession in the case of low-ranking demons and deceased souls as well as spirits of the Buddhist protector deities. While candidates report omens they have seen in their dreams and describe other relevant symptoms, these do not always amount to

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Tibetan society. It also illustrates the difficulty of acquiring descriptions of psychological states of non-ordinary, transpersonal experience in Tibetan culture.

evidences enough for diagnosis. Because spirit-possession is perceived, as not only a personal experience, but as a social, communal matter, much focus of diagnosis is placed on the identification of the possessing spirit. Thus, the role of identifier/confirmer is, to some degree, conferred on other possessing spirits who would speak through their mediums in trance. Even when figures of authority take on the role and are involved in the process, diagnosis aims to distinguish the characteristics of the possessing spirit during trance. Consequently, the candidate has little conscious participation in the procedure, and his or her psychological experience is largely excluded from the whole event as well as from the resulting narratives.

Thubten Ngodup (1992) describes a few tests he underwent during trance, for example, whether his breath had the fragrance of the deity, and if his accent and speech pattern conformed to those of the possessing spirit, etc. However, this was information he garnered after the event. It is well known that, Namsel Drolma's possessing deity was verified by the Nechung spirit during a trance that they both participated in. The procedure and ritual of diagnosis/confirmation are understood as events during which the individual 'sleeps' or has 'dreams that [one] cannot remember once woken up'. Thus, when I asked Thubten Ngodup about his own confirmation and his participation in Namsel Drolma's, his response was that it was like he was 'asleep'.

Training and its immediate transformative effect

Instead of her diagnosis which she could not recall much, Kelsang Lhamo tells me about the ceremony of opening her channel (rtsa sgo phyed, pronounced as tsa-go-ché), which was more important for her,

> Duzom Rinpoche gave me Yudronma initiation and opened my channels. After that I became less ill.

During 'opening channels' as it is narrated by the three mediums, personal experience of possession becomes an event whereby the medium begins to own his or her experience, shifting from the position of victim to that of a participant. As mentioned earlier, according to Tibetan medicine and esoteric Buddhism, the human body has 72,000 channels through which wind/air the subtlest of the physical elements carries mind. These channels may be blocked as a result of physical, psychological, or karmic causes (Avedon, 1997, Gutschow, 2009, Powers, 2008). Possession is described as a phenomenon in which an external mind enters the mediums' channels. Despite a lack of clarity on the whereabouts of the medium's own mind, the channels are required to be fully open so as to accommodate the extra load. Otherwise, the repeated process of going into trance is considered to take a heavy toll on the medium's own lifespan (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956/1996). In the quote above, Kelsang Lhamo's channels were 'opened' by Duzom Rinpoche a renowned teacher of the Nyingma tradition who gave her initiation into the lineage of her possessing spirit by means of a ritual. It is apt to draw a comparison between the Tibetan approach of accommodating the possessive spirit and Assagioli's theory of the opening/broadening of the channel between the conscious self and the higher Self. Assagioli (see p.48-57) argues that there is an ongoing flow of energy from the higher Self to the conscious self. When the influx of energy suddenly increases, it may turn into a spiritual crisis, of which symptoms may vary depending on the contents of the higher and the lower unconscious which are where the energy is fed into. I do not intend to maintain that the concept of broadening signifies the same kind of activity in the two systems or that it is intended to bring about the same kind of result. Although both approaches explain a crisis in terms of energy, Assagioli's 'channel' is more figurative than the Tibetan concept of subtle channels which explains how the mind moves through the body (see p.185).

A major part of channel-opening involves one's prowess in esoteric meditation (Avedon, 1997, Diemberger, 2005, Powers, 2008). Unlike during the diagnostic process in which the individual is completely passive, here one is required to make a conscious effort. Thubten Ngodup (1992) states that he was given instructions to meditate on the deity Tamdin (better known in the West by its Sanskrit name Hayagriva). Tamdin, originally a horse-headed manifestation of the Hindu god Vishnu, later became part of the retinue of bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara. Tamdin is also believed to exert control over all possessing spirits and demons (Avedon 1997, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956//1996). It is noteworthy that this meditation involves the medium visualizing the deity, at first in front of him/her, but eventually as himself/herself. That is, the medium undergoes training to identify himself/herself as the superior of the possessing deity, which, as Thubten Ngodup notes, 'minimizes the physical and psychological exhaustion' and thus makes one 'less ill' (Kelsang Lhamo). Eventually, this training common to all three mediums, as Walsh (1997, 2007) and Peters (1984) suggest, enables them to control the onset of possession so that the spirit possesses the medium only when invoked.

This process further enables them to reinterpret their symptoms ‘not as pathology but as a calling, not as an emergency to be suppressed but as an emergence to be guided’ (Walsh, 2007, p. 216) from a wider, validating perspective. Walsh (2007, p. 216) proposes that the process of initiation helps the candidates to ‘value and work with the symptoms as part of an important developmental learning process and as a doorway to a new and valued social role’.

Long-term transformative effect at the social level

The possessing spirit’s position within the Buddhist pantheon as well as the particular ritual function that certain deities occupy within Tibetan society provide the primary criteria for determining the medium’s status (Avedon, 1997, Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956/1996). The meditative training that Namsel Drolma and Thubten Ngodup underwent may be said to have been imposed on them primarily because their possessing spirits play an important role in relation to the Dalai Lama and his government. This emphasis on social perspective is reflected in their two narratives by the paucity of material on the personal results of transformation compared to the wealth of material on the social implications of their newly acquired vocations.

Thubten Ngodup’s narratives, both that of 1992 and his interview with me, stress the significance and quantity of his services as medium, abbot, and government officer, labelling his personal life as ‘insignificant’. Namsel Drolma presents a rather unique, personalized position yet one which is embedded in the doctrinal positions of the Geluk tradition. She describes how the doctrinal education she has undergone since the beginning of her training has informed/shaped her vision of her role in the world. This marks another departure from those of typical spirit-medium narratives.

> I have a goal: there is a vast, outstanding lineage of teaching, empowerment and instruction by the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. It’s now been about 360 years since he first revealed them, and since then, it hasn’t been possible to reveal them completely again. I feel a strong karmic connection with this special lineage, so my sole wish is to restore this entire lineage for His Holiness.

It should be noted that Namsel Drolma as a medium of Tsheringma does not belong to the monastic community as Thubten Ngodup does, and this perhaps is a key factor that enables her to envision herself not just as a medium but also as a Buddhist teacher.[43]

Reticence about long term transformative effect on the psyche of the individual

An important question needs to be asked: what is the long term effect of spirit possession on the psychology of the medium? Experiencing the deity as something completely external and independent from oneself encourages mediums to divorce themselves from any actions or prophecies made during trance. Their narratives repeatedly deny the possibility that going into trance as contact with the transpersonal may have any lingering effect on their psychology. I have noted during interviews with Kelsang Lhamo and Thubten Ngodup that the physical effects of possession were always described openly and without any hesitation, this by contrast with questions pertaining to the psychological effect of the possessive state about which they were often reticent. Contrary to this ostensible reticence, their narratives show dramatic differences in their perspectives, abilities and personality before and after initiation.

As illustrated above, Namsel Drolma, a simple nomadic girl who before her journey was completely unaware of the current Tibetan political context, is now in a position to envision herself assisting the Dalai Lama in the task of preserving and spreading Tibetan Buddhist teachings.

Thubten Ngodup who neither dared to imagine himself assuming the role of kuten nor communicated his symptoms to anyone presents himself as someone who can ‘serve’ and administer numerous jobs given to him. Similarly, in her old age, Kelsang Lhamo summarises her life as a channel between the deity and the people.

> My life? I suffered a lot but I helped a lot of people. If something is beneficial, it is noble. That is dharma. Kundun (the Dalai Lama) also says so.

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[43] To date no full ordination has been given to nuns in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Although female teachers are recorded in Tibetan Buddhist history, they have been extremely rare and none has been a medium like herself. In passing, it is worthwhile noting that the Tibetan Buddhist organization that publishes *Mandala* invited her to lead a meditation retreat at their monastery in France in 2012. Her position as dharma teacher may be perceived inappropriate in a more native setting as Dharamsala, where her role is restricted to that of spirit-medium.

In the quote above, we see that she submits to cultural norms regarding the medium's role by evaluating her life in terms of the 'help' she has provided to her clients rather than in terms of her own personal achievements such as psychic abilities, enhanced awareness or doctrinal understanding. She sums her life up in the word 'help'. However, strictly speaking, this 'help' is carried out by the goddess who 'comes and goes', and remains peripheral to her personal identity.

Rigid perceptions of separation between the medium and the spirit may hinder mediums from noticing the positive side effects of their relationship with the possessing spirit. For example, Kelsang Lhamo attributes her ability to divine outside of trance to her own efforts and considers that it has nothing to do with her possession by the Yudronma spirit. As the result of such a rigid separation, the psychological aspect of the effects of possession has to be rendered in terms of service to the community.

Karma: unidentified trigger of spirit possession

Studies suggest that there is a link between possession and a period of psychological distress (Walsh, 1997, p. 107, 2007) and traumatic life experience (Lewis, 1971, Samuel, 1997). As Lewis (1971) observes, this link proposed by anthropologists is arguably imported from the dominant psychiatric understandings of dissociative disorder. Drawing from the patterns of events found in mediums' life stories, Diemberger (2005) argues that harsh living conditions, trauma and even major life events such as marriage may function as triggers for spirit possession. This kind of rational explanation, however, contradicts the medium's own interpretation of his or her experience.

Amongst the narratives examined in this chapter, Kelsang Lhamo's most closely corresponds to the pattern suggested by Diemberger (2005). Kelsang Lhamo's erratic behaviour such as running around half naked or eating toothpaste began when she was 25, soon after her marriage. However, personally she sees no link between this sudden change in her life and her experience of possession. As possession is considered to be instigated by the possessing spirit, an external entity, explanations of its onset must also reflect and/or justify the 'choice made by the spirit' (Kelsang Lhamo). The conversation below provides an example of this, as well as offering a clue about how she makes sense of her unusual destiny.

Unjyn: Where was your home in Tibet?

Kelsang Lhamo: I was born at Burang near the border. I was born on Guru Rinpoche's birth day, the tenth day of the fifth month of monkey year. So, there were many events to see on that day. My mother went to see some performance, then bore me on the road.

In introducing her life, as a response to my ice-breaker question, Kelsang Lhamo proudly states that she was born on 'the tenth day of the fifth month of the monkey year' of the lunar calendar, which is the birthday of Guru Rinpoche [Tibetan title meaning the precious spiritual teacher], Padmasambhava who was one of the major figures in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet. As mentioned earlier, Padmasambhava is said to have travelled around Tibet subjugating the nature deities and forcing them to pledge themselves protectors of Buddhism. Amongst Tibetan Buddhists, the iconographic importance of Padmasambhava is far greater than that of the historical Buddha. The Tibetan calendar consists of a cycle of twelve animals, one assigned to each year, which makes the monkey year return every twelve years. Thus the fact that Kelsang Lhamo's birthday coincides so precisely with that of Guru Rinpoche effectively emphasizes the auspiciousness of her birth.[44] Later, when asked whether she had had any unusual experience marking her out as a future medium prior to the onset of her lha-né, Kelsang Lhamo returned to the narrative of her birth, suggesting that her birthday itself was a 'sign' that provided convincing enough evidence for why she had been chosen by the goddess Yudronma. Accordingly, she does not mention any specific trigger to which she ascribes the onset of her *lha-né* at the age of twenty five. Association with one of the great founders of Tibetan Buddhism is what makes the possession meaningful to her and turns it into a transpersonal event. Possibly, such a reliance on a traditional belief (from my perspective, a belief, but from hers, a cosmological reality) compensates for the lack of self-imposed meaning and value she places on her experience as well as for the lack of personal benefit she has received from the possession.

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[44] Attributing significance to particular dates is common in Tibetan culture. There may be a number of different principles and/or beliefs about the meaning of these. For example, certain dates such as the full moon or those of important Buddhist anniversaries are believed to multiply the result of virtuous actions by up to 100,000 times. On the other hand, the historical Buddha as well as many renowned figures in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist history are believed to have made conscious decisions about when and where to reincarnate themselves, calculating all the earthly conditions in order to achieve the best results in their next lives.

Attributing the cause of possession to predestined destiny, as in the case of Kelsang Lhamo, is found in other mediums' narratives as well.[45] Namsel Drolma and Thubten Ngodup explain the mechanism behind their being 'chosen to be spirit-mediums' in terms of karma collected during their past lives. I have mentioned earlier that karma is viewed as one of the causes, or as the underlying principle for other causes of mental illness in general, and of possession in particular. For instance, Namsel Drolma ascribes the cause of her possession to 'very strong karmic imprints from past [lives]'. In doing so, she draws from two different types of evidence.

Firstly, the sudden recognition and appreciation that she has received from various Buddhist teachers including the Dalai Lama is understood as a mark of her karmic relation with them in her past lives. Her reasoning may not appear convincing, yet it is difficult to tell whether she has had any visions or memories of past lives on which to intuit her karmic connection with these high ranking Buddhist figures. Secondly, she mentions certain episodes which appear similar to the phenomenon of channelling:

> sometimes the words to express the view of emptiness come out of my mouth automatically – something I have never heard and studied before – but I can't remember later what I said.

It again should be noted that she grew up from a provincial nomadic community and received no doctrinal education until she was confirmed as a medium of the goddess Tsheringma. Therefore the ability to narrate complicated doctrinal concepts eloquently is interpreted as not originating from to her conscious self. Yet, channelling in the form of delivering an intellectual message in a calm and deliberate manner does not conform to the usual style of her possession by Tsheringma, a wrathful deity, which effectively rules out the possibility that this material originates from the goddess. Thus she reaches the conclusion that she must have some past life karma as an innate tendency in her psyche which has resulted in her intimate connection with the possessing spirit.

Conclusive remarks

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[45] In anthropological studies, the mediums' subjective understanding of the cause/trigger of their possession tends to be overlooked. One of the mediums interviewed by Diemberger (2005, p. 124) attributes her ability to receive prophecies in the form of images from the lake goddess to her being the reincarnation of *lu* (*klu*) a water spirit.

The major focus in this chapter has been on whether and how the meaning of spiritual crisis as an opportunity for personal growth and transformation is created in the narratives of Tibetan spirit-mediums.

At the beginning of the chapter, we saw that the phenomenon of spirit possession in Tibetan culture agrees with the description of spiritual emergency suggested by Grof and others in the sense that the symptoms need to be treated using transpersonal methods which are based on assumptions about the structure of psyche. However, in terms of those underlying assumptions of the psyche, the psychological positions reviewed in chapter one and Tibetan explanations of spirit possession are completely at odds with each other.

As the Dalai Lama (Tenzin Gyatso 1990) states, the fundamental principle of Tibetan spirit-possession is that these spirits are entities independent from the individuals they possess. The particular manner in which body and psyche (*sems* in Tibetan) are combined in Tibetan Buddhist medical theory offers a way of understanding how the spirit enters into the medium. This invasion (descent) of superior energy into the individual's psychological and physical system is at its onset called lha-né, illness from the god/goddess.

Meaning of possession decided socially

In terms of diagnostic process, we have seen that each case of spirit-possession is evaluated in terms of the social position and functional role of the possessing spirit, rather than in terms of meaningfulness of the experience to the individual medium. As we have seen regarding diagnostic process in the narratives, verification of the presence of a spirit is the first central concern because this provides validation for the symptoms in the sense that they may indicate something socially meaningful. We have seen that fear of madness and an urge for validation were central to Namsel Drolma's narrative. Secondly, the identity of the possessing spirit becomes important – whether it is a trustworthy spirit or something that needs to be repelled. Such social aspects of spirit-possession shape the mediums' stories and the way in which they give meaning to their experience. Therefore, possessive states in themselves are not regarded as psychologically transformative. In the narratives of the three mediums, the subjective interpretations of the experience of possession are equated with the nature of phenomenon typified by cultural and religious norms as expressed through qualified Buddhist hierarchy. There is little space for any private sphere of interpretation.

Facilitation not Treatment

The so-called opening, or broadening, of one's psychic channels by means of a series of rituals and meditative practice can be understood as a therapeutic measure which enables the individual to accommodate the experience of possession, a temporary, huge influx of psychic energy of an exterior origin. If compared to psycho-therapeutic exorcism described by Grof and Grof (1989), Bragdon (1990), and Stephenson (2009) amongst others, the foremost difference lies in the perceived nature of the possessing spirit: the Tibetan possessing spirits discussed in this chapter are regarded as protectors of Buddhism, and it is a personal honour to be chosen by one as host. Thus exorcising the protector spirit is out of the question.[46] The so-called treatment aims at facilitating the manner of possession. From the perspective of the three mediums' in this study, the rituals and training involved in 'opening the channels' represent a way to surrender to a new way of life, and a life which is partly defined by engagement in greater causes than that of the individual – be it neighbourly, monastic or related to the Dalai Lama as the spiritual centre of gravity of the nation.

Does spirit possession bring about personal transformation?

It must be noted that the perception of spirit as foreign entity entails that the individual's psyche is independent from the possession, and that possession by itself results in neither spiritual development nor personal transformation. Of the three spirit-mediums quoted in this chapter, none associated their experience of possession with personal psychological transformation/growth. Mediums do recover from the crisis by actively facilitating the spirit's need to speak through them, and as a result of this cooperation they acquire knowledge into a new realm (as Thubten Ngodup's dream of the tree and monkeys signified) as well as opportunities to serve the larger community. However, such changes may not be understood in terms of individual development or psychological transformation. Links to personal development are made in terms of serving the community (Thubten Ngodup) and accumulating virtue which will contribute to one's better rebirth (Kelsang Lhamo). Even Namsel Drolma who narrates a long list of spontaneous transpersonal experiences would not associate these with the outcome of spirit possession. This seems to suggest that spontaneous transpersonal experiences outside of the usual doctrinal boundaries are not considered relevant to individual spiritual development in Tibetan Buddhist culture (See Samuel 1993 for the opposition between shamanism and Buddhist monasticism in Tibet). As seen in Namsel Drolma's narrative, spontaneous transpersonal experience may be viewed as a symptom of madness before its endorsement by the monastic authorities.

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[46] I limit my argument to the class of protector spirits. Regarding other lower classes of spirits, rituals may be practiced for the purpose of exorcism (Avedon 1999; Karmay 1998).

Why are certain individuals chosen as spirit-mediums?

As possession is viewed as being caused by an outside agent, personal characteristics and/or psychological type do not seem to explain why certain individuals are chosen by spirits and others aren't. The literature tells us little in this regard. Respectively the three mediums explain the causes of their possession in terms of a particular birth date, one's form in a previous birth, and indistinct and fragmentary evidence of past life experiences and inborn dispositions. Broadly speaking, they indicate that they were destined to become mediums by their *karma*, a causal effect of one's actions and intentions in the past. We will discuss karma in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Karma and compassion

> *Bodhisattvas practising transcendent wisdom will be tormented—indeed, they will be greatly tormented—by past actions that would have brought suffering in future lives, but have ripened in this life instead.*
>
> - *The Diamond Cutter Sutra*, cited in Patrul Rinpoche (1994, p.128)

In chapter five, I discussed various concepts of spiritual awakening and crisis relevant to individual spiritual development gained by means of Tibetan Buddhist esoteric practice. In chapter six, I illustrated how spirit-possession is understood not as an individual psychological experience but as an event in which the individual is unwillingly involved. I also noted that the three mediums studied in the chapter associate their possession with karma. In this chapter I consider the concept of karma and illustrate the ways in which karma can be used to explain psychospiritual crisis. For this purpose, I offer an analysis of the life-story of Lobzur-la, a Tibetan Buddhist monk and former political prisoner.

It might appear to readers, as it did to me initially, that his life-story which begins with an account of his life as a young monk, continues with his imprisonment by the Chinese and culminates in his leaving Tibet for exile in India could have no relevance to the concept of spiritual crisis as discussed in the literature review. It is this apparent lack of relevance to the topic that makes the analysis of Lobzur-la's narrative important to my thesis: the dissimilarity between the individual-psyche oriented concept of spiritual crisis in the field of transpersonal psychology and its Tibetan Buddhist equivalent in terms of the elements from which meaning is constructed.

The analysis in this chapter, therefore, aims to demonstrate this relevance by means of a detailed analytical process. In the literature review, I have argued that one of the main difficulties in defining spiritual crisis is, as Daniels (2005) notes, that transformative meaning is a defining factor of spiritual crisis. In the narrative presented in this chapter, readers will see how a transpersonal, transformative meaning may be constructed in relation to one’s lived experiences and one’s responses to them, rather than from a transpersonal experience which involves non-ordinary consciousness/activation of the unconscious as is discussed in transpersonal psychology.

Recruitment process – how Lobzur-la’s narrative emerged as a key narrative

As a ground for spiritual advancement, the motif of imprisonment in Chinese occupied Tibet frequently appeared during the phase of exploratory interviews and in responses to my questionnaire. Unlike any of the Western participants, I talked to during the phase of exploratory interviews, Tibetan participants identified former political prisoners as examples of those who overcame spiritual crisis. However, proceeding with participants’ suggestions that did not seem to fit the theoretical lens of spiritual crisis was not a straightforward step. My reluctance and doubt had to be suppressed because the repeated occurrence of the theme indicated a genuine Tibetan voice, in whose interpretive validity, I would, after completing analysis, become confident. In the following section, I will describe the process in some detail.

Initially, just before I enrolled on my PhD course, I was granted a brief audience with the Dalai Lama during which I introduced him to my research project. As the de facto leader of the Geluk tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, his knowledge of, and wide contacts amongst, Buddhist practitioners in Dharamsala, identified him as a key informant. On hearing that the subject of research was spiritual crisis, he suggested that I meet former political prisoners so as to hear their experiences. His comment came as an unexpected direction, but the audience was too brief to ascertain if any potential error in terms of communicating the concept had occurred. At the time, it did not seem promising to pursue the direction any further.

During the phase of exploratory interviews, I did not mention the Dalai Lama’s suggestion in case his authority should condition participants’ responses. Responses from my three Tibetan participants in the UK suggested a link between the Buddhist concept of suffering and that of spiritual awakening. Undergoing hardship and traumatic events was identified with intense psychological pain. Experiencing such situation, it was suggested, could lead one to embark on the spiritual path. A young Tibetan lay Buddhist put it like this: ‘The Buddha must have had great pain. Otherwise how could he leave his beautiful wife and baby?’ The same opinion was also expressed in a more dogmatic way. Tashi Tsering, a Buddhist teacher himself teaching in the UK, told me that ‘experiencing suffering in depth’ could take one very close to the ‘understanding of the meaning of suffering’ which initiates the spiritual journey. His statement is grounded in Buddhist concept of the Four Noble Truths. These consist of four statements regarding 1) the universality of suffering, 2) the cause of suffering, 3) liberation from suffering, and 4) the path to liberation. Tashi Tsering suggested that experience of intense suffering might provide one with an opportunity to grasp the first Noble Truth, which could in turn signify the genuine beginning of one’s spiritual journey.

From his perspective, the political imprisonment that many Tibetans have undergone under Chinese occupation was one such example of suffering. Tashi Tsering referred to the story of a monk that he had heard the Dalai Lama mention several times. ‘A monk who had been in prison for twenty years reported to His Holiness that the greatest danger [he faced] in prison was the risk of losing compassion toward the Chinese’. Similarly, Ngawang, another Tibetan participant, also in the UK, referred to the story of a former nun who did not want to sign a petition requesting that her former prison guards be brought to justice: “Can you understand that? She said she didn’t want them to go through the same suffering [as she had undergone] because she knows what it is like. Something must have happened [in the prison].” On hearing the definition of spiritual emergency from me, he responded, ‘Wouldn’t they experience fear and everything in prison?’ The ‘something’, which is demonstrated by compassion for the Chinese prison guards, indicates a form of personal transformation which, according to Ngawang, raises the nun to a spiritual height, that gives a perspective which ordinary minds like himself cannot understand.

In the questionnaire responses, the kind of transformative process or prison experience often resulted in the acquisition of ‘charisma’, ‘presence’ or some other special quality that made the respondents cry when listening to them deliver a sermon. During fieldwork, I met the questionnaire respondents who had written about these former prisoners, acquired further information about them and heard many more similar stories. It is noteworthy that none of these questionnaire respondents or participants during the exploratory interviews who had raised the subject of political imprisonment saw any potential link between triggers of spiritual emergency and spiritual development as they conceived it. Whilst most of the people mentioned were not present in Dharamsala so could not be interviewed, there were some former prisoners living there.[47] I interviewed three former political prisoners who were all monks, two of them in their eighties and one in his sixties in order to explore whether the conceptual link between ‘suffering’ and spiritual awakening could be found in their imprisonment narratives. One of them was Lobzur-la, who turned out to be the monk whom Tashi Tsering had mentioned to me as having often been quoted by the Dalai Lama.

Interviewing Lobzur-la[48]

Lobzur-la’s narrative was acquired during three interviews undertaken in March 2012. These lasted altogether about four hours. Interviews were carried out in his room inside the Namgyal Monastery complex in Dharamsala. The aim of my interviews with Lobzur-la was set as the acquisition of an in-depth account of the circumstances surrounding ‘the risk of losing compassion in prison’. I wanted to understand his own perspective, in the hope that this would help me shed light on the way in which Tibetan participants understood the concept of spiritual crisis when they repeatedly mentioned such imprisonment narratives in their interview responses.

Semi-structured life story interview (Atkinson 2002) was identified as the suitable schedule. The first interview covered his arrest by the Chinese in 1959, his time in prison, then his release, and finally his journey into exile in India, including events related to the quote about losing compassion towards his Chinese guards. Lobzur-la’s story heavily focused on description of external events and I learned little about his inner experience/feelings/thoughts. However, it was necessary to consider the relational context (myself/the researcher being a complete stranger to him). Also, I heard from one of the young monks who look after him that they had never heard a full account of his life in prison. In the week between the first and second interviews, I paid him a short visit, bringing with me a typical Tibetan greeting gift – butter for making lamps and incense for making offerings to the shrine in his room. During the second interview, he was less stiff, smiled more, and made frequent gestures more with his hands. Our conversation initially focused on his monastic life before his arrest. Based on his narrative from the first interview, I asked questions about the feelings and thoughts which he had while in prison in order to understand the context in which imprisonment might lead him to undergo a crisis of a spiritual dimension. During the third interview preceded by another social visit, Lobzur-la and I clarified a few points on his prison experience, and he concluded his story by providing me with a short dogmatic summary of his life turning it into an illustration of Buddhist morality.

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[47] Many of the former prisoners whose stories I heard were those who were imprisoned before the Cultural Revolution, hence, if they were available to be interviewed, most of them would be in their eighties or nineties.

[48] Lobzur-la is not the participant’s name but a title (Lobzur) with an honorific vocative ending (la). He is also commonly referred as the former ritual master of Namgyal monastery. In Tibetan culture people are often referred to by their titles or by their relation to the speaker. This being the case, I always addressed him as ‘Lobzur-la’ during interviews. He did not wish to be presented with a pseudonym, which in any case would not have concealed his identity as his narrative is highly contextualized with historical figures, places, and events.

For my interviews with Lobzur-la, the Dalai Lama's office offered me the services of Tenzin Tsepak, who works as resident translator for the Dalai Lama during his teachings in Dharamsala. In spite of my competence in using Tibetan for daily conversations and for understanding religious teachings, I accepted the offer bearing in mind a number of potential issues: the wide range of vocabulary involving geography, historical figures and other cultural elements likely to arise; Lobzur-la's old age and potential hearing issues; the clarity of his pronunciation (a problem for me in understanding him); and his lack of experience in conversing with a non-native Tibetan speaker (a problem for Lobzur-la in understanding me).

Preparing and reorganizing the text

Lobzur-la's text, as a result of translingual interviewing, was negotiated to some degree. It is the interpreter's translation which was transcribed, not Lobzur-la's original speech in Tibetan. As a professional translator of religious teachings, Tsepak tended to remove repetition and reorganize what Lobzur-la said so as to make it more comprehensible. He also tried to sanitize the narrative whenever he felt that Lobzur-la becoming lost in the midst of his memories and/or was over-elaborating the past in a way that made it irrelevant to my question.

While transcribing the recordings, I went through Lobzur-la's speeches comparing them with Tsepak's translation and made amendments wherever possible. The resulting transcript in English is not always a strict, literal, translation of Lobzur-la's speech. As the research interest lies in ascertaining the meaning of spiritual crisis in Lobzur-la's narrative rather than in linguistic matters, the resulting text reflects Lobzur-la's own story-telling to a sufficient degree.

When the transcript was complete, I read it over many times. I found that within each interview, Lobzur-la's story was well sequenced chronologically, even without Tsepak's rearrangement. On the other hand, with the reversed order of his formative years and adulthood caused by the interview questions, the overall pattern ('general narrative thread' in Josselson, 2011; 'core pattern' in Lieblich et al., 1998) was not sufficiently accentuated. I made the decision that restoring the natural flow would facilitate analysis and edited the transcript as an analytical step. A similar approach is found in the life-story interviewing approach of Atkins (2012) which aims to produce a life story with a natural flow. The narrative analysis presented below is based on this reorganized text.

The manner in which I engaged with Lobzur-la's narrative is best described as 'empathetic understanding' as phrased by Charmaz (2012, p.137), focusing on understanding 'the logic of the person's experience from his or her point of view'. On the other hand, I also adopted Anderson (2011)'s more intimate approach to the text which involved a constant engagement with the narrative in my daily life for an extended period.

Introduction to Lobzur-la's narrative

At the time of my interviews with him, Lobzur-la was 83 years old. Events described in his narrative are based on three interviews, which cover the period from age seven to his mid-fifties. Recounted from the vantage point of time, the narrative reflects how Lobzur-la saw his life and wished to present it at the time of the interviews, rather than how he may have actually lived it. His narrative tells the story of a man who became a monk as a child. Trained to be a ritual master in a highly privileged and honoured setting of Tibetan society, he lived in a world permeated by Buddhist deities and symbols. He then lost this identity when he was imprisoned by the occupying Chinese in 1959 and was later forced to lead a socially ostracized life before returning to the Buddhist world, but this time as an exile in another country. His biographical account centres round a figure, who comes to represent for him both the transpersonal and the sociopolitical – the Dalai Lama. Along with the development of plot in terms of the biographical, the narrative reveals a paralleling development of the transpersonal: 'illness of the soul' manifested as imprisonment and being resolved through 'not losing compassion towards other inmates'.

Lobzur-la’s narrative is comparable to the famous biblical story of Job. In the Book of Job, Job’s trials unfold as his wealth, children, health are lost. Then his disease which was traditionally believed to have been leprosy destroys his reputation. All his friends and his wife (the only surviving family) argue that he must confess his sin. When he is left with just his bare existence, God reveals Himself to him. The wager between God and Satan frames Job’s life experience so that no experience is coincidental.

Analytical procedure

Lobzur-la frames the biographical events in his story within the context of the transpersonal: imprisonment and other events in his life are assumed to have been triggered by his *karma* from past lives, hence a crisis in life is by definition regarded as a crisis in the transpersonal dimension. On analyzing Lobzur-la’s narrative, I focused on examining how his biographical account supports the meaning of spiritual crisis and healing within this overarching interpretive framework.

The analysis consists of two parts: 1) analysis of plot development drawing on the holistic analysis of form by Lieblich et al. (1998), which analyzes the whole story in terms of its structure. Lieblich et al. (1998) argue that ‘the formal aspects of structure, as much as its content, express the identity, perceptions, and values of the storyteller’. This approach was particularly effective in teasing out the meaning of crisis from Lobzur-la’s narrative: a whole life experience interpreted within the conceptual framework of the reincarnating mind. The role of the Dalai Lama in his biographical account will be highlighted here.

The second, and the larger part, focuses on two thematic foci: karma and compassion. These are by no means the only key themes in Lobzur-la’s narrative. However, due to lack of space and so as to focus on the principal object of this thesis, other themes will be woven into analyses only when they are pertinent to the two main themes. The doctrinal aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and their parallel concepts in transpersonal psychology will, where necessary, be interwoven to illuminate multiple layers of meanings of psycho-spiritual transformation in the narrative.

General characteristics of the narrative

The most striking characteristic of the plot is the sense of discontinuity between the major stages (periods) of his life: before crisis, crisis, after crisis. Each of these distinctive periods is marked or influenced by events in the exterior world, such as the Chinese invasion of Tibet, the end of the Cultural Revolution, and the beginning of political dialogue between China and the Tibetan Government in exile.

With events in his own life so much dictated by political context, Lobzur-la's narrative focuses largely on descriptions of external events. Throughout the story, there is little he does out of his own interest or volition, except for the manner in which he chooses to respond to what unfolds outside, which is usually by conforming to what is expected of him by others: 'whether you were initiated [into esoteric practice] or not, during the prayer sessions, you can't keep quiet as all the others are moving their lips', 'whatever work I was assigned to do, I did sincerely with effort', 'There was no one else to go, so I had to (was made to) go'.

As will be elaborated in the contents analysis, one of the few exceptions to this is the event relevant to the quote on 'losing compassion towards the Chinese'.

The 'humble' and 'hard working' protagonist/ego wades through the looming outer world. In this presentation of a journey, his own perceptions and personal feelings play only a small part. Keeping his statements to the level of generalized observation may to some degree be cultural rather than a fact pertaining to his own personality. This may be due to the fact that, linguistically, 'I' statements are much rarer in Tibetan than they are in English and that monastic culture, in particular, tends to discourage people from strongly asserting personal feelings and opinions. One of the rare exceptions is when he smiled during one of the interviews, while remembering how good some dried meat had tasted on the first occasion he had eaten meat in two decades, on the day that the connection to his pre-imprisonment world was restored, as will be elaborated in the analysis of pattern below.

The second characteristic is that his narrative details very little of his relationship with others. Lobzur-la mentions no single person with whom he felt intimate. His relationship with others is briefly mentioned in general statements: for example, 'people liked me because I was humble'. People in his narrative are often introduced anonymously as part of his description of events. Rare exceptions to this include those who were involved in the significant transitions in his life, such as the relative who took him to the monastery as a child, or the Dalai Lama's brother who headed the delegation from the Tibetan government in exile and searched for Lobzur-la's whereabouts while he was in Lhasa.

However, once their roles in events are over, they are never mentioned again. The only person who reappears throughout the narrative is the Dalai Lama, whose presence and absence drives the story.

Seen in this light, Lobzur-la's story becomes, ironically, an intrapersonal narrative in which the protagonist's attention is exclusively directed at the dynamics between what his difficult life experiences and the Dalai Lama respectively represent to him. Experience and meaning are defined by what happens outside, they are not created personally. Therefore, throughout the narrative, uncertainty, confusion, and/or loss of meaning are not his central problem, which is in contrast to the episodes described by de Waard (2010), Grof & Grof (1989, 1990) amongst others.

Overall patterns

This section analyzes Lobzur-la's narrative in terms of plot development. I first identified thematic foci that developed along with the story: social status – relation to others, relationship with the Dalai Lama, and karma. Amongst these foci, karma appears only in part of the narrative, and it develops its own pattern while providing an interpretive framework to events and a logical sequence to them. In the analysis below 'karma' will be separated from the biographical account and its own pattern will be discussed.

Lobzur-la organizes his story by using the names of locations as milestones for each event.[49] These are linked to dramatic changes in his social status, that is, how he is perceived by others and how he relates to them: from a humble young monk to becoming a respected ritual master in stage 1; from prisoner and 'uncle' of other inmates in stage 2-1, to becoming so socially ostracized that he is forced demean himself even before children in stage 2-2, then becoming revered again from the second transition. Another focus is his relationship with the Dalai Lama. As a symbol of Tibet, Buddhism and spirituality, and also as the archetypal character of the self for Lobzur-la the Dalai Lama dominates the narrative, and actually plays a significant role in creating the major pattern in the biographical account of Lobzur-la's journey. In the first stage of his narrative Lobzur-la works his way up to a position where he can be near the Dalai Lama. Then from the first transition to the second trial stage, Lobzur-la has no contact with him other than seeing him in his dreams. The trials come to an end when Lobzur-la comes to India under the Dalai Lama's patronage.

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[49] Parallel to this, using locations of events to mark his life experience, Lobzur-la describes his experience of observing the destruction of his world.

Sharing the same pattern indicates how closely these two foci are interwoven from Lobzur-la's perspective. The last thematic focus, the concept of *karma* forms a pattern that parallels the biographical account but is not identical with it. The *karmic* pattern as narrated by Lobzur-la appears at the beginning of his trials, and is resolved during those trials.

The combination of all of these stages renders his story that of a journey which neatly fit 'primordial patterns' of life story such as 'separation, transition, incorporation' (van Gennep 1960), birth, death, rebirth (Eliade 1954), or as departure, initiation, return (Campbell 1968)' (authors cited as appearing in Atkinson ,2012, p. 121). In this journey narrative, i) he creates his self-image, both in the conscious aspect of his life and in the unconscious, by successfully merging his social achievement/status with the religious ideal. Then ii) he is stripped of the identity associated with this status and, by means of a series of trials, finds the values that he has learned in the course of his religious training tested. iii) Finally he returns home (in exile) with a gift (a lesson that he has learned) for his master (the Dalai Lama).

This basic pattern is presented as three major periods and two transitional stages.

Stage 1: Life in the monastery
Transition 1: Arrest
Stage 2 – Trial: 1) Life in the prison, 2) Further hardships – life in Lhasa after release
Transition 2: Arrival of the messenger
Stage 3: Coming into exile.

Lobzur-la presents his life in the pattern that rises first in a progressive manner (first stage), then regresses rapidly (from transition 1 to the trial stage) then takes a sharp upward turn for rising rapidly (transition 2), until becoming stable once he comes into exile, which suggests that the conflict – the crisis is fully resolved.

The pattern of the transpersonal – karma

Lobzur-la’s own interpretative pattern is the Buddhist concept of *karma* transferred through rebirths. This concept will be considered in detail in a thematic analysis below. For this section, it suffices to say that mind at the deepest level, not as ordinarily experienced, survives physical death, and carries one’s karma (intentions and/or deeds) and imprints (bakchak) from one life time to the next. His way of integrating the concept of past lives in understanding his present experience is in line with Grof (1993)’s argument that to understand the formation of an individual psyche requires us to expand the knowledge of one’s experiences, beyond the biographical, to the perinatal, and the transpersonal.

Lobzur-la does not always consistently employ the concept of *karma* to make sense of his life. The successful training that he undertook in the first stage is not explained by karma, neither is the second transition when he is reunited with the Dalai Lama: The word *karma* first appears only towards the end of the first interview providing logic to the beginning of the trial period when he describes an incident of being surrounded by Chinese soldiers who direct their guns at him and believes he is about to be shot.

Karmic cause is defined as ‘illness in the mind’, the result of which is described as amounting to arrest and imprisonment but not any more than that: ‘If I had the karma to be killed there, then I would have been killed there.’ Whilst Lobzur-la regards the imprisonment itself as karmic retribution, it is in turn presumed to be a form of payback. The removal of this ‘illness in the mind’ is achieved by going through a number of trials and by the shedding of many layers of identity in prison, in particular, in the incident of his struggle sessions, as will be detailed below in the analysis of key themes.

When Lobzur-la’s use of the concept of *karma* is applied to the plot development, a pattern emerges which is completely different from that of the biographical narrative. As shown in Figure 4, Lobzur-la presumes that many unobservable experiences prior to his birth provide the context of his life. A karmic cause from that undefined mass of past lives is dormant in his youth. Then it suddenly comes to fully manifest itself before disappearing from the continuum, leaving the pattern of his life to resume an upward progress.

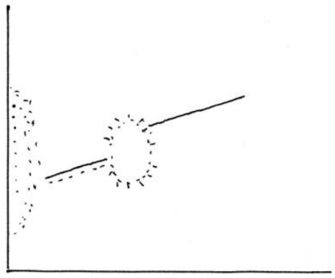

Figure 4. Pattern of Lobzur-la's interpretation

The significance of the trial stage (life in prison and in Lhasa afterwards) becomes clearer in this figure as we see that Lobzur-la now believes that a form of transformation has occurred in the sense that the 'illness in the mind', a presumed unwholesome factor in his psyche, has been removed (Note that the dotted line stops after the circle. Once the process of purification is complete, karma is not mentioned again in his description of later events.

Stage 1: Life in the monastery: Beginning of Journey; initial separation from family, initiations and training; moving closer to the Lama

Lobzur-la recounts this period of his life in a manner that demonstrates he was happy at the time, briefly and without becoming involved in any particular event. On the other hand, despite the nonchalant manner of his presentation and the seeming success of his career, this period is significant for understanding his crisis because what delineates the crisis later in his narrative is the very loss of what he has achieved during this stage. Without understanding what he went through during this formative period of his life, it would be difficult to isolate the psychological transformation that happens at a later period, and the logic behind how Lobzur-la' makes sense of his imprisonment.

Describing this formative period between the ages of seven and thirty, Lobzur-la's narrative narrowly focuses on his successes: 1) becoming a member of a highly respected monastery, 2) being ordained by the Dalai Lama, 3) being initiated into various circles of esoteric practices, and 4) being successively promoted in the monastery up until reaching the rank of ritual master. As I mentioned above, one distinctive characteristic in Lobzur-la's narrative is the centrality of the Dalai Lama to his story which affects Lobzur-la's life on many levels. The successes above are in fact all different ways of describing his relationship to the Dalai Lama as 1) a person, as 2) the symbol of the state, and as 3) the personification of a Buddhist deity of compassion, Avalokiteshwara.[50]

Namgyal in which young Lobzur-la begins his monastic life is a community that has traditionally personally served the Dalai Lamas. Therefore becoming a member of the monastery bestows much honour on the person and their family. For Lobzur-la, it is in this social realm that his spiritual development through religious training progresses. He grows up in a 'primal world' which was 'animated by the same psychologically resonant realities that human beings experience within themselves' (Tarnas, 2006, p.22).

On top of joining a privileged monastery, Lobzur-la demonstrates his capacity to memorize esoteric texts in front of the 13th Dalai Lama, and with whom he forms a spiritual relationship by being ordained by him: *'I took ordination from the 13th Wish-fulfilling Gem, the novice monk initiation'*. After ordination, his training takes on a more active form as he begins to learn the dancing and music required for performing esoteric rituals. Unlike the typical curriculum for a Geluk monk, Lobzur-la's training is characterized by an absence of the theoretical underpinning in dogmatic studies which generally is much more stressed in the Geluk than in the other branches of Tibetan Buddhism. Instead, this lack of doctrinal training assists him in rapidly integrating the esoteric world into his own psychological developmental process. This is suggested by the casual remarks he makes on his dreams of Buddhist deities and of the Dalai Lama blessing or initiating him. These dreams he describes as 'imprints (*bakchak* in Tibetan)' from his daily life of prayers and rites, and therefore 'empty by their nature'. By such argument, he avoids crediting much significance to them. This is an example how Lobzur-la narrates his story within the framework of Buddhist doctrine as he understands it.

Through mastering dances, chanting, musical instruments, and the creation of ceremonial sand mandalas (symbolic representations of the universe), Lobzur-la becomes the ritual master of the monastery. The importance of this achievement is measured by the statement that he now 'went wherever the wish-fulfilling gem went'.

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[50] The Dalai Lama as a figure who represents the Tibetans in exile, as the head of the theocratic state and the incarnation of a boddhisattva Avalokiteshwara has been noted (Bentz,2012; Dawa Norbu 2012; McLellan, 1999). However, the nature of the institution of the Dalai Lama is beyond the scope of this thesis. What interests me as reader is that for Lobzur-la who belonged to the particular monastery which personally served the Dalai Lama at the headquarters of the state, the Dalai Lama represented to him both the entire Buddhist universe and his personal connection to it.

Transition 1: separation from the Lama, arrest, accepting the circumstances as the outcome of his personal karma

Lobzur-la narrated this part of the story with few prompts during the first interview. This short period beginning with his separation from leaving the Dalai Lama's party and continuing up to his imprisonment takes up the largest part of his narrative and is the most detailed, which suggests the significance of this period in his life.

We have seen above how Lobzur-la's childhood and training are described without mention of the many presumably important figures in it such as a personal teacher or mentor, or those who must have trained him in ritual. Instead, all activities are described in terms of their recipient – the Dalai Lama. As a consequence, it is with his separation from this figure that Lobzur-la's trials begin. Here is a description of the day when the Dalai Lama left Norbu Lingka his summer palace in order to flee the country.

> I was at Norbu Lingka when Wish-fulfilling Gem actually left Tibet. . . After Wish-fulfilling Gem left, I went back to the Potala with others [the ritual performers]. On the 11th or 12th we were at the Potala. What happened was, I was actually asked to go with Wish-fulfilling Gem. I was assigned to retrieve the necessities for Wish-fulfilling Gem from the Potala and then follow him. But the Chinese started bombing the area around the Potala, and we couldn't leave (after him).

In the narrative above, Lobzur-la presents his arrest as a result of his being on a mission to retrieve the Dalai Lama's personal belongings. As mentioned a few times already, the person of the Dalai has many layers of meaning in his narrative. Whilst the Dalai Lama represents the essence of the Buddhist world and of the country in general, there is some degree of personal interaction between the Dalai Lama and Lobzur-la thanks to the fact that Lobzur-la performs rituals for the Dalai Lama, and this dictates his everyday life.

Ironically, when Lobzur-la is given a mission to collect the Dalai Lama's personal belongings, that is, when Lobzur-la is given an order to leave the presence of the centre of his world, the interaction between the two of them becomes even more intimate, and this signifies that Lobzur-la's immersion into the world which the Dalai Lama represents has reached its deepest point.

Arrest In the following account, the world into which Lobzur-la had been so totally immersed disappears, shattered by the new order to which Lobzur-la must now surrender. This shattering of the old world order is punctuated with the names of the places he is taken to one after the other by the Chinese soldiers, of which Lobzur-la spends time describing their former and present states. Surrendering is accompanied by 'so much suffering and fear'. In this fear for physical survival (the first time his narrative focuses on the physical dimension) Lobzur-la describes three separate occasions when he denies his identity as a ritual master in an attempt to save his life: for example, he hides his brocade jacket, telling the Chinese army that he only performed rituals but did not hold any monastic position. That which had once displayed his achievement has now become grounds for his arrest.

Accepting the circumstances as the outcome of his personal karma It is as the outcome of his personal karma that Lobzur-la accepts the situation and gives up trying to hide his identity. This occurs at a moment when he is facing an imminent death.

Stage 2 – trial: 1) Life in the prison, 2) Further falls – life in Lhasa after release

During this stage, the 'karma' which he proposes as the reason for his expulsion from the primal world becomes fully manifest as imprisonment which will entail various ordeals.

Trial 1) Life in prison During his fifteen years in prison, Lobzur-la suffers from the absence of his 'lama' as well as from not being able to practice and from having to observe, and take part in, sacrilege. In presenting his life of this period, Lobzur-la was in general fairly detached. On the surface, he presents the events of this period as having to perform a variety of manual labour in which he continues to be a 'humble' 'sincerely working' prisoner. However, when asked his opinion on the tragedies that befell so many 'lamas' during the Cultural Revolution, his voice dropped with a sigh: 'it is something very sad, depressing. You have no one to rely on spiritually. I think I must have very bad karma.' This illustrates that, for Lobzur-la, neither manual labour itself nor degradation pains him so much as does separation from his lama and that the separation works as the gauge by which he measures the grave condition of his karma. It should be recalled that previously he had not mentioned any personal lama other than the Dalai Lama. Whilst the Dalai Lama is physically absent from his life, Lobzur-la has dreams of making an offering to him to wish him a long life, also receiving an initiation from him, in the form of bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara. Unlike the dreams in the first stage which he dismissed as the ‘result of imprints of what [he] had done during the day’, these dreams give him joy and relief while he is ‘disappointed and exhausted in prison’. Without any activities to stimulate such dreams during the day, Lobzur-la interprets them as a sign that [he] was ‘being looked after’. The link between him and the Dalai Lama is perceived to be active.

Another ‘suffering’ for him is having to observe the Chinese ‘thoroughly destroying religion’. This is illustrated by the example of being forced to use the wooden blocks used for printing sacred texts to carry manure. Lobzur-la maintains that this sadness made his devotion to ‘religion’ even stronger. It must be noted that he remains a Buddhist by continuing to make his daily prayers though without external form, of course, wishing all sentient beings to be freed from suffering and to be happy. This is presented as the core fact of his spiritual identity that remains after the possibility to perform all expressive practices had been denied him.

Trial 2) Further hardships

If the prison account demonstrates an experience of observing a process of dismantling the the conceptual/ physical world of Buddhism by means of which Lobzur-la is able to re-set his identity as a ‘human’, the account of his life after release, narrates a period of isolation in which no interaction with any single person appears. Life in prison was presented with some degree of equality and empathy amongst inmates and with basic sustenance taken care of. On the other hand, once he is released from prison, he finds that he is stigmatized as a ‘hat wearer’ (one who has been publically criticized during the struggle sessions). This stigma defines his social interactions reducing him to something like a public slave.

This period of Lobzur-la’s life forms a nadir experience. On the surface, Lobzur-la calls it ‘even worse than being in prison’ in terms of his livelihood as he resigns himself to the necessity of being ordered by the state to do humiliating and sometimes life-threatening jobs for small amounts of food or even for free. Furthermore, there is no mention of any dreams of the Dalai Lama or inner practice during this period. His nadir experience comes to a conclusion when he is expelled from the community and made to live on his own watching over a field of crops outside the city.

Transition 2: Arrival of the messenger

As with other events in his life, the end of Lobzur-la’s trial period is defined by social contexts, in this case that of the visit of a delegation sent by the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile in India. While living alone with his crops, he receives a message that the brother of the Dalai Lama, the head of the delegation, wants to visit him. The brother of the Dalai Lama is described as one who ‘knew the old world’ and one who ‘knew who I was’. The significance of this incident in the narrative is firstly that it proves to him that he has not been forgotten by his *lama*, and that the connection between himself and his lama which has since 1959 only been experienced in dreams is still intact. Secondly, it brings him back to the world of people thus ending his social isolation and the second period of trial. All of a sudden, his narrative becomes crowded with people: someone who delivers the message from the brother of the Dalai Lama, relatives lend him proper clothes and suitable gifts to offer the delegation – none of these acquaintances have been mentioned during the second trial stage. Not only has the delegation restored Lobzur-la’s social life and sense of status, but they have also offered him a gift – a large chunk of dried meat. The significance of the dried meat is reflected in the fact that the moment that Lobzur-la was describing how good it tasted was the time during all the interviews when he showed the strongest emotions – satisfaction and happiness. Whilst Lobzur-la does not attribute any meaning to this incident other than admiring the falvour of the meat, it indicates that the restoration or re-confirmation of the connection to the Dalai Lama as Lobzur-la’s spiritual centre is at a fundamental level as the meat symbolizes life itself. Also, it may imply that Lobzur-la’s trial, a metaphorical death, is now complete and he can be brought back to life. Thus, meeting with the delegation brings Lobzur-la’s trials at the spiritual, social, and physical dimensions to a conclusion.

Stage 3: Coming into exile.

The last part of Lobzur-la’s narrative consists of his account of fleeing from Tibet/ arriving in India as a refugee to have an audience with the Dalai Lama. It provides the vantage point of his telling this story. After the delegation goes back to Dharamsala, they report Lobzur-la’s situation to the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama’s office tries to find someone to look after him in Lhasa. When Lobzur-la declines this, his flight to India is organized.

In this unusual account of exile, Lobzur-la’s flight is neither a goal nor the result of his own will as is in most exile narratives. It is rather a gift given by, and a call from, his old master who represents to him the spiritual ideal and world. This unusual characteristic of his narrative fits with Lobzur-la's understanding of how he had 'remov[ed] poisons from [his] mind': firstly, by fulfilling his prayers through not taking part in struggle sessions and secondly by 'not reacting' to the external hardship – which is characterized by separation from his lama. If negative karma manifests itself as hardship, as long as that hardship persists, it is difficult to know whether the purifying process is complete or if there is still more to come. Therefore for Lobzur-la, the end of hardship at the biographical level evidences the completion of karmic purification.

In this light, the state of being in exile from his homeland for him is a reward after a completing a long and difficult journey, and a beginning of his further progress in the continuum of many rebirths.

Key themes: karma and compassion

Lobzur-la adopts the concept of karma as the overarching interpretive framework by which he makes sense of his life. More specifically, Lobzur-la places the experience of imprisonment and release on a map of spiritual development by drawing on the concept of karma.

Within the conceptual framework of karma, a life crisis is presented as having a transpersonal cause: 'accumulated negative karma' from his past lives, and compassion is fashioned as a key element (force) that enables Lobzur-la to get out of the current crisis summarised as imprisonment, and then to move towards the ultimate goal of spiritual development, buddhahood as stipulated by doctrinal Buddhism. In this way, his hardships in prison and later in Lhasa are understood as events that were bound to happen at some point, if not now.

Karma in Lobzur-la's narrative

The concept of karma is tightly interwoven with the idea of rebirth (Powers 2009). Lobzur-la's use of karma also has this sense. It is in this framework that his hardships are put into a larger context – a mind that transmigrates between lives from beginning-less time to indefinite future.

Lobzur-la’s account does not delve into the theoretical detail of karma. The doctrinal explanation of how the human psyche is formed and incarnated (as reviewed in the chapter two) is not central to Lobzur-la’s narrative. Whilst such a role for karma is implied in a conclusive remark at the end of the narrative, what develops the plot of Lobzur-la’s narrative is, as shown in the pattern analysis, the notion that karma formulates conditions and events in one’s life. Such an understanding, rather close to popular notions of karmic retribution, has not been given much attention in the field of transpersonal psychology. Outside of the field, similar understandings are found in reports of past life regressions that karma from one’s previous lives conditions the overall course of one’s present life (See for example, Cannon 1993; Newton 1996, 2001, 2009). In this light, let us now examine the theme of karma in the narrative.

Recognition of karma as spiritual awakening

Lobzur-la describes a moment during which he accepts his potential death as result of his karma.

> The next day they were taken to a big ground or something, and made to stand. What happened was they were surrounded by Chinese soldiers with guns—also he’s talking about machine guns—pointed at them. So everybody was like “Oh, we are going to die.” And I said to everybody, ‘we don’t have to fear anything.” Of course everybody was suffering so much, with so much fear inside. I said, “It’s our karma. We can do nothing.” So that’s what I said.

It is not clear within the narrative whether his statement was the result of a realization of the moment, or originated in the general way he made sense of his life. Elsewhere in the interview, however, Lobzur-la suggests that he at first struggled with this new reality: ‘[if one becomes] imprisoned like that, [one] would ask why, wouldn’t one?’ This suggests that, between the time of his arrest and the moment of facing the guns, much had been happening in Lobzur-la’s mind. In the narrative above, Lobzur-la presents his crisis as one that begins with an awareness of karma*,* in which he ‘recognize[s] the causally interconnected nature of karma and rebirth’ (Powers, 2008, p. 46) by way of confirming it to others. From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, such an attitude itself signifies a considerable degree of spiritual development. As discussed in chapter two, the first of the three stages in spiritual development according to the Tibetan Buddhist *Lamrim* system begins with gaining assurance of the truth of reincarnation and investing one’s efforts so as to achieve a better condition for one's next birth. Lobzur-la clearly, but possibly unconsciously, puts himself in the category relevant to that beginning.

Spiritual development required as condition for manifestation of a dormant karma

As seen from the analysis of narrative form given above, Lobzur-la enters the monastery as a child, and becomes a 'well-liked' monk with a successful career. According to his story, Lobzur-la's earlier years do not provide enough 'bad karma' for him to deserve the harsh treatment he would later undergo.[51] This period falls into a blank area according to Lobzur-la's own presentation of karma. At the same time, he claims that he 'must have had the karma to be imprisoned' because there are other Tibetans who were not imprisoned, for example, the rest of the staff who served the Dalai Lama succeed in crossing the Indo-Tibet border.

A Buddhist explanation for such apparent incongruity in life is that dormant negative karma materializes itself in the form of life events because the person has developed the ability to cleanse himself of it. Patrul (1994, p.128) states that if someone who is currently dedicated to spiritual practice is 'beset by sufferings', it must be due to negative karma inherited from innumerable past lives. Previous karma as the cause of present predicaments could become manifest 'because the antidote [has been] input in the mind', that is, by a result of developing understanding of the transpersonal (in their version) by studying dogmatic theory, or by engaging oneself in meditative practice, or as in Lobzur-la's case, by mastering esoteric ritual and serving his master.

What is noteworthy in Patrul's argument is that the manner in which the results of negative karma manifest is different for different people. It varies according to one's level of spiritual development, which is measured in terms of accumulated virtue and understanding of emptiness (the ultimate nature of reality postulated in the doctrine). For those with little virtue and wisdom, in other words, those with little compassion and transpersonal understanding (Newland 2008), dormant karma remains unmanifested in the psyche either as psychological experience or as life circumstance. Instead, it causes one's rebirth in disadvantageous forms – typically, non-human. On the contrary, for those who are committed to the path of spiritual development, that is, the accumulation of virtue and wisdom, this very practice induces the dormant karma to manifest itself as observable obstacles. A number of participants offered a similar opinion by stating that the more one spiritually advances, the more obstacles duly follow.

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[51] Lobzur-la excludes other potential factors that could have been involved in his imprisonment such as the political context.

From Patrul’s perspective, Lobzur-la’s training in his youth may have worked as an ‘antidote’ to certain karmic imprints dormant in his psyche and to have ‘ripened’ them so as to manifest themselves in the form of experiences of ‘suffering’ such as being placed in a situation where the chances to create negative karma is abundant and where one’s lama is absent. This is how Lobzur-la characterizes his period of imprisonment.

Degree and nature of karma is reflected in the situation

A pronounced trend within transpersonal psychology is to explore *karmic* content by revisiting relevant past-life events through past life regression or other forms of experiential therapies. Grof’s concept of COEX and its exploration through breathwork is an example of this. However, Lobzur-la hardly shows any interest in the details of the negative karma that he assumes/understands to be the cause of his predicament. As illustrated in the narrative below, karma remains a generic concept.

> All these experiences we had are from our karma. What I underwent is from the karma that I had accumulated. Once accumulated, karma is not purified simply. If I had not accumulated the kind of karma, I would not have been put into prison, would I? No, I wouldn’t have struggled in prison otherwise. Because I have accumulated the karma, I had such experience. . . There are many others who were not arrested. They must have escaped because they didn’t have the karma to be arrested. I must have had it.

Lobzur-la makes it clear that the concept of karma is to be accepted and does not need to be learned experientially. In this sense, he agrees with Wilber (1990) who argues that reincarnation is a concept that one can intuit ‘through the eye of spirit’ so trying to ascertain the contents of any particular example of karma is neither feasible nor necessary. Instead of the specific nature of his ‘bad karma’, the degree of its negativity is a more important issue for him. The proportion of the ‘accumulated negative karma’ becomes evident to him in the sense that it has made him lose his lama: ‘[Without teachers] you have no one to rely on spiritually. I think I must have very bad karma.’ As the particular nature of negative karma involved in this crisis does not prove to be a crucial issue – or possibly it is sufficiently implied by the current situation, his attention is directed to the issue of resolving the current crisis by purifying the negative karma.

Strategy to resolve the negative karma

Lobzur-la rephrases 'bad karma' as 'illness of mind' drawing on the doctrinal description of the formation of psyche. The Tibetan word he uses for 'mind' here is *sem* (sems). According to Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary, *sem* has diverse meanings ranging from awareness, cognition, thinking mind, to soul. Amongst these, 'soul' is the closest to Lobzur-la's usage of *sem,* as the illness indicates life circumstance and its cause as negative karma.

Now purifying his negative karma is viewed as a healing process of his 'sem'. To address such a need, Buddhist tradition offers various methods such as meditation, repentance, reciting verses related to particular buddhas and deities, and prostrations, amongst others. Tibetan Buddhists do not view working on one's karma as a solely personal matter. Actions of others can also influence one's karma. For example, the impact of individual karma is influenced by mortuary rites performed communally in order to affect the deceased's future birth (Dargay 1986; Mills 2003). Buddhas and bodhisattvas are believed to exert their power by mitigating the malevolent effect of one's past karma when one calls on them by memorizing their names (see for example, Thubten Zopa 2000). Relying on certain buddhas and engaging in esoteric practices are recommended as a way to purify latent predispositions in the psyche resulting from past karma (Berzin 2009). However, in the context of being in a Chinese prison, Lobzur-la's strategy to heal himself and to get through the crisis excludes pretty much all the religious methods mentioned above, 'even moving lips', as he observes, would have caused severe punishment. Instead he appears to be bent on how to respond to exterior circumstance (the consequence of his past karma) by 'observing [his] karma'.

Strategy 1: Awareness and acceptance

The context of imprisonment is understood ambivalently as a punishment for actions in former lives and as a dangerous situation where further negative karma could be rapidly accumulated. His general approach to this perilous situation is to accept the adverse exterior situations which face him with little emotional reaction such as complaints or despair. Here his awareness of karma does not seem to be pertinent to the theory of consciousness, as described in Chapter two. Instead, he adapts himself to whatever situation arises and continues to be a person who ‘works hard’ and is ‘well liked’ by others. This implies that, as the cause and its manifestation of his present hardship are beyond his control, Lobzur-la regards its resolution also to be beyond highs control, and so sets the limit of his influence as his own attitude in responding to it.

Strategy 2: Working on his karma

Unlike the first strategy, his second confronts the exterior world while remaining grounded in the former, by working on his karma. It is based on the general concept of spiritual development as a process of increasing positive karma while avoiding accumulation of further negative karma.

> Teachers say that we accumulate karma, don’t they? If you don’t watch your karma, there’s no chance of acquiring happiness or Buddhahood. If you don’t create any negative karma and keep going on with your practice, you are actually heading towards the goal, enlightenment. If you create negative karma, you have to suffer its consequences again and again. If you don’t engage in this kind of thing, you are actually on the path to enlightenment.

However, as mentioned above, in prison, traditional activities that are believed to increase one’s positive karma were forbidden. Lobzur-la states that his daily practice while in prison was to pray for the happiness of all beings, a part of traditional daily prayers. On the other hand, ‘negative karma’ is described as causing others to ‘create negative karma’ and to ‘suffer from its consequences’, that is, a lack of compassion or losing compassion.

> And if you please the Chinese by criticising somebody, you are also letting them create negative karma. Because you are giving them the opportunity to create negative karma, your compassion is an empty word. Your prayer is an empty word (khatongpa). Your prayer is for the happiness of all sentient beings. And when you’re facing these challenges, if you criticise inmates to please the Chinese, actually you are making them create negative karma for themselves. Even if they don’t suffer from the result in this life, they will get it some other time. They will have to suffer the consequences.

Rational argument and doubt regarding the validity of karma as a causal determinant are labelled ‘Chinese’. As an example of such scepticism, Lobzur-la gives the account of a son who criticized his father in a struggle session. For this young man causal relationships are an illusion or a mistaken connection perceived between actually unrelated events. The outcome of such a viewpoint, ‘not listening to [the teachings on] *karma*’, is described as destructive and immoral: ‘destroying religions’ (synonymous to the spiritual), ‘putting his father in prison so that he could get himself released’. Further, it is described as self-destructive in the sense that such destructive behaviour will make its perpetrator ‘suffer the result again and again’, probably, in future rebirths.

> All the lamas say “Don’t create negative karma (sdig pa) but actually create positive ones. So that’s what we need to do. But what the Chinese wanted you to do in prison was to create negative karma.

As seen above, Lobzur-la sees his hardships as a consequence of his negative karma yet sees it on the larger map of his spiritual journey, and has a strategy to extricate himself from current hardship by means of spiritual virtue – compassion.

When I interviewed Lobzur-la and heard his story of not ‘losing [his] compassion towards fellow inmates’ in the context of public struggle sessions within Drapchi prison, I was puzzled. First of all, he had so often been quoted as having said that the biggest risk in prison was that of losing compassion towards the Chinese guards. Often, those who had quoted him exhibited much admiration for the greatness of Tibetan Buddhist practice in developing compassion or bodhicitta, which is a wish to become enlightened to benefit all beings. However, as soon as he heard that he was said to have made such a statement, he downright denied it. Secondly, the compassion he described did not appear to be a spontaneous inner experience that he ‘felt’ either as emotion or energy. This brings to our attention two important issues: firstly, that of how a Tibetan audience interprets his ‘compassion’, and secondly, as already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, my preconception that spiritual crisis must entail a transpersonal experience. The first issue will be discussed in the following section. But let us now follow what Lobzur-la actually means by ‘losing compassion towards other inmates’.

As discussed in the previous section, in Lobzur-la’s narrative, the two notions of compassion and karma are closely related to each other. Compassion appears in the context of assessing his karmic totality. Lobzur-la describes compassion in several different ways: 1) not harming others, which is similar to injunctions in his monastic vows; 2) wishing others happiness, more specifically wishing all beings to be free from karmic bondage; 3) in practice, ‘not criticizing others’, that is, not taking part in public struggle sessions; 4) the values of the Bodhisattva Chenrezig who is the mythical protector of Tibet and whose incarnation the Dalai Lama is believed to be.

The contextual information of compassion narrative

Amongst the descriptions above, the first three are interwoven with his account of *tamzing,* the Tibetan word for public struggle sessions carried out during the Cultural Revolution in China. Thurston (1990, p. 154) describes a public struggle session as ‘the primary and most frequent form for attacking the accused during the Cultural Revolution’, which involved verbal and physical attacks on the accused by colleagues, neighbours, relatives and, depending on the accused’s social position, the general public. Although struggle sessions were carried out throughout China, Tibetans tended to perceive them to be another form of Chinese, that is to say, foreign, oppression.

During *tamzing*, Lobzur-la narrates, one is supposed to confess one’s own anti-social crimes, and to criticise other inmates or people outside prison. Criticising others can bring small rewards, sometimes, even being freed from prison. During the interviews, Lobzur-la brings the meaning of the word ‘criticise’ to our attention. The Tibetan word for ‘to criticize’ consists of two parts, *kyon for ‘fault’ and jö* for ‘to express’. Lobzur-la has his own definition of ‘kyon’ which is distinctively different from that of the Chinese authorities: ‘I was imprisoned because of my past karma. I had an illness of mind, didn’t I? That’s *kyon*’. On these grounds, Lobzur-la stubbornly refuses to take part in struggle sessions by criticising others, as illustrated in the narrative below.

> The Chinese said, “Although you do your work really well, deep down you still hold something that you are not actually disclosing to us. What is that? Tell us.” And my response was “My intention is not to get out of this prison. In order to do that, I have to criticise somebody, pinpoint somebody and their mistakes.’ By doing so I could get some favours from the prison guards. And then I might be released. ‘I’m not doing that. Because, first of all, I don’t know these people from before so I have no way to criticise them. I don’t know them. I do not want to say something against them to get out. This is my feeling. I always think of helping somebody, prison inmates, not harming anybody. This is what is deep in my heart and nothing else.” That’s how I responded.[52]

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[52] Riessman (2008, p. 11) suggests we locate ‘gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative, or counter-narratives’. On the other hand, what is found in this narrative is a potentially reinforced consistency that suggests an alternative narrative or a potential discrepancy between narrative fact and historical fact. This account was narrated in answer to my question of whether he ever experienced beatings from other inmates during struggle sessions. Lobzur-la paused for a brief but awkward moment, after which he picked up his narrative in a tone of rather exaggerated liveliness. This effectively put into question his statement that he had not been beaten: ‘because I

Meaning of compassion

In this unusual narrative in which he contradicts the prison guards by means of giving a moral preaching, Lobzur-la presents compassion as a general moral attitude. In other parts of his narrative, compassion appears to be more or less synonymous with what he believes to be right, a perspective. The narrative also shows that compassion as he understands it is not an emotional/psychological experience, but rather a choice within a relational context: a choice between taking part in criticizing the accused/adding more suffering to the accused in order to release from prison. This is further illustrated by the case of the son and his lack of compassion when he 'criticizes his father . . . [to] get out of prison'.

Although his 'compassion' appears mainly as a moral concept that guides his relation to other inmates within the specific context of public struggle sessions, such understanding of compassion fits into the larger framework of karma in his narrative. Lobzur-la expands the sphere of influence of his compassion from 'the other' who would 'suffer more' if Lobzur-la criticized him publicly, to the Chinese guards who 'also lose compassion toward others' by inflicting physical and other sufferings on them and therefore suffer the consequences again and again'. Within the context of prison, the sphere of influence is now interpreted to include 'everybody around including the prison guards', as demonstrated by the fact that everyone called him (though it's not clear whether this applied to the guards as well) 'azhangla' meaning maternal uncle. By illustrating the causality of his choice, Lobzur-la takes the present wellbeing of others and their karma

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really sincerely did whatever work I was given. They said on the surface I was good.' In the autobiography of Palden Gyatsho (1997) who was also in Drapchi prison around that time, beatings befell those who did not join in criticising the accused during struggle sessions. Verbally and physically attacking the accused during thamzing was, as Thurston (1990) states, a way of self-defense in fear of the attack being directed at themselves instead.

Considering that the situation in different barracks may not have been identical, it is not possible to discredit completely Lobzur-la's story, nor is it necessary for the purpose of this study. However, it is probable that Lobzur-la's story of escaping beating in prison is a preferred narrative, which is employed in order to keep consistency in his overall narrative, i.e., that in line with not criticizing fellow inmates, Lobzur-la refuses to mention any violence inflicted on him by prison guards or other inmates. He may have seen 'the risk of losing compassion' in narrating the event factually and therefore of causing the listener (the interviewer) to hold a negative opinion about his oppressors (to create negative karma on the listener's part).

with its future outcomes as part of his own responsibility and thus participates in their spiritual progress.

Here compassion appears to function as a means to keep his identity as a monk/bodhisattva aspirant and as someone who actively takes responsibility for other's suffering and spiritual development. In describing a similar situation during the second interview, he said, 'That way I felt I was fulfilling my prayers not to harm anybody'. Fulfilling his prayers eventually leads him to the following:

> When I was not criticising others [during struggle sessions], I would find myself happy. There was no animosity towards others. That way, my own illness of mind (semsgyinatsha) was being released.

The narration above does not show a transpersonal experience that involves non-ordinary/altered states of consciousness, but rather a significant personal experience during which, he suggests, he intuits karmic resolution. By solely looking into his narrative, it is impossible to tell whether his experience was within the boundary of ordinary consciousness or whether his language strictly formed his experience so as to suggest so. Nevertheless, his compassionate choices based on his concern/fear of accumulating negative karma by means of criticizing others reaches a point where the mental state purely filled with good will for others becomes powerfully significant.

Compassion expands the path from that for the 'small' to that for the 'great'

The narrative of 'no animosity' stands out from the rest of Lobzur-la's narrative. In general, Lobzur-la's presentation of the concept of karma positions his understanding of spirituality and his motivation for spiritual practice within the beginners' category of the Lamrim system. However, as his compassion narrative progresses as illustrated above, the rationale to be compassionate seems to become transformed from that of accumulating 'positive karma' in order to counteract his 'negative karma' into that of compassion itself, being concerned with others' happiness and well-being ('not being punished more'). Now he presents compassion as an essential condition for human survival:

> Look, this is what human beings survive on such things, love and compassion as you have towards others. That's the essence. If you have love, everyone is happy. If you don't have love, no one is happy. That's what I meant when I said losing compassion.

By giving greater priority to other’s happiness and their karma, Lobzur-la’s narrative achieves the transformation of his motivation, from better future incarnation for himself to benefit for others, which distinguishes the ‘greater beings’ from ‘smaller’ or ‘middle’ ones in the *Lamrim* system.

Compassion as an alternative to rituals

Lobzur-la’s practice of compassion blossomed after he had been stripped of all his previous methods of worship which mainly consisted of performing rituals. External expression of faith is not limited to Lobzur-la personally. Traditionally ordinary Tibetans start their day by offering water and incense to the buddhas and other deities. Then, people may go out to circumambulate a stupa or other important building. During the rest of the day the elderly turn small prayer wheels which have tens of thousands of mantras written in tiny letters rolled up inside. In their free time, Tibetans are encouraged to repeat mantras while busily running their thumbs across the beads of their rosaries. Meditation is not generally taught to ordinary Tibetans. Even when one is given a set of practices as the preparing part of one’s spiritual training, it is an indispensible first step to perform a hundred thousand prostrations and to make a symbolic replica of the whole world and offer it to the deity whose practices one plans to follow. These physical and verbal ritual forms are deeply engrained in Tibetan Buddhist culture.

In prison, however, according to Lobzur-la, even twitching one’s lips would invite beatings from the prison guards. Now, robbed of the opportunity to perform traditional rituals, the only way to practice (providing that one had enough energy left to think about it at all) was to do so in the mind. It is noteworthy that Lobzur-la’s stress on compassion, whether ethical or spiritual, occurred in this context. Perhaps it may be argued that the public struggle sessions actually pushed Lobzur-la to focus on the concept of compassion. The ‘essence’ he stresses in terms of human nature may represent the essence of his Buddhist training when the rituals (‘tradition’) have been stripped from practice.

Ambivalence of ‘losing compassion’

We saw earlier that separation from the Dalai Lama was the main result of what Lobzur-la regarded as the consequences of his ‘negative karma’. The Dalai Lama in his narrative is a figure who provides the meaning of his monastic vocation, and around whom his daily life is organized. Lobzur-la mentions that, in prison, he had dreams of the Dalai Lama giving him an initiation or blessing, and that those dreams made him feel ‘looked after’. He does not explain away such dreams as the outcome of ‘imprints’ from the previous day’s activities, as he has had no such sensory stimuli to induce them. Instead such dreams are interpreted as evidence of a connection between himself and the Dalai Lama.

It is important to note here that the Dalai Lamas who are traditionally believed to be reincarnations of a single soul/mind are also believed to be incarnations of the bodhisattva Chenrezig (better known as Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit). In the foundation myths of the country, Chenrezig is involved in establishing the first Tibetan kingdom. In Buddhist cosmology Chenrezig is described as the personification of compassion. Hence, Lobzur-la’s relation to the concept of compassion is multi-layered. It signifies an ethical decision ‘not to harm others’, ‘positive karma’ that will improve the conditions of his next rebirth, the essential requirements for human wellbeing, and the true identity of the Dalai Lama beyond mere physical appearance. Because the concept of compassion signifies the nature of his lama as an individual in the transpersonal dimension, Lobzur-la can interpret having dreams of the Dalai Lama while in prison as a sign of the bodhisattva Chenrezig’s protection both personally and collectively, and this gives him a sense of security. In turn, his well-known statement that the biggest challenge while in prison was the risk of losing compassion may be interpreted to mean losing his connection to the Dalai Lama who for him is also the deity of compassion.

Narrative’s impact on readers: Imprisonment narrative as a prevailing form of spiritual crisis narrative

Lobzur-la’s story has become widely known thanks to the Dalai Lama who has quoted it a number of times. It is commonly retold in the following way: a monk who has developed *bodhicitta* reported to the Dalai Lama that the biggest difficulty he faced while in prison was the risk of losing compassion toward his Chinese prison guards. In this popularly circulated version, the personal context of individual spiritual development and the particular setting of public struggle sessions that constitute the losing compassion narrative are omitted. The change that occurred in Lobzur-la’s narrative in the course of its circulation may be an illustration of how participants who recommended imprisonment narratives like Lobzur-la’s to me relate the transpersonal to the political, and construct the notion of a crisis at the transpersonal dimension within the political context. Unlike these participants as readers/listeners of imprisonment narratives, Lobzur-la limits the implications of his narrative to his personal resolution instead of submitting to the widely quoted narrative of ‘Buddhist master’s moral and spiritual superiority over the ignorant

Chinese’. By so doing, his narrative actually stands against the more widespread narrative of collective spiritual crisis.

Conclusive remarks: Psychological drama versus life experience

We have seen, from Lobzur-la’s narrative, that when karma becomes a reference frame used to understand spiritual development, states of consciousness seem to become less prominent – this by contrast with Western narratives of spiritual crisis in that are centred on non-ordinary states of consciousness and mental illness. Instead, life experience as a given circumstance and also as the individual’s response to it is described as a psycho-spiritual crisis.

The concept of Karma as it is illustrated in Lobzur-la’s narrative differs from both the Grofian and the Buddhist doctrinal understanding of karma which were reviewed in chapter one and two respectively. The concept of karma is reflected in Grof’s theory of COEX (see p.60), which refers to clusters of emotions, memories and images that resonate together and are transferred through one’s rebirths. Grof (1993, 2008) suggests that chronic psychological symptoms have their root in a COEX and that these may not be healed when the treatment/therapy addresses only the biographical. Similarly, in chapter two, the theory of alayavijnana was introduced as psychic storehouse of personal karma. However, as repeatedly stated in this chapter, Lobzur-la’s understanding of karma is based on different assumptions. Rather than manifesting itself as psychological experience, *karma* from his past lives formulates his experience manifesting itself in the form of exterior events and contexts which befall him. From this perspective, karma appears not only to be something that is stored in one’s psyche, but also a principle that connects the psychological with the physical. Thus, when the transpersonal is adopted as the overall interpretive framework to understand oneself, one’s experience, and the world, every event – or every primary event at least – is interpreted as having some transpersonal implication. In Lobzur-la’s account, therefore, the distinction between the spiritual and the political becomes blurred as his political, social crisis – imprisonment – is interpreted as being the result of *karma* from his past lives, hence a spiritual crisis.

For Lobzur-la, a series of hardships indicates a set of trials – arrest, physical hardship, having to give up his former identity and ritualistic practice – that arise as a result of transpersonal reasons: purifying negative karma. I have provided two kinds of explanation for why trials/ traumatic events occur. Lobzur-la's own interpretation that, simply, in past lives, he must have created negative karma tends to view his imprisonment as something similar to punishment, whereas Patrul's viewpoint, as exemplified by the citation at the beginning of this chapter perceives it as a transformative opportunity. In this form of psychospiritual crisis, healing/treatment refers to karmic purification which occurs, Lobzur-la claims, by means of compassionate acceptance of the circumstances.

Lobzur-la's narrative emphasises the value of compassion primarily in terms of its beneficial effect on one's own karma rather than on that of another person. The focus on compassion replaces that on the quality of consciousness, whether altered or holotropic, stressed in the literature in the field of transpersonal psychology and in the Buddhist theories of spiritual development reviewed in chapter two. Instead of heightening one's awareness or widening the channel between the higher self and the conscious ego, compassion, according to Lobzur-la, removes the 'poison' in one's mind. Furthermore, on the map of spiritual development which Lobzur-la proposed at the end of the final interview, as if he had been giving a piece of spiritual advice to the interviewer, compassion is stressed as the only measure of spiritual development. It is likely that this is indicative of the way in which ordinary Tibetan Buddhists who do not actively engage in meditation relate to spiritual development in their lives.

Chapter 8

Discussion

Summarizing the discussion thus far

This thesis began by reviewing four structural models of the unconscious as an explanatory mechanism for spiritual crisis. In each of the previous three chapters we have explored narratives that provide either an illustration of personal transformation (chapter 5 & 7) or examples of spiritual emergency (chapter 6). In these chapters, I followed the procedure of narrative analysis laid out in chapter three, and focused on examining how each narrator generates the meaning of psychospiritual transformation within their own narratives. The distinctive process by which I encountered each narrative and made intuitive judgements as well as ethnographic observation were described in order to contexualise the narratives.

In so doing, I was careful to avoid imposing either the theoretical lens generated in chapter one or the theoretical positions of doctrinal Buddhism directly onto the voices of the narratives. Instead, I introduced relevant doctrinal concepts only when the narrators had themselves drawn from them, and when a connection to transpersonal concepts and Buddhist doctrinal concepts was implicit in the form of the narrative. By so doing, I came up with four themes of psycho-spiritual transformation:

1) Becoming a monk as an undertaking to affirm the emergence of one's spiritual dimension – Lobsang Tenzin (chapter five)

2) Political imprisonment as a means to karmic purgation – Lobzur-la (chapter seven)

3) Exile as a resolution of crisis – Lobzur-la

   Voluntary exile as the beginning of the transformative process – Lobsang Tenzin

Voluntary exile as the resolution of crisis and as a means to further awakening – Namsel Drolma (chapter six)

4) Psychological distress or psychotic symptoms caused by a disembodied spirit – Lobsang Tenzin (chapter five), Kelsang Lhamo, Namsel Dolma, and Thubten Ngodup (all in chapter six)

Before proceeding to expand on these themes, it would be good to remind ourselves of the discussion in chapter one. Traumatic life experience has been proposed as a possible trigger of spiritual emergency (Grof & Grof, 1989, 1990) and as a cause for the activation of the unconscious (Jung, as appearing in Shamdasani, 2009). According to this point of view, the role of trauma is to cause a dramatic change in one's psychological state via a sudden release of psychic energy (Assagioli, 1965, 1989), or of powerful archetypal dreams and fantasies (Jung1963, 1983, 2009,), or via various types of transpersonal experience (Bragdon 1990/2013, Grof & Grof1989, 1990, Lucas, 2011, Lukoff, 1985, 1993). Thus, the researcher's focus is fixed on inner experience separated and isolated from the context of the individual's life because the nature of the external event is considered only secondary, its primary importance being that of a catalyst or trigger to inner events (Grof and Grof 1989).

One prominent feature of the narratives of Tibetan participants is that traumatic life experience is itself understood as spiritual crisis, not necessarily as a trigger to crisis. As we have seen in Lobzur-la's narrative, triggers of this type are considered to belong to the domain of *karma*, the causally determined result of one's intentional actions performed in the past. Even when describing the psychological experience of visions and dreams as in theme 4), perception of deities/spirit as foreign entities results in narrators describing them as being independent from their own psychological identity and thus describing them as they would external events. Then again events are interpreted as having occurred as a result of karma, as illustrated by the prestige of being born on a particularly auspicious day (Kelsang Lhamo), or the perceived significance of remarks offered by Buddhist masters and the spontaneous uttering of doctrinal verses (Namsel Drolma).

In spite of the initial impression that these four themes are unrelated, I have found that they are all underpinned by the concept of karma. In this chapter I will discuss different facets of the concept of karma: 1) as simple and literal causal relation, 2) in terms of elements of the psyche, 3) in terms of interactive dimensions between individuals, and 4) in terms of interactive dimensions amongst diverse groups and the environment, which together constitute the world. By so doing, I aim to shed light on how the interrelation of these understandings of karma underpin these narratives, each of which draws heavily on socio-cultural context (including that of the spirit realm), and thus to highlight the elements of psycho-spiritual transformation within each narrative.

Personal karma

The term karma does not refer to a single uniform concept in Tibetan Buddhist culture. Many different notions of karma are at play when Tibetans narrate their life experiences in terms of obstacles (barché), and crisis (ngenkha, literally 'danger') of psycho-spiritual development. The dominant presentation of karma is, as has been mentioned already, that of a causal framework: that karma refers to intention and intentional acts, and that it follows a simple law of cause and effect.

In popular parlance, one's karma is understood to mean the collection of imprints of good and/or bad intentions performed in past lives and carried with one into this and future lives. Favourable life environment and/or experience are attributed to one's moral/virtuous actions performed in past lives. On the contrary, hardship and personal disaster are associated with one's immoral/sinful actions in the past, as illustrated by the case of the divination performed by a lama for Lobsang Tenzin regarding a stone, which was interpreted in karmic terms; also, Lobzur-la's reasoning on the causes of his imprisonment. The idea that one must suffer the results of negative karma is based on the principle that, once formed, karmas and their potential effects are not easily counteracted until they have brought about their results (Tenzin Gyatso & Berzin, 1997, Lati Rinpoche 1980, Samdhong Rinpoche, 2006). This type of interpretation is relevant to themes 1) and 2) as stated above.

In the case of both Lobsang Tenzin and Lobzur-la, becoming aware of the connection between their present situation and their actions in the past (an unknowable past for Lobzur-la) marks a turning point in their narratives, and thus a form of spiritual awakening: the connection between psychosomatic illness and a fight that had happened in the past in the case of Lobsang Tenzin; and between separation from the Dalai Lama/imprisonment and assumed negative karma from a past life in the case of Lobzur-la. In Lobsang Tenzin's case, his realisation of this karmic connection relies on the ability of a lama to perceive what is not visible to the rational mind. Therefore the trust in the authority of the lama’s findings gained by a non-ordinary state of consciousness is a crucial element that creates the turning point in his life. Although the piece of information the lama reveals is related to an event that happens in his current life time (the biographical), the same principle is extended to past life events.

Individual karmas as elements within the psyche

As illustrated in chapters five to seven, the notion of personal karma is interwoven with the concept of *bakchak* (Tib. bag chags, Skt. vasānā). Bakchak refers to habitual tendencies, traces of memory which are, in Buddhist terms, dormant in the psyche (*sems* in Tibetan).

As discussed in chapter two, Buddhist doctrine posits a mental continuum in which all bakchaks are stored: the ālayavijñāna (*kun-zhi* ‘base of all’ in Tibetan) which is supposed to have existed ‘since a beginningless time’ as the Buddhist expression puts it. This concept influenced the evolution of the idea of the clear light mind (’od gzer) in later Tibetan esoteric Buddhism. What is common to both concepts is that there is a fundamental state of mind which stores all one’s personal karma, and which functions as the basis for one’s sense of individual continuity (Tenzin Gyatso & Berzin, 1997). The concept of clear light mind (and/or ālayavijñāna) would appear to be equivalent to that of a personal unconscious which is chronologically continuous through repeated rebirths.

The parallel between the concept of a reincarnating mental continuum and the Western concept of the unconscious is clear. As was noted in chapter one, the self is posited as the centre and whole of the psyche according to the Jungian model and it is experienced in dreams and fantasies in the form of archetypal figures such as kings and prophets. Likewise, the higher self in the system of Assagioli is posited as the source of subjectivity/ consciousness and is said to be experienced in the form of light during states of mystical experience. We have also seen that the Grofian model of the psyche implicitly includes the concepts of karma and rebirth as elements within the transpersonal and relates it to the concept of COEX (Grof and Grof 1989, 1990; Grof, 1975, 1993, 2000, 2012) as an explanation of psychospiritual crisis.

Grof (1975/2009, 1988, 2000, 2012) argues that holotropic states of consciousness have the autonomous tendency to return to, and experience, the totality of the self. Likewise, the goal of Tibetan esoteric Buddhist meditation is to have a direct experience of the clear light mind. Yet whether the clear light mind is experienced as light, or whether it is indeed possible at all for the individual consciousness to experience the clear light mind as its object is subject to debate. For example, the Dalai Lama (cited in Varela, 1997) argues that direct experience of the clear light mind is possible but recognizing it as such experientially is impossible because the clear light mind can only be a subject (Tashi Tsering, 2012, Tenzin Gyatso & Berzin, 1997). We have seen in chapter five how the Dalai Lama responded to Lobsang Tenzin's experience of luminosity by insisting he ground it in a doctrinal understanding of the concept of emptiness. Karma stored in the psyche is believed to be purified as a result of such experience of the clear light mind (Kelsang Gyatso,1982, Tashi Tshering 2012, Tenzin Gyatso & Berzin, 1997 amongst others). In Lobsang Tenzin's narrative, his bouts of depression about his living conditions cease to occur after the emptiness and bliss which he experiences during the experience of luminosity.

In the same narrative, it was also noted that, *bakchaks*, unconscious karmic imprints are seldom objects of introspection or self-exploration. This is unlike *samkharas,* their equivalent in the Southeast Asian Buddhist tradition, which are considered objects of observation during mindfulness meditation.[53] Instead, narratives of Tibetan participants tend to employ the term in two different ways. Firstly, unconscious imprints (*bakchaks*) are often proposed as an explanation for events and/or experience, (especially, if it is something extraordinary) when none other is readily available. For instance, we have seen Lobsang Tenzin using the term in order to explain his exceptional progress in learning to read religious texts and Namsel Drolma to explain her spontaneous, and otherwise inexplicable, automatic utterance of Buddhist doctrinal verse. The other employment of the concept of *bakchak* that I came across most frequently was to provide an explanation of the motivation for one's becoming a monk. Secondly, *bakchaks* as internally stored *karmas* are often used to describe the relation between individual and external events. The most obvious example of this connection is found in Lobzur-la's narrative: the cause of his imprisonment (an external event) is attributed to his negative karma ('*le dugcha*'), purification of which in turn is presented as the cause of his regaining his monastic identity.

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[53] This statement is made based on my own training and practice of vipassana meditation under the instruction of S. N. Goenka, an Indian lay teacher whose methods originate from one of the Buddhist meditation lineages in Myanmar.

Tendrel as a symbolic link between inner experience and the outer world

It is important to note the interconnection between different dimensions in Tibetan Buddhists' way of understanding the world in order to discern how the physical and the political are equated with the spiritual. One such example in the narrative of Lobzur-la is the meat presented him by the Dalai Lama's brother, which I have interpreted as a symbol of life. This kind of interrelation between inner and outer realities is called *tendrel*, which colloquially means auspicious omen.[54] Other examples of tendrel that have appeared in chapters five to seven include the coincidence of Kelsang Lhamo sharing the same birthday as Padmasambhava, and events occurring in the various dream accounts of Lobsang Tenzin and the three spirit mediums. The concept of tendrel indicates the connection between the individual psyche and those of others, and between psychic experience and exterior events. The intricate interconnection between these two is explained in terms of a monistic cosmology which reduces the nature of karma to that of volition and which treats the material world as a manifestation of the totality of all karma (Akira, 1990/1993, Wallace 2006). [55]

Interpreting Tendrels

The doctrinal position on the karmic process is that intuitive, hence direct, knowledge of its workings is available only to an enlightened mind (Varela, 1997). Tendrels, i.e., auspicious omens are considered the signs by which this process becomes apparent to the unenlightened mind. However, the unenlightened mind is not the same as the rational mind. It is believed that the more spiritually advanced one becomes, the more adept one will be at recognising and interpreting various tendrels in life. The parallel between this and the Grofian concept of the expansion of holotropic consciousness is notable. However, the ability to discern tendrels does not always require an altered state of consciousness, although it may be increased in such a state. As we have seen with the narratives of Lobsang Tenzin and the three spirit-mediums, the increasing occurrence with which they are aware of both in dreams and in exterior objects is understood to signify that they are either making spiritual progress or moving towards an obstacle/crisis.

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[54] Tendrel (rten 'brel) is an abbreviation of rten-cing 'brel-bar 'byung-gnas (Skt. pratītyasamutpāda). It is originally the term for the Buddha's ontological tenet – dependent origination, which means that 'everything is constituted by the coming together of multiple causes and conditions' (Gyatso, 1998/2001, p. 179). Using this term to mean 'auspicious omen' is not a universal Buddhist practice as it is not used this way, for example, in Korean Buddhism.

[55] There is a parallel between the concept of tendrel and Jung's concept of synchronicity, which refers to the meaningful coincidence between psychic phenomena and physical phenomena that have no apparent causal relationship (Tarnas, 2006). According to Jung, synchronicity occurs because the human psyche and the physical world share a common archetypal structure. Comparison of these two concepts is beyond the scope of this study but may offer promising possibilities for future researchers.

The dream interpretations in their narratives also show that individual interpretation of a tendrel is shaped by socio-cultural context. For instance, Lobsang Tenzin interprets dreams of worms as indicating a crisis caused by a minor nature spirit, whereas an old woman with a cup of barley beer is interpreted as symbolising tummo-arising. On the other hand, highly subjective and intuitive, interpretations of tendrel can expose one to ridicule. Lobsang Tenzin's interpretation of bland tea as indicating black magic performed by a follower of Shiva (an Indian deity) was referred to as 'mad' by Dondup and various other Tibetans.[56]

During my fieldwork I have noted that, even though interpretation of tendrel is shaped by the complex system of Buddhist and pre-Buddhist traditions, each interpretation is perceived, and received, with varying degrees of validity and authority. Firstly, regarding the interpreter, the interpreter's individual spiritual development is in general considered to conform to his or her rank in the monastic hierarchy. The particular state of non-ordinary consciousness required to recognise tendrel is largely considered to be available only to exoteric and esoteric meditators endorsed by the Buddhist tradition. In some cases, individuals argue that their ability to interpret tendrel and the validity of their interpretations are derived from a doctrinal lineage, and are therefore superior to interpretations made spontaneously and personally. For instance, Kelsang Lhamo developed a skill of divination over the course of her career as spirit-medium. Because the spirit is regarded to be with her only during possession, her divination was perceived as being performed entirely by herself. Consequently, her divination was not received with as much authority as prophecies given through her mouth during trance by the spirit. Neither was it regarded as highly as divination performed by a learned Buddhist scholar.

The examples mentioned above indicate the complexity of interpreting tendrel, the contradictions between interpretations, and the potential difficulties which one may have when one's intuitive interpretation of tendrel is at odds with that of the general community. In chapter five, I discussed Lobsang Tenzin's participation in a scientific experiment and the interviews he made afterwards which also touch on the matter of tendrel and its interpretation.

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[56] One such incident is described on p.149.

Collective karma

In the narratives studied in this thesis, psycho-spiritual transformation as a process is, as has been outlined above, described as a series of events that occur during the course of one's lifetime. When viewed from this perspective, others – whether human or non-human – may play as significant a role as oneself in events. The significance of others is comparable to that of symbolic, archetypal figures who are encountered during the confrontation of the unconscious, as expounded by Jung (see p.45-47). This intersubjective and social dimension to transformative crises is associated in particular with themes 3) and 4), and is discussed in terms of the concept of collective karma.

The concept of collective karma has been little discussed either in the West or in native Buddhist traditions.[57] For example, I have never encountered the Tibetan term for collective karma, tűnmong-gi-lé (thun mong gi las) at any time during the ten years or so of I have been attending religious teachings nor have I ever come across it during my textual studies of Buddhist philosophy. However, the fact that the term is uncommon amongst Buddhists does not necessarily imply that such a concept does not exist in Tibetan Buddhism or that it is not an important factor in Tibetan Buddhist culture.

Collective karma can be approached in two ways: either in terms of the karmic relation between individuals, or as a broader collective karma that functions at the socio-cultural level. The karmic relationship between individuals is explained by Samdhong Rinpoche (2006, p. 223-225) in terms of a relationship between an intention (karma) and its recipient. Karma can be created only in these relational terms. When this interaction occurs between two individuals, the action (and/or intention) forms a link between the two people involved. This is called *delwa* (''brel ba), karmic relation.

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[57] Some Buddhologists such as Hayes (2009) argue that the concept of collective karma has no textual reference in either Sanskrit or Tibetan Buddhist literature. However, *Abhidharmakośa*, an Indian Buddhist treatise written by Vasubandhu in the fourth or fifth century CE, describes nature as something which is created by the volitions of all the individual beings in it (Akira, 1990/1993). While Hayes (2009) may be correct in terms of terminology, the Tibetan term tűnmong-gi-lé (thun mong gi las) and its Chinese equivalent 共業, with which I am more familiar from my Korean Background, are not modern innovations.

If we take an act of killing for example, this action is stored in the killer's psyche (sems rgyud: mental continuum) as bakchak, unconscious content. According to Samdhong, actualisation of this karma is triggered only by the presence of the one who in a past life was killed. It is important to note that the concept of karmic relation inherited between individuals is combined with the notion of karmic retribution. Thus, in the case of the killer and his victim in the above example, the karma stored in the killer would result not as tendency to kill but as the potential to be killed.

This relational approach can be expanded to the level of society and culture as a whole, and even to the species and beyond. From this perspective, society and culture are the collective consequence of everything that human beings have ever done before (Powers, 2007, Samdhong Rinpoche 2006). This implies that everyone belonging to a particular society at any one moment shares the karma to be in it (Samdhong Rinpoche 2006, Lati Rinpoche as appearing in Hayes 2006). Additionally, collective karma refers to worldviews and values shared by people within a given socio-cultural context. Further, at the species level, it denotes the sensory perception, instincts, and emotions, i.e., the biological and mental apparatus by which the world is experienced (Dilgo Khyentse & Padama Sangye, 2005).

This aspect of collective karma (that both the material and immaterial environments are formed as the result of the collective volitions of those who inhabit them) is seldom discussed beyond speculation on the formation of nature and culture. In transpersonal psychology, the connection between individual and collective psyche, and their connection with historical events has been suggested by Tarnas (2012) who, together with Grof, has been attempting to theorize Jung's concept of the psychoid nature of the physical realm. Tarnas (2012) argues that events significant to human history have often occurred in synchronic patterns that coincide with certain planetary alignments. He goes on to suggest that the political turbulence witnessed during the twentieth century is related to the current planetary alignments. Unfortunately, the narratives collected during fieldwork offer no further material on the link between individual and collective psyche than has already been discussed in this chapter, other than a brief suggestion made by Lobzur-la' brief suggestion which will be considered in the section on imprisonment narrative as spiritual crisis (p. 255-258).

Karmic relation in spiritual crisis narratives

The implication of karma as causal relation of action and mental imprints has in the West, as Bache (2002) and Coward (1983, 1986) amongst others have commented, been largely restricted to the psyche and to life as lived at the individual level. This causal interpretation of karma considers individual spiritual development to be primarily a matter of personal responsibility. This is an underlying theme in both the narratives of Lobsang Tenzin and Lobzur-la.

However, as Kapstein (2000) notes, the concept of karma which holds that the totality of individual karma is a closed entity is complicated by the concept of the bodhisattva, a term referring to those who choose to remain in the world of suffering in order to save all beings without exception. Doctrinally speaking, achieving enlightenment without relying on any support or inspiration from others is said to be possible for only a tiny minority of people called lone buddhas (pratyekabuddha in Sanskrit) (Gethin, 1998, Harvey, 2001, Keown, 2003, Keown & Prebish, 2009, Snellgrove, 1987/2002). Otherwise, everyone needs other people to remind them of their purpose in life, and of the direction and practical measures which they need to take.. Jangchup, a monk in his late forties put it this way.

> One needs to make a karmic link (delwa) with a bodhisattva even by throwing a stone at him. Without a karmic link between the individual and a bodhisattva or a lama, the bodhisattva cannot help him. Once there is a karmic link, the bodhisattva will wish to help you because bodhisattvas have only altruistic intentions.

In theories of the structure of the psyche, the ego consciousness is mediated by archetypal images and/or light. In Tibetan narratives, the transpersonal realm expressed in terms of individual karma is often represented by a personality who performs the same role as does the bodhisattva in the quote above. Hence, an important stage of psycho-spiritual transformation is the formation/recognition of a relationship with just such a personality – encountering one's *lama*, spiritual teacher. Tibetan Buddhist traditions raise the status of the *lama* to a similar level as that of the three doctrinal objects of devotion, the Buddha, his teachings, and the community which practices them. This immense stress placed on karmic relation, especially between spiritual teacher and pupil, has been viewed as one of the most important traits to distinguish Tibetan Buddhism from other branches of Buddhism (Berzin 2005, Powers 2007).

Karmic relation as a condition of spiritual awakening

The encounter with one's *lama* results in the commencement of spiritual practice and a deep interest in and longing for the spiritual dimension of life, as witnessed in Lobsang Tenzin's narrative. Through his lama comes the awareness of karmic order. The lama's intuitive ability to unearth the meaning of the symbol of the stone from the chaotic rubble of his life is a key element in Lobsang Tenzin's narrative of embarking on the spiritual journey.

It is important to note that such an encounter is often understood in terms of the instantaneous recognition of someone as one's own lama or spiritual teacher, rather than the gradual development of a relationship between strangers. Furthermore, such an encounter often accompanies powerful intuitive and/or emotional experiences. Drolma, a masseuse in her late thirties describes an event in which she was taken to visit a Buddhist teacher whom she instantly recognized as being her *lama*:

> When I met him, I just cried on and on in front of him. He didn't ask me why. But I felt as if he understood me. I also felt that my purpose in coming to India had been fulfilled. [Unjyn: (jokingly) You fled to India to meet him?] Strange, isn't it. I hadn't thought about finding a lama. But I just immediately understood that meeting him was important for me. . . He gave me instructions to start preliminary practices, and told me to come to his teachings every summer when he returns to India.

Prior to this, Drolma had left her home in Tibet for no clearly stated reason and spent several years in India aimlessly moving from one menial job to another. Her life as a refugee – a status she had acquired merely through circumstance – now becomes framed as a journey to meet her lama. This recognition also enables her to see herself as a being who reincarnates because she believes that previous actions in her past lives must have forged this 'mutual relationship' between her and her lama (Gyatso, 1998, p. 179). In both the narratives of Lobsang Tenzin and of Drolma, an encounter with a figure who takes on the role of lama, spiritual mentor, brings a resolution to previous troubles.

I will present one more example in which, Jangchup, one of my participants, came to find his spiritual teacher. His crisis of losing faith in Buddhist doctrine is triggered by an illness which brought him close to death.

> I came close to death as result of tuberculosis when I was about twenty. While I was lying on my bed, my mind grew dim. My mother and eldest sister were crying and massaging my hands. Then all of a sudden, I heard a question from the depth of my heart. 'I have spent more than half of my short life as a monk working and studying hard from five in the morning till bedtime. What if there is no future life? Wouldn't it all have been a waste?' After sometime, I more or less recovered and eventually returned to my monastery in South India. I could not tell anyone about my doubts. So I secretly searched for ways to douse them and began to collect potential evidence for reincarnations, and the existence of spirits and deities to prove the validity of the Buddhist metaphysics that I had studied. For the next five years, I met possessed women, collected articles about children who claim to remember their past lives and so on.

The short narrative above is extracted from twelve sessions of doctrinal instruction which for him was a suitable context in which to narrate his life. His search for the proof of rebirth implies a statement of doubt about the truth of the doctrine, an act very much against the cultural norms of Buddhist monasticism. By making use of methods which are not approved by the scholastic monastic community to which he belongs in order to clear up his doubts, he pursues his own individual path to find meaning of his life. In other words, the experience of physical death is turned into a form of existential crisis. The crisis is resolved through an encounter with the Dalai Lama, with whom he feels a deep sense of karmic connection as described in the following conversation made in a back-up interview several months after the fieldwork.

> Unjyn: Teacher, during those classes you gave, you never actually told me how you became convinced of rebirths. If you remember, you only told me how each phenomenon seemed not convincing enough.
> Jangchup: (silence for a few seconds) At first you just accept. Then, you ask why. Then, again, you accept. It is like that, there's nothing special.
> Unjyn: Ah, so, you didn't find any evidence?
> Jangchup: (silence for a few seconds) You know, one day, I was in my room in the monastery. For several days, [the Dalai Lama] was giving teachings at my monastery. I was too weak to attend. At lunch hour, some others came and said that he wanted to see me. No one had told him about me but he knew. He told me to go to a hospital and get checked up.
> Unjyn: (remaining in silence) Isn't it possible that someone told him?
> Jangchup: You might think so. (silent a few seconds) But that was not the first time. Once, a few years before that, I was standing amongst the crowd waiting to watch him pass. He had his car stop and motioned to me, then he asked me how old I was.'

It is worth reminding ourselves again that all the examples of psycho-spiritual transformative process reviewed in chapter one of this study, those of James, Assagioli, Jung, and Grof, primarily limit the parameters of the experience to the individual psyche. In Jangchup's narrative, however, the meaning of his life is restored and the truth of the doctrine of rebirth demonstrated by means of an event that requires for its context a world external to the individual psyche.[58] Jangchup emphasises that it was the Dalai Lama who recognized him, not the other way around, when he was picked out from amongst the crowd in the street. Thus, when the Dalai Lama asks to see him in the monastery, the importance of the first encounter is reconfirmed, which assures him that he must possess a genuine karmic link with the Dalai Lama.

In this section, I have provided several examples which present the experience of spiritual awakening in terms of the discovery of one's karmic link to a personality who represents the spiritual dimension of life. Possession of a firm conviction regarding the truth of karma and reincarnation defines the beginning of spiritual development according to the *Lamrim* system of Tibetan Buddhism, within which Drolma and Jangchup may effectively be situated (see p.79-80 for the three stages of spiritual development).

Imprisonment narrative as spiritual crisis – representative narrative of collective karma

As mentioned in chapter four, when the concept of spiritual crisis, loosely defined as a spontaneous orientation towards spiritual practice or the gaining of spiritual insight through psychological distress, was communicated to Tibetan participants, the most frequent connection they made was with that of the experience of imprisonment. Such a connection was communicated to be by the Dalai Lama, as well as by a number of others among my Tibetan participants (two from preliminary interviews, six from questionnaire responses). This resulted in the detailed analysis of the imprisonment narrative of Lobzur-la made in the chapter seven.

In contrast to the frequent mention of the theme of imprisonment, I observed that participants hardly referred to events in the lives of traditional religious heroes such as the

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[58] In refugee communities, when the Dalai Lama's vehicle is on its way to and from his residence, many Tibetans stand on either side of the road to try to catch a glimpse of his face, thus trying to produce karmic imprints of him in their own minds.

Buddha, Yeshe Tsogyal, and Milarepa as examples of spiritual crisis.[59] One possible reason for this may be that these hagiographic accounts like these are not generally referred to during religious teachings, which are the sole medium of communication of religious ideas and motifs amongst the refugee community in Dharamsala, where traditional forms of vernacular storytelling as practiced by wandering bards, or popular operatic performances are no longer commonly found.

In their absence, we find imprisonment narratives appearing in their place. Typical of these are the imprisonment narratives of a Buddhist master who brings an end to his life in order to stop a Chinese soldier from committing the sin of murdering him; of a youth who, while marching to the execution ground, consoles his crying fellow inmates by smiling and saying that his time in prison has offered him the opportunity to complete one hundred thousand recitations of a prayer (a particularly auspicious number); or of a monk who spares a portion of his daily ration to offer to a youngster as a form of spiritual practice.[60] On the one hand, these stories describe doctrinal virtues such as compassion, karmic retribution, and the accumulation of positive karma, as was seen in Lobzur-la's narrative. Negative karma produced in a past lifetime is posited as trigger/cause, and the imprisonment, as the phenomenological description of the crisis.

The retelling of these stories was for some of my participants a powerfully emotional experience. While sharing in the moment of deep sadness, I could not help asking myself why the paranormal feats of a traditional religious hero like Milarepa had somehow lost their place to accounts of a dying master in prison.

While the concept of individual karma enables the narratives of imprisonment to be interpreted in terms of karmic purification, a form of psycho-spiritual transformative crisis, the concept of collective karma is used to rationalise the Chinese occupation of Tibet as being the result of the collective karma of all Tibetans. Every single Tibetan born in the present era has his/her life embedded in this a priori karmic pattern which has manifested itself as the current occupation of their country (Lati Rinpoche as appearing in Hayes,

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[59] Hagiographies of these figures were discussed in chapter two in connection with their relevance to the concept of spiritual crisis and with the approach of transpersonal psychologists towards them.

[60] In chapter two, the act of giving/generosity was listed as one of the *paramitas*, the merits to be perfected, by bodhisattvas.

2009). In that sense, the imprisonment narratives cease to be stories of individual karmic purification but instead represent the collective karma of all Tibetans.

Imprisonment narratives as narrated by religious participants tend to bestow transpersonal abilities and doctrinal virtues on the hero as seen from the examples mentioned above: the hero has a foreboding of his imminent death through clairvoyance, overcomes the fear of death (conviction in karmic laws and rebirth) and transcends death by bringing life to an end consciously and for a compassionate cause. In chapters five and seven I noted that the respective narrative in each chapter has been altered in its public presentation so as to fit into the idealised mould of such type of compassionate master. Superimposed on top of Lobsang Tenzin's account of life in the prison camp, angry and desperate to escape, is his realization of the truth of the law of karma. Lobzur-la's efforts while in prison not to participate in the practice of public criticism for fear of a negative karmic outcome is dubbed as trying not to lose compassion for the Chinese prison guards. It is not in the interest of this thesis to query whether such misrepresentations are indeed intentional or merely coincidental. Regardless of that, the popular circulation of such stories suggests that they have become a significant vehicle for Tibetans to place the current political context into perspective and to present it to themselves and to the outside world.

At the next level of collective karma, astrological factors are also taken into consideration. In this approach, the collective experience of loss of country is presented as part of a broader overall picture of collective karma at the level of human history. The Chinese occupation of Tibet is perceived as a predestined event, foretold by the 8th century Indian mystic, Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava is believed to have made the following prophecy (Powers 2007, p. 213):[61]

> When the iron bird flies and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan People will be scattered like ants across the face of the earth, and the Dharma will come to the land of the red faces.

This prophecy is believed to refer to the current Tibetan exodus and the spread of Buddhism to the rest of the world; Powers (2007, p.212) suggests that 'the Tibetan Diaspora has forced thousands of eminent lamas to leave their country, with the knowledge of the philosophy and meditative practices of Buddhism' and take them to the West.

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[61] Like many of the hidden teachings (terma) and prophecies of Padmasambhava, the credibility of this prophecy has often been placed into question (see for example Batchelor 2010).

Within this context, Lobzur-la locates the particularity of his personal karma along with that of those who were also imprisoned in 1959. While the collapse of their country may be a result of the collective karma of all Tibetans, imprisonment, according to him, occurred only to those who 'accumulated the corresponding karma to get into prison'. From this perspective, collective karma does not necessarily form or shape individual karma. Instead, resonance between the two is required to explain an individual's particular circumstances at any given point in time. Consequently, a particular form of collective experience, such as that of imprisonment of monks in Chinese occupied Tibet may be viewed as a collective manifestation of individual spiritual crisis, i.e., karmic purification, of individuals who share the same karmic pattern or element.

The controversial conclusions of such a perception of collective karma are not difficult to deduce disasters, wars, and political oppression as the result of the collective karma of the particular group (See Hayes, 2009 for the author presenting Lati Rinpoche as interpreting Holocaust in this way). During my fieldwork, I observed the rising conflict between young lay people and the monastic elders over the self-immolation of a young refugee that recently occurred in New Delhi. From the lay perspective, the equation of political crisis with spiritual crisis infers a fatalism which undermines any effort they might make in order to regain their country's independence. Older monks, however, viewed this argument as immature, a product of a lack of 'ability to see karmic connection', as one prominent figure confided to me. This reminds us that imprisonment narratives such as Lobzur-la's describe a particular form of individual spiritual crisis manifested as a traumatic life event in a very particular socio-political and temporal context, a manifestation of collective karma shared, possibly, only by Tibetans of today.

Exile as a stage along the spiritual journey

The experience of exile in the narratives which we have examined is described, implicitly or explicitly, as a ground for one's spiritual development. Corresponding to the manner in which imprisonment is perceived as a form of crisis originating from the spiritual dimension of life (the karmic dimension) as well as each individual's participation in collective karma, exile appears to imply the resolution of crisis and the possibility of further growth.

This conclusion is at odds with the dominant view of exile. Refugees are typically reported as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression, as Benedict, Mancini and Grodin (2009), and Holtz (1998) amongst others have similarly described Tibetan refugees' psychiatric issues. Narratives of former political prisoner who were forced to spend years in prison-labour camps are in particular laden with accounts of physical, psychological and social trauma as result of starvation, torture, and the destruction of Buddhism, that is, their known, meaningful world (see for example, Benedict, Mancini & Grodin, 2009; Palden Gyatso, 1997). Such a view concurs with what I have often heard from Tibetan refugees. My intention is not to deny the traumatic elements of the Tibetan refugee experience but rather to point out that the meaning of individual transformation appears to lie in that very contradiction between exile as presented by my participants and the dominant narrative of exile as presented by most refugee communities as well as outsiders' common perception of refugees.

Amongst Tibetans, the characteristic of exile as a resolution of crisis comes, above all, from the presence of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. I have discussed, in the section on karmic relation, why his presence plays an important role in triggering spiritual awakening and/or spiritual crisis in the narratives examined in this thesis. Similarly, it is expected that Tibetan Buddhists who belong to other denominations would experience a similar triggering of spiritual experience through encountering a symbolic figure of authority within their own community. The symbolic function of the lama as a representation of the spiritual, for example, the Dalai Lama in the cases of my participants, is something that has been traditionally encouraged and is thus not a new phenomenon. It is the change that has been happening in the refugee community at the social level that I wish to consider in concluding this chapter.

In chapter seven, I suggested that the ban on any form of religious activity in the Chinese-run prison where Lobzur-la was held resulted in changes in his religious practice that forced him to rely on inner experience, focusing on his identity as a Buddhist, with a firm faith in karma, and as a human being, on the humanistic value of love. To some degree, the fact that he had lost the spiritual centre of his life, the Dalai Lama, resulted in him adopting the Dalai Lama's traditional role and taking on the position of moral (equated with the spiritual in his perspective) centre for his fellow inmates. The central focus of spiritual practice shifts from rituals confined to Tibetan Buddhism to universal values such as love and compassion, which Lobzur-la describes as the fundamental requirement for humanity.

In chapter six, Namsel Drolma's narrative describes her premonition of her future vocation as a Buddhist teacher. As a barely educated lay woman, the goal of her psycho-spiritual development would usually have been dictated by the norms of spirit-mediums and would have been limited to the task of going into trance for the monastic community. Yet her vision of providing a retreat for members of the monastic community did actually become a reality as she now leads a retreat in France. This extraordinary change in Namsel Drolma's status during her in exile which has resulted in her becoming a female religious teacher is a case too rare to be generalised to other female Buddhists in Tibetan Buddhism. Yet, it indicates a change, minute though it may be, in the status of women in traditional monasticism, which has been noted in terms of monastic vows, opportunities for education, and living conditions by Grimshaw (1992), Gyatso (2005), and Simmer-Brown (2001) amongst others. Another example can be found in the narrative of Drolma, whose account of meeting her lama was discussed earlier in this chapter. She contextualizes her exile in terms of an unknowable destiny. Like Namsel Drolma, she left Tibet without any conscious reason after having an inexplicable illness. She expresses the meaning of her exile as following:

> If I had not left Tibet, you know, I wouldn't have understood what the Three Jewels are about.[62] My cousin in Tibet, she still has no idea. Until I came to Dharamsala, I had called myself a Buddhist but had no idea who the Buddha was…Life is hard here, and it is hard [in Tibet] as well. I went on pilgrimage to Bodhgaya[63] twice, and was even able to invite and take my father there. This kind of fortune was not imaginable. (with a pause and a smile) I have been going to the Saturday doctrinal classes. (hiding her mouth with her hand) The teacher Lobsang is really good. Sometimes a little difficult to follow. But these days,

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[62] The expression 'three jewels' refers to the Buddha, the Buddha's teachings, and the community of those who practice the teachings. Being a Buddhist is often defined as those who take refuge in these three jewels. As with English vocabulary of divinity such as 'God' or 'Christ', the 'three Jewels' may be sued to convey emphasis on one's claim in an argument: for example, 'By the three jewels, I never said that!'

[63] The Indian town where Gautama Siddhartha is said to have become enlightened, and thus become the Buddha, is now a major centre of pilgrimage.

> I’ve begun to understand just a little bit of what Gyalwa Rinpoche (the Dalai Lama) says during those long teachings.

In the extract quoted earlier, Drolma describes how her opening to the spiritual dimension of life commenced with the recognition of a Buddhist teacher as her lama, an event which occurred in exile. The extract above describes her further progress towards the goal that is first implied by her meeting with the lama and is then also represented by him. Though she does not explicitly state what he means to her, we know that her emotional response, a form of intuition as Anderson (2011) suggests, to his presence, initiates the process by which she has begun to uncover the meaning of life as understood according to traditional Buddhist doctrine. It is significant to note that her further participation in a new course of weekly doctrinal classes for lay people, is one that would have been unavailable to her, a lay woman in traditional Tibet, had the country not been occupied by the Chinese.

Consideration on methods

While designing and carrying out this research, I employed a number of different methodologies and pragmatic methods in order to facilitate data collection and analysis. Within the broad framework of intuitive inquiry as qualitative research, I used exploratory interviews and questionnaires in order to locate participants for narrative interviews to be carried out during my fieldwork. To a large degree, the preparatory measures eased the progress of the fieldwork. There were, however, modifications to be made when the interview schedule using hagiographies did not produce expected results. During my fieldwork, anthropological and ethnographic observations were undertaken in the process of participant recruitment and interviewing. Furthermore, this thesis is the first example of a research case which combines intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis. Much of the rationale for bringing in methods from various disciplines was stated in chapters three and four. In this section, I will reflect on the process and review the successes and difficulties that I encountered along the way.

Cultural taboo in terms of my position as researcher and its impact on fieldwork

From the stage of formulating the research topic, I was aware of the cultural taboo in Tibetan Buddhism pertaining to esoteric vows (see p. 150). First of all, as a lay woman, I was not someone to whom esoteric experience could be traditionally communicated. In this respect, I sometimes wondered if the Tibetan monks I met during fieldwork would have opened up more in front of an ordained male researcher who had been initiated into the equivalent circle of esoteric practices and was then considered eligible to carry out in-depth interviews with Tibetan mendicants. However, it is an irony that such a researcher would then have been bound himself by the esoteric vows and forbidden to carry out the enquiry in the first place, let alone publicizing the results.

This awareness of my weak position in terms of interview context initially burdened me so much that I often felt like I was walking into a wall. However, I tried to compensate for this by carrying out interviews as far as possible on my potential participants' terms. As a result, I often found myself positioned as a lay Buddhist sincerely seeking their advice on spiritual matters. The outcome varied. Sometimes the wall did not budge. For instance, an elderly retreat master offered to answer any questions I might have if I came back after reading his late master's biography which he himself had edited and published. I read the biography with the help of a Tibetan interpreter. Therein I found a few episodes of the late master's erratic behaviour while he was living in a remote cave, which appeared relevant to my interest in psychotic symptoms related to spiritual emergency. However, when I went back to see the elderly monk, he did not answer any of the questions I asked. In the end, we sat for nearly ninety minutes – he on top of his bed, and me on the floor – drinking tea and eating some biscuits. The wall, however, could also retreat. Jangchup whose story was quoted in chapter eight did not agree to participate in my research at first. However, when I visited him again and requested he give me tuition in the classic Buddhist text *A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhipathapradīpa*) by Atisha (see p.79), he agreed. During the third class, he said that I could use whatever I found useful in the lessons. When I asked him if that meant he would use examples of his own life experience to elucidate the text, he said yes. On another occasion, the wall seemed almost to vanish. One participant who was living in a cave on a hill above McLeod Ganj, invited me into his cave where he showed me his altar, then he cooked his lunch and shared it with me. He was happy to answer all my questions, and to talk openly about his life. The only reason why his interviews are not included in the analysis chapters of this study is that he did not recall any crisis or difficulty in his tummo practice. Neither did he see transformative meaning in the practice – perhaps he was an excellent example of one of the happy minded described by James (2002).

Overall, these experiences gave me the impression that the wall of secrecy might be rather more flexible than has been noted by Kapstein and Tuttle (2013), Urban (2003), and Welbon (1987) amongst others. It may be more dependent on individual choice and personal history than has previously been thought. I do not regard the silence of the old retreat master or the monk who declined to be interviewed to keep his vows (see p. 151 for the description of the incident) as a failure of my interviewing strategy. Their silence was also informative in helping me to understand the context of Lobsang Tenzin’s narrative and the implications inherent in the act of narration as a trigger of spiritual danger from the perspective of Tibetan esoteric Buddhists.

My three months of fieldwork was designed in consideration of emotional and financial cost, as Arthur and Nazroo (2003) noted, as well as the time scale of my PhD project. However, considering the flexibility of the taboo against sharing meditative experience that I observed during fieldwork, it might be suggested that more first-hand accounts of spiritual crisis could have been collected if the fieldwork had lasted long enough to encourage further ‘building on intimacy’ (Johnson, 2002) with potential participants.

How did the adoption of intuitive inquiry affect data collection?

As discussed in chapter two, I only discovered intuitive inquiry as a methodology after I had already formulated the research project. When I came across Rosemarie Anderson's intuitive inquiry (Anderson 1998), I thought the formulation process she described exactly described the way in which I had come to the idea of carrying out research into the concept of spiritual crisis amongst Tibetan Buddhist refugees. In terms of data collection, the prospect of examining potential data collection methods and resulting data from a state of mind characterised by both calm detachment and empathetic engagement appealed to me. While carrying out data collection, I regularly practised imaginal dialogue (described in chapter three) and paid attention to bodily sensations and dreams while engaging myself with participants and data, as suggested by Anderson (2006).

In certain cases, my emotional response to material accentuated its significance and persuaded me to give primacy to its thematic relevance and powerful imagery over form. The narratives of Lobsang Tenzin and Namsel Drolma are examples of this. Both of their stories moved me deeply. I felt sorrow, joy, and the desire to know them better. Whenever I read the paragraph in which Lobsang Tenzin first experienced light in his meditation and the one in which he prayed in tears to die in isolation like Milarepa, I was deeply stirred. If intuitive inquiry had not reminded to pay attention to these emotions, I would have relegated my feelings to the domain of private life without reflecting them in the research process. As mentioned in chapter four, the original aim of fieldwork was to acquire narratives through interviews and all my preparations had been carried out in that direction. Therefore, the choice of secondary data as key narratives was a rather frustrating experience. In retrospect, although I had read that qualitative research design is emergent (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Elliot & Timulak, 2005), this had not psychologically prepared me for such an eventuality. With the support of my supervisory team and the methodological foundation laid down in intuitive inquiry, however, I was able to adapt my research process and make it responsive to what was emerging during fieldwork.

In terms of meeting participants, I kept notes of powerful experiences, vivid dreams, and visions during imaginal dialogues that I had had prior to, during, and after the interviews. If I had a vivid dream in the morning of the day when an interview was scheduled, later, when the interview was over for the day, I would come to realize that the dream signified something about the interview. In chapter six, I described an experience that I had in Namsel Drolma's living room, which highlighted the significance of her text for me but also led me to giving up on interviewing her. However, it should be noted that intuitive responses to data/participants such as sensing, dreaming, etc. were not the only factors considered when it came to meeting participants and, later, making a choice about key material. It would be more accurate to say that unconscious, emotional, and bodily responses affected the way I met and related to participants afterwards. They also enabled me to become more aware of what might have gone unnoticed in the way in which I related to participants/data.

Applying intuition to analysis of narratives

Intuition, as a means to understand the narrative, was regularly practiced in the way described in chapter three. The result of such practice was not always distinctively different from my understanding of narratives through the rational process. Once the unconscious is given a role in the analytical process, the occurrence of intuitive understanding seems neither limited to alternative states of consciousness nor oppositional to the rational processes. It makes it very difficult therefore to draw a clear line between intuition originating from the unconscious and rational inference.

However, when unexpected intuitive understanding that was distinctively different from the rational thought process did occur in the form of dreams or other images, it did not occur randomly. For example, I mentioned two dreams relating to Lobsang Tenzin on p.168. Before having the first dream, I had, for several weeks, been intensely engaged in comparing the Tibetan and English versions of his narrative while undertaking thematic analysis focusing on interrelation between the events therein. This process immersed me deeper and deeper into his story. In the first dream, I found myself about to take part in a banquet in a large refectory. From there I could see through a window that looked out onto a hill with a small mendicant's chapel on top. I interpreted 'enjoying a monastic meal' in the dream as signifying that my interpretation had reached a satisfactory level of meaning construction from the Tibetan Buddhist cultural context. However, I felt that it was then vital to make an inferential leap to 'the mendicant's chapel'. Until then, I had refrained from making any interpretations regarding the narrative of the 'dark figure of a local spirit' that were in any way different from Lobsang Tenzin's own interpretations, which were very much embedded in the context of Tibetan shamanism. I began to feel frustrated. I decided to hold his image as it was printed on the front page of his published biography as well as varying scenes in the narrative as the objects of my attention for several days. The aim of this practice was, as Anderson (2011b, p.248) notes, to 'inhabit the lived world of'

Lobsang Tenzin in order to reach the meaning beyond ‘what is embedded in the text’. During an imaginary dialogue with the Indians and Bhutanese (described in Lobsang Tenzin’s dream, see p.172), I noticed that while they were watching the battle pensively, one of them was holding a mirror which he flipped back and forth slowly. At each flip, the mirror would reflect one of the two adversaries, Lobsang Tenzin and the dark figure. This image inspired me to interpret the narrative of the dark figure as a visionary image personifying Lobsang Tenzin’s own shadow. As mentioned in chapter six, after completing a draft of this psychologised interpretation, I had a dream of a scorched, elegant giant who stooped to hold my hands. I took this dream as an indication of a breakthrough in my attempt to ‘inhabit his lived world’.

How were intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis combined in the pragmatics of conducting my analysis.

In principle, once the narratives were identified, I followed the procedure listed on p.116-117. The main reason for this was that the tracing of the process of meaning construction was instrumental in voicing the narrator’s own perspective. Also, the aim of intuitive analysis to ‘inhabit the lived world of’ another is not an epistemological assumption of this thesis but rather a target to achieve. As I argued in chapter three, appreciation of the cultural differences and barriers between cultures was at the heart of the research design: would Tibetan participants recognise what I understand as spiritual crisis as such?; Would I be able to recognise what they understand as spiritual crisis as such?

In this regard, Ferrer (2002) rejects any generalised gross comparison between religious traditions. In chapter two, I made a parallel point regarding comparison between psychology and Buddhism (see pp. 69-74). Ferrer notes that ‘the key to the spiritually transforming power of a given tradition may lie in its own distinctive practices and understandings’ (ibid, p.92). From this perspective, when a specific meditative experience is to be interpreted, it needs to be located within its own particular context first. For instance, in order to interpret Lobsang Tenzin’s tummo arising (in chapter five), I had to first locate it within the sequence of narrative events, then identify his interpretations of the event throughout the text, and finally to reflect on it from the perspective of doctrinal Buddhism. His dreams regarding his understanding of the doctrine of emptiness were also interpreted in this way. Likewise, with the three mediums in chapter six, while considering their symptoms of ‘divine illness’, I consistently shed light on the relation between their own interpretation of these and the socially generated meaning of their experiences. In the same vein, I highlighted the stage of the doctrinal exposition of spiritual development at which participants located their experiences. In this process, the context of individual experience and interpretation has been made explicit to the reader, even if at the risk of the resulting analysis appearing overly descriptive.

To Ferrer's argument above, Wilber (2006) adds the necessity of considering factors related to the stage of individual development. Wilber (2006) argues that at the moment of having a mystical or a peak experience, it is impossible to experience it without instantly interpreting it based on one's stage of consciousness development and religious orientation. No reports of individual transpersonal experience, Wilber argues, are ever free from these factors. It seems to me that Wilber's argument on pluralism rephrases the questions I asked above. On the one hand, Wilber's argument may appear to lead to epistemological agnosticism. However, I think that his argument actually supports the claims made by Anderson and Braud (1998, 2011) and Hart, Nelson and Puhakka (2000) amongst others, that transpersonal methods are needed for researching transpersonal phenomena. In terms of the analysis of narrative, this implies that to approach a text with transpersonal awareness, as one undertakes to do in intuitive inquiry, offers a better chance of going beyond the narrator's interpretation of the transpersonal, even if 'inhabiting the lived world' of the narrator is never completely achievable. My alternative interpretation of the dark figure of the local spirit is an example of such an attempt, even though it directly contradicts the cultural interpretation of the phenomenon. Similarly, my interpretation of the psycho-spiritual transformative effects of imprisonment in Lobzur-la's narrative was arrived at only through a long process of imaginal dialogue.

One might ask why an imaginal dialogue should ever be needed in order to interpret Lobzur-la's imprisonment narrative as a record of spiritual crisis when he phrases his experience so clearly in terms of karma. However, when transpersonal notions are part of a dominant cultural framework, it is not a simple matter to differentiate rhetorical expressions and speech habits, insights from transpersonal experience, and insights acquired through assimilation (for example, monastic education) into the cultural framework from one another by relying only on the dictionary meaning of words. Imaginal dialogue and other practices laid in intuitive inquiry provide assistance to the researcher when wading through the multiple levels of meaning in a text.

Another important issue to note is the way in which the two different approaches of narrative analysis and intuitive inquiry clashed during the process of data analysis. Indeed for a while, it seemed that reconciling the ontological and epistemological assumptions grounding each of them was impossible. For example, once I engaged in the course of following analytical procedures of narrative analysis, I would notice the narrative facts, intentions, sequences, and underlying notions but not the individual (see Crossley 2000 for losing the participant in analysis). With the individual vanished, the transpersonal dimension also seemed to be lost. This loss was aggravated by the need to draw heavily on the literature of Buddhist studies and Tibetology which rarely share notions of transpersonal experience and awareness. This was due to the lack of contextual discussion of Tibetan Buddhism in transpersonal psychology, as discussed in chapter two. Part of the problem lies in the fact that ‘meaning’ in narrative theories and ‘meaning’ in the discussion of spiritual crisis do not signify the same thing. The former, as discussed in chapter three, is formed in relation to other references in the narrative, while the latter refers to the purpose and fulfilment of life, as described in chapter one. In an attempt to reclaim the narrator and to reach the transpersonal dimension of his/her experience, I held certain scenes from the narratives and/or the photographic images of the narrators in my mind. Occasionally I experienced a sense of pleasure as if meeting a friend after a long time, and this enabled me to notice things that I had not recognised before. To illustrate this, I will return once again to Lobsang Tenzin’s dark figure narrative. My effort to empathetically identify with him brought about an interpretation which, though heavily psychologised and contradictory to his own interpretation, is actually in line with his own judgment of his spiritual attainments, and still remains grounded in the context of Tibetan Buddhist culture.

In sum, narrative analysis enabled me to ground my narrative interpretations in the cultural context of Tibetan Buddhism and the current political context of Tibetan society, while intuitive analysis enabled me to uncover the transpersonal dimension of experience described in the narratives, which would otherwise have been undifferentiated from the overall mass of cultural beliefs.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

This thesis began by problematizing assumptions of the universality of spiritual crisis found in the field of transpersonal psychology. I argued that the universality of examples of spiritual emergency such as shamanic crisis does not demonstrate the universality of the concept of emergency. This argument is based on the question of whether phenomena categorised as forms of spiritual emergency by transpersonal psychologists may be understood as such in other cultures. I identified the meaning of individual psycho-spiritual transformation as the central element in the construction of the concept of spiritual emergency. Therefore, I argued that it is necessary to demonstrate that this meaning is also constructed in cases of spiritual emergency in other cultures. The intention was not to criticize the concept of spiritual crisis as it is proposed in psychology but rather to argue the need for a more culturally informed approach. In order to address the issue, I have explored the construction of the meaning of spiritual crisis in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural context by means of case-oriented narrative research.

The need for more culturally informed research such as this study offers has recently been advanced by Berkhin and Hartelius (2011), Ferrer (2002, 2011), and by Les Lancaster and David Lukoff during the conference of the European transpersonal Association in Crete, 2014. Thus, this study makes a contribution to the methodological discussion in transpersonal psychology in its attempt to explore a transpersonal concept within a particular socio-cultural context.

Addressing such a need inevitably requires research to be both interdisciplinary and cross-cultural. This has necessitated me, the researcher, to bridge considerable linguistic and conceptual divides: between transpersonal psychology and Buddhist doctrine, between the examination of psychological concepts and the practice of social research, between the transpersonal and the socio-cultural, and finally between English and Tibetan. The process of crossing these divides between different conceptual paradigms has been laid out in the first four chapters.

Chapter one began with a review of Grof's concept of spiritual emergency together with how it was discussed in the field of transpersonal psychology. Instead of following the common approach that focuses on the diversity of triggers and phenomenological descriptions of spiritual emergency, and the distinction between spiritual emergency and psychosis, my focus has been on Grof’s claim that spiritual emergency can be explained using his model of the psyche – the biographical, the perinatal and the transpersonal. Noting that Grof and Assagioli, the two seminal contributors to *Spiritual Emergency* (Grof & Grof, 1989) were both influenced by the Jungian model of the unconscious, I reviewed each of these three models of the psyche along with that of William James. In doing so, I focused on the central elements of their theories where a transformative crisis is understood as a legitimate part of psycho-spiritual development. These structural approaches to the human psyche propose the unconscious (the subconscious in James’s theory) as a mechanism of spiritual crisis. I also noted how each theorist’s understanding of the unconscious differs from those of the others, also the manner in which these differences affect their explanations of psychological distress and psychotic symptoms as well as the link between these symptoms and psychospiritual transformation.

The second chapter consists of three independent though interrelated sections on 1) the approach to my treatment of Buddhism as an assembly of psychological concepts, 2) the identification of the lack of a notion of spiritual crisis in the orthodox Buddhist doctrines of spiritual development, and 3) the illustration of a potential construction of the meaning of spiritual crisis from hagiographic sources and other forms of traditional narrative. As a former Buddhologist, I sympathetically reviewed criticisms of the Western treatment of Buddhism as advanced psychology. However, I also argue that, the functional value of Buddhism as a conceptual framework by which Buddhists make sense of themselves and the world means that Buddhism deserves to be treated as a psychological system. Further, I suggest that the multi-faceted nature of Buddhism and Buddhist tradition embraces doctrinal, experiential, and social dimensions, and that research into any one of these need not be pursued at the cost of any of the others. I also juxtapose typical Buddhist doctrinal narratives of spiritual development with Tibetan hagiographies and traditional stories in order to bring attention to the conceptual gap between them. By so doing, I justify my choice to explore the concept of spiritual crisis using sources other than the orthodox doctrinal texts, though ones which are nevertheless implicit in Tibetan Buddhist culture. These sources allowed me to make inferences regarding the lived experience of Buddhists in a manner that would not have been possible if I had had to rely solely on the stereotypical presentation of Buddhism provided by the canonical texts.

In chapter three, I ground my methodology in intuitive inquiry, informed by narrative analysis. Intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis are reviewed at length, because they are both based on very different ontological and epistemological foundations, thus combining them is a delicate, yet indispensible, matter for this study. Furthermore, combining the two has never previously been attempted in academia, which has necessitated detailed discussion of the two approaches in order to justify why this study benefits from this combination and to elaborate on the strategy of how the combination of the two was to be practiced in actual data analysis. It was also noted that emphasis on personal, intuitive, and unconscious engagement with the research process as advocated by intuitive inquiry may appear theoretically contradictory to the negation of the subjective ego and the stress on the role of socio-cultural context in the meaning making process of narrative analysis.

Chapter four considers the process of formulating the research question; undergoing a reflexive process based on the first cycle of intuitive inquiry, designing and reshaping the research as it proceeded, and the process of data collection. The research design aimed to be reflective of the geographical and cultural elements of the fieldwork context, Dharamsala, India, and thus has to some degree been emergent. Instead of a linear and sanitized version, I have provided a detailed account of how each stage of the research process informed the following one, and explained why sometimes unconventional choices such as the use of a questionnaire to locate interview participants were made. However, the information acquired during fieldwork, the major stage of data collection, was so vast and diverse that it had to be integrated into narrative analysis as is presented in chapters five to seven.

Anderson (2011a) suggests that the confusion the researcher feels when faced with his/her research data indicates a significant discovery. Crane, Lobbard and Tenz (2009) suggest that research traversing different conceptual paradigms may require the researcher to inhabit a hybrid-space which entails hesitation and confusion. This exactly describes my own feelings as I sat transcribing and revisiting field notes and memories, reading through transcripts, and marking themes and patterns. The tendency to search for what fits the theoretical lenses prepared prior to fieldwork while reviewing literature proved to be difficult to drop. Therefore, I initially followed the procedure of narrative analysis presented in chapter three, and reviewed further literature in order to illuminate the meaning of personal transformation as constructed in the narratives. One of the difficulties in identifying a theme of psychospiritual transformation in Tibetan narratives is the selfeffacing manner which is deeply engrained in narrators' speech habits. This is not to suggest that Tibetan Buddhists are any less self-aware, or more humble, than Westerners. Humility as a virtue is socially encouraged, which suits well the Buddhist doctrine of no self, or its Tibetan version, emptiness of self. Thus, absence of self-statement is often associated with psychological maturity and/or being cultured. On top of this, there is the priority given to so-called correct understanding over personally generated meaning. This is further complicated by the cultural taboo against discussing one's religious experience with others. As noted by narrative researchers (Josselson 2011; Riessman 1993, 2002, 2008), these factors influence narrators to deliver what is significant to them by means of the detail and length of a given account rather than by explaining directly how they make sense of their experience.

In chapter five, I use Lobsang Tenzin's narrative to examine two different concepts of spiritual crisis. Firstly, I discuss a shift of identity that occurs during the process of renunciation and the subsequent ordination into a monastic order, acts traditionally emphasized as a form of spiritual awakening. In general, the doctrinal emphasis on renunciation and ordination as requirements for spiritual development tends to mask the personally generated meaning of such an event. I trace the destructive emotional pattern of grief, anger and depression as well as his alcoholism in the narrative and by so doing demonstrate that Lobsang Tenzin's ordination is the outcome of a genuine emergence of the spiritual dimension of life, also that it is an example of psychospiritual transformation rather than just a shift of social identity. This spiritual dimension is brought to his awareness by a lama who diagnoses his ailments as being the result of karmic connection to a traumatic event in his past. Although this awareness does not arise from his own transpersonal experience, the resulting spiritual awakening is powerful enough to bring the destructive emotional pattern to a stop and to enable him to widen the scope of his conscious experience. The fact that such an awareness occurs through the transpersonal experience of someone else reflects the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism. This is by contrast with the structural theories reviewed in chapter one which associate transformative power with one's own inner, transpersonal experience.

I also explore a particular notion of crisis at the level of the spiritual caused by the influence of external entities: as a form of unwelcome disturbance in chapter five; and as a result of forceful psychic invasion in chapter six. In Tibetan culture, cases of crisis caused by external spirits are regarded difficult to diagnose and/or to treat. Their symptoms are often confused with those of madness, the difference being that cases of spirit-possession are classified in terms of their functional value to the community during the process of diagnosis. Because these spirits are perceived to be completely independent from humans, interaction with them is not in itself viewed as having implications for the individual psyche. Therefore, the meaning of self-constructed personal transformation is seldom found in such narratives. However, the need for transpersonal expertise is clearly stated as exemplified in the three mediums' narratives of their diagnoses; as well as in Lobsang Tenzin's strategy first to repel the local spirit by relying on compassionate meditation, then to visualize himself as a ferocious deity in order to destroy it. As discussed in chapter six, this cultural perception contradicts the mainstream Western psychological interpretation of such phenomena, yet is in line with new perspectives which have developed in transpersonal psychology (see p.179).

In particular, I provided detailed information on the way in which Lobsang Tenzin's aggressive reaction to the perceived local spirit may be justified from the Tibetan tantric Buddhist perspective, which is little understood in Western psychology. In addition, applying Lobsang Tenzin's own logic of dream interpretation, I suggested an alternative interpretation in which destruction of the local spirit is viewed as a form of ego death triggered by analytical meditation on the emptiness of self. I associate the dark figure with Lobsang Tenzin's unresolved psychological tendencies toward grief and anger which had been illuminated by the revelation and joy of realizing emptiness. This interpretation draws from Assagioli's suggestion that increased psychic energy may be absorbed in the contents of the lower unconscious.

The mediums' narratives in chapter six begin by establishing a link between the experience of possession and that of spiritual emergency. We have seen the way in which symptoms including erratic behaviour, panic, and loss of consciousness are interpreted to originate from an external entity and to be independent from the individual, even when visionary experiences and powerful dreams are described as part of their own personal experience. The meaning of psycho-spiritual transformation is largely moulded in terms of the roles of the deity and the medium in the community. I also suggest that cultural norms with their roots in Buddhist doctrine which stresses the acquisition of merit and wisdom do not accredit spiritual attainment to any experience other than the doctrinal. Therefore, while distinguishing spirit possession from madness is a matter that requires transpersonal expertise, any form of personal development which coincides with possession is explained in terms of the Buddhist concept of karma, which is better suited to accommodate Buddhist doctrine.

The theme of karma runs through all five narratives analysed in this thesis but is given central focus only in chapter seven. In this chapter, I analyse a narrative centred on two key concepts, karma and compassion to illustrate the way in which karma is understood to turn life events into a form of spiritual crisis. Karma, it appears, is a concept that encompasses 1) the principle by which the psyche of the individual is formed as well as 2) the separate elements of which it is composed, and 3) the link between inner experience and the exterior world. From this perspective, what happens in the external world is a reflection of the elements that make up one’s psyche. The boundaries between traumatic life events and internal psychic experience such as Jung’s visions and hallucinations during spiritual emergency become blurred.

Two concepts of karma that are used to explain traumatic life events are discussed. Firstly, the retributional approach states that the present situation is a direct manifestation of karma, and reflects as such the nature of one’s personal karma. The second, more complex and nuanced, suggests that for dormant negative karma to become manifest it is necessary that the individual be psycho-spiritually advanced so as to be able to cope with the consequences. From this perspective, undergoing a crisis itself indicates a certain level of development. Further, if the crisis arises at the level of the socio-political, as Lobzur-la articulates it, generating positive karma such as compassion is suggested as the primary solution to it.

In the structure of the unconscious proposed by Jung and Assagioli, spiritual crisis is described as the stage of the ego’s development when the ego/conscious self begins to be aware of its source, the self/the higher self. At this juncture, the ego begins to move towards the self (Jung’s description) or to expand its range of awareness of the contents of the unconscious (Assagioli). In this process, the ego is guided by a symbolic figure that represents the self, source and destination. In chapter eight, I further discuss how the role of symbolic representation of the self in the theories of Jung and Assagioli is played by a figure of religious authority.

The spiritual dimension of life may emerge through an encounter with an individual who plays the role of a tendrel, an omen that discloses the nature of karmic workings. Because of the particularity of the fieldwork context, the Dalai Lama appears as the personification of tendrel in nearly all the narratives. Each individual attempts to secure the meaning of their life and validate their experience through him. The Dalai Lama's symbolic position varies in each narrative: as a karmic regulator and redeemer (Lobzur-la); as one who reinstates the purpose and meaning of life (Jangchup); as one who approves a level of spiritual development and leads the individual onto the next (Lobsang Tenzin); as one who validates a crisis arising from spontaneous trances (Namsel Drolma). We have noted that this heavy reliance on figures of spiritual authority as providers of meaning and as representations of the spiritual plays a significant role in interpreting one's experience as a form of spiritual crisis and in resolving the crisis. Furthermore, when the system of doctrine which such a figure represents is widely accepted within society, spiritual transformation is often perceived in terms of achieving a viewpoint on oneself and one's experience which better conforms to orthodox doctrine.

Even though the doctrine of karma is proposed as the mechanism underlying the non-physical dimension of the individual, it provides at most only a broad framework rather than detailed explanation of its inner workings. Assagioli (1965) suggests that the existence of the self is inferred because experiencing it directly is not possible. Similarly, the presence of karma is inferred as the underlying mechanism of the psyche and life. In this karmic framework, therefore, examples of spiritual emergency may not always be interpreted as an opportunity for personal psycho-spiritual transformation. On the other hand, the meanings of crisis for personal transformation and crises originating from the transpersonal might be generated both from experience of any kind – psychological, physical and social.

Remarks on combining intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis

In chapter eight, I comment on my use of intuitive inquiry and narrative analysis. By adopting intuitive inquiry, a methodology relatively new in academia, in a multidisciplinary and multi-cultural research setting, this work contributes to the discussion of transpersonal research methods and presents an example of transpersonal research informed by socio-cultural contexts.

In concluding this study, I wish to summarise my experiences as follows. In its conception, intuitive inquiry inevitably stressed the need to use intuitive, unconscious, emotional modes of knowing rather than those of rational thinking. However, transpersonal knowing is an added element to the inductive process of research, not the only epistemological tool available to the researcher. Therefore there has been an on-going dialectical process between my rational/conscious and my empathetic/intuitive engagement with narratives, which has enabled my analysis to reach beyond what is embedded in the text and the theoretical lenses that I employed at the beginning of the research.

Suggestions for future research

The narratives studied in this thesis do not delve into the structure of the psyche of their narrators. Instead, they portray conscious selves interacting with internal and external events, entities, and situations between which there are no rigid, impenetratable boundaries. Regarding the concept of karma as principle that assimilates the psychological and the material, the personal and the transpersonal, I came to think during the course of this study that, in order to understand the ‘unique creative solution to the transformation of the human condition’ (Ferrer, 2002, p. 92) found in Tibetan Buddhism, our knowledge of karma needs to go beyond the usual presentations repeated in academia and the traditional doctrinal literature, and this would seem to suggest a direction for future research.

In chapter six, I noted that spontaneous transpersonal experience in Tibetan Buddhist society is not always considered either valid or of spiritual value. To take the example of the story of Drolma in chapter eight, Tibetan women have traditionally been marginalised in Tibetan Buddhist monasticism. In Buddhist anthropological studies, attempts have been made to look into the lives of eminent and extraordinary female figures (see for example, Gyatso 2005). However, spontaneous spiritual awakening and spiritual crisis in the case of ordinary lay women is an area that remains unexplored, and which might open a new vista for us to understand Tibetan Buddhist spirituality.

Furthermore, the Buddhists studied in this study are all refugees. For me personally, capturing a world that may soon disappear was an important motivation when I embarked on this study. The Tibetan community in exile inhabits a multi-cultural, multi-cosmological world in which a pristine Buddhist cosmology has to compete with those of Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, not to mention modern science and medicine. This change may have contributed to certain differences between the narratives of Lobsang Tenzin and Lobzur-la; where the former stresses the supernatural power of wrathful deities as remedy for his particular version of spiritual crisis, the latter emphasizes the power of universal love. Although this study includes the transitional position of Tibetan Buddhism as part of its research context, it has only been able to incorporate a relatively narrow range of perspectives of Tibetan Buddhist refugees. I hope further research will examine how the spirituality the younger generation develops in its relation to Tibetan Buddhism.

Finally, this investigation of Tibetan Buddhists' narratives of spiritual crisis using narrative analysis has raised questions about the formation of the concept of spiritual crisis. Among the four theorists reviewed in chapter one, biographical accounts of James and Jung have been studied in relation to their works, as noted in chapter one. In terms of conceptualising spiritual emergency, our knowledge relies exclusively on Grof's own publications which present conclusions relying largely on thematic and phenomenological analysis of his participants' reports. I suggest that a vigorous re-examination of the narratives used by Grof to formulate his concepts of COEX, the perinatal and the transpersonal might help to re-evaluate the contribution of these seminal concepts to transpersonal psychology.

Concluding statement

This thesis is an attempt to explore the concept of spiritual crisis in the context of Tibetan Buddhist culture and to understand how Tibetan Buddhists make sense of their crises and generate meanings of psycho-spiritual development. It also undertakes to examine what Tibetan Buddhism offers to individuals in psychological and spiritual distress. At every stage meticulous measures have been taken to address any issues identified. By following Tibetan participants' own invitations and grounding myself in their own narratives, I have tried to hear their voices and articulate the meaning they give to their own lives. In doing so I have also attempted to create an equal relationship between researcher and researched.

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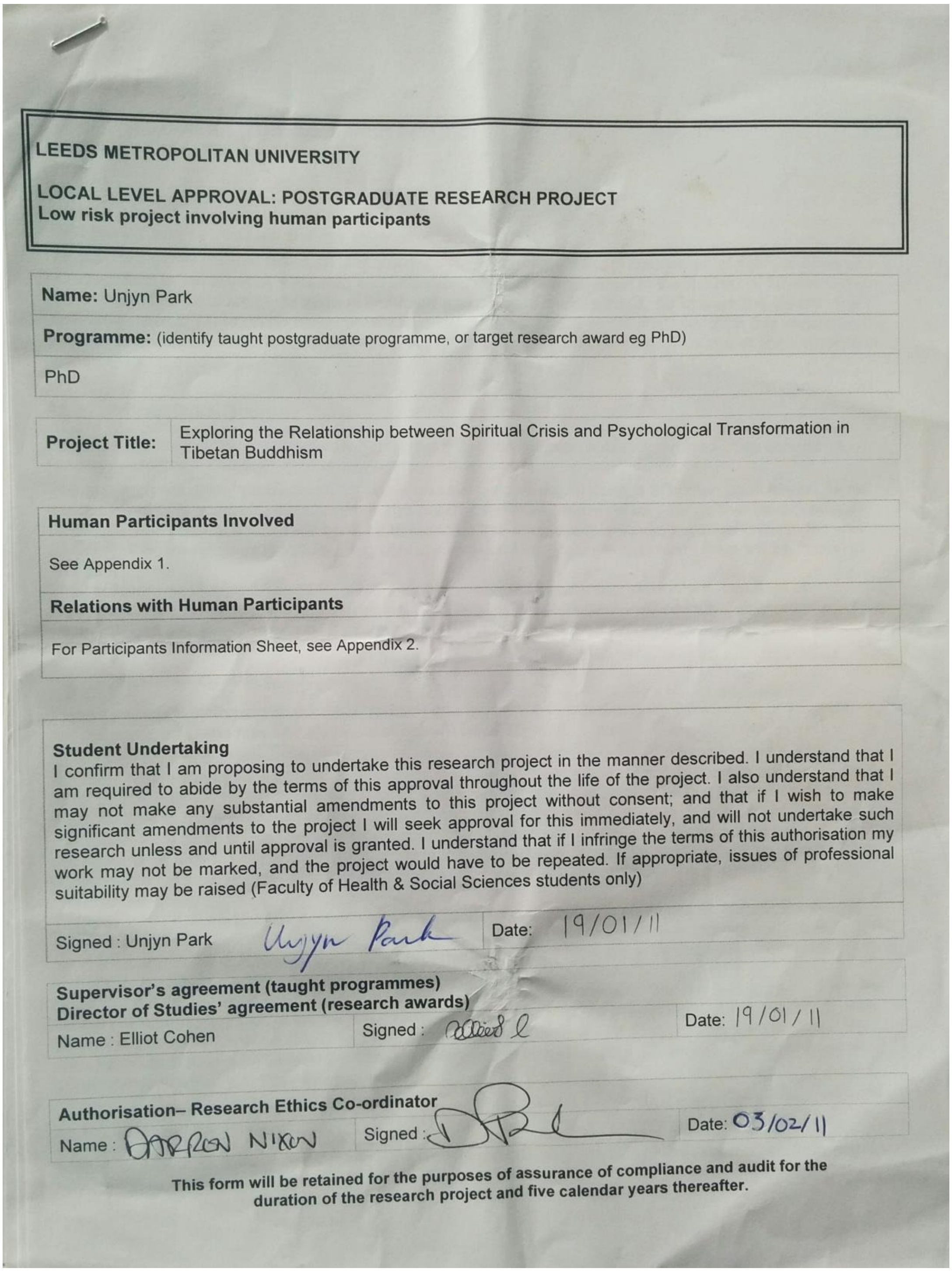


LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

LOCAL LEVEL APPROVAL: POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT
Low risk project involving human participants

Name: Unjyn Park

Programme: (identify taught postgraduate programme, or target research award eg PhD)

PhD

Project Title:	Exploring the Relationship between Spiritual Crisis and Psychological Transformation in Tibetan Buddhism

Human Participants Involved

See Appendix 1.

Relations with Human Participants

For Participants Information Sheet, see Appendix 2.

Student Undertaking
I confirm that I am proposing to undertake this research project in the manner described. I understand that I am required to abide by the terms of this approval throughout the life of the project. I also understand that I may not make any substantial amendments to this project without consent; and that if I wish to make significant amendments to the project I will seek approval for this immediately, and will not undertake such research unless and until approval is granted. I understand that if I infringe the terms of this authorisation my work may not be marked, and the project would have to be repeated. If appropriate, issues of professional suitability may be raised (Faculty of Health & Social Sciences students only)

Signed : Unjyn Park Unjyn Park	Date: 19/01/11

Supervisor's agreement (taught programmes)
Director of Studies' agreement (research awards)

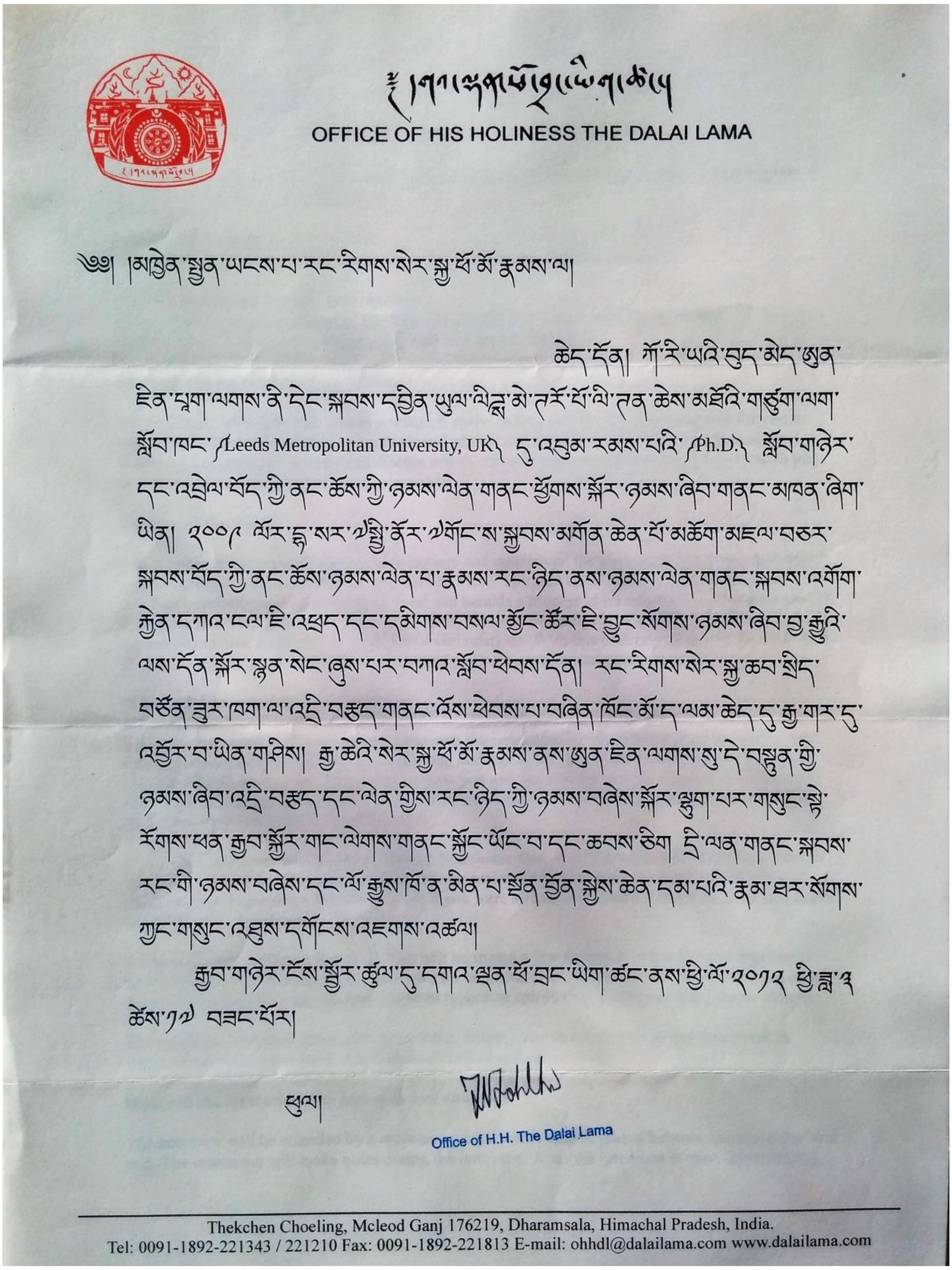
Name : Elliot Cohen	Signed : Elliot C	Date: 19/01/11

Authorisation– Research Ethics Co-ordinator

Name : DARREN NIXON	Signed :	Date: 03/02/11

This form will be retained for the purposes of assurance of compliance and audit for the duration of the research project and five calendar years thereafter.

Ethics Approval



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OFFICE OF HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

༄༅། །མཁྱེན་སྤྱན་ཡངས་པ་རང་རིགས་སེར་སྐྱ་ཕོ་མོ་རྣམས་ལ།

ཆེད་དོན། ཀོ་རི་ཡའི་བུད་མེད་ཨུན་ཇིན་པཱག་ལགས་ནི་དེང་སྐབས་དབྱིན་ཡུལ་ལི་ཌྶ་མེ་ཏྲོ་པོ་ལི་ཏན་ཆེས་མཐོའི་གཙུག་ལག་སློབ་ཁང་༼Leeds Metropolitan University, UK༽ དུ་འབུམ་རམས་པའི་༼Ph.D.༽ སློབ་གཉེར་དང་འབྲེལ་བོད་ཀྱི་ནང་ཆོས་ཀྱི་ཉམས་ལེན་གནང་ཕྱོགས་སྐོར་ཉམས་ཞིབ་གནང་མཁན་ཞིག་ཡིན། ༢༠༠༨ ལོར་ཧྥ་སར་༧སྤྱི་ནོར་༧གོང་ས་སྐྱབས་མགོན་ཆེན་པོ་མཆོག་མཇལ་བཅར་སྐབས་བོད་ཀྱི་ནང་ཆོས་ཉམས་ལེན་པ་རྣམས་རང་ཉིད་ནས་ཉམས་ལེན་གནང་སྐབས་འགོག་རྐྱེན་དཀའ་ངལ་ཇི་འཕྲད་དང་དམིགས་བསལ་མྱོང་ཚོར་ཇི་བྱུང་སོགས་ཉམས་ཞིབ་བྱ་རྒྱུའི་ལས་དོན་སྐོར་སྟན་སེང་ཞུས་པར་བཀའ་སློབ་ཕེབས་དོན། རང་རིགས་སེར་སྐྱ་ཆབ་སྲིད་བཙོན་ཟུར་ཁག་ལ་འདྲི་བརྩད་གནང་འོས་ཕེབས་པ་བཞིན་ཡོང་མོ་ད་ལམ་ཆེད་དུ་རྒྱ་གར་དུ་འབྱོར་བ་ཡིན་གཤིས། རྒྱ་ཆེའི་སེར་སྐྱ་ཕོ་མོ་རྣམས་ནས་ཨུན་ཇིན་ལགས་སུ་དེ་བསྡུན་གྱི་ཉམས་ཞིབ་འདྲི་བརྩད་དང་ལེན་གྱིས་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཉམས་བཞེས་སྐོར་ལྷུག་པར་གསུང་སྟེ་རོགས་ཕན་རྒྱབ་སྐྱོར་གང་ལེགས་གནང་སྐྱོང་ཡོང་བ་དང་ཆབས་ཅིག དྲི་ལན་གནང་སྐབས་རང་གི་ཉམས་བཞེས་དང་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ཁོ་ན་མིན་པ་སྔོན་བྱོན་སྐྱེས་ཆེན་དམ་པའི་རྣམ་ཐར་སོགས་ཀྱང་གསུང་འཕྲུས་དགོངས་འཇགས་འཚལ།

རྒྱབ་གཉེར་ངོས་སྦྱོར་ཚུལ་དུ་དགའ་ལྡན་ཕོ་བྲང་ཡིག་ཚང་ནས་ཕྱི་ལོ་༢༠༡༢ ཕྱི་ཟླ་༣ ཚེས་༡༧ བཟང་པོར།

ཕྱག།

Office of H.H. The Dalai Lama

Thekchen Choeling, Mcleod Ganj 176219, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India.
Tel: 0091-1892-221343 / 221210 Fax: 0091-1892-221813 E-mail: ohhdl@dalailama.com www.dalailama.com

Local Ethics Approval

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: Exploring the Relationship between Spiritual Crisis and Psychological Transformation among Tibetan Buddhists

Names of Investigator: Unjyn Park
Names of Supervisors: Elliot Cohen, Prof. Gavin Fairbairn, Stephen Sayers

Contact Details for Further Information

; Unjyn Park, u.park@leedsmet.ac.uk Tel) +44 (0) 113 812 9325, +44 0770 821 9840
Elliot Cohen, E.Cohen@leedsmet.ac.uk Tel) +44 (0) 113 812 1844

Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If anything is not clear to you or you would like more information, please ask.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present research is to explore and understand the phenomenon of “spiritual crisis” in the context of Tibetan Buddhism and culture. Here “spiritual crisis” refers to experience that involves psychological distress on one hand, yet heralds a process of transformation. The aims are (1) to acquire first-hand narratives of spiritual crisis, (2) to learn the insider view of such experiences, (3) to understand how these may be related to social relations. With this understanding, (4) the study will attempt to review and broaden the discourse of spiritual crisis in transpersonal psychology.

What will I be asked to do in the study?

If you are interested in discussing this topic with the researcher, or if you are willing to tell her your own experience of spiritual crisis or awakening and its relation to Tibetan Buddhism, we’ll have an interview for an hour or so—depending on how you and she feel. In case the researcher needs to get further opinion/story, she will ask you if making another appointment is okay with you either at the end of the interview or by telephone/e-mail.

If you are a westerner who practices Tibetan Buddhism: Our interview topic will be (1) your story of becoming a Buddhist, (2) your experience of spiritual crisis and/or what you think of it, (3) how it relates to your becoming a Buddhist, or (4) if you were already a Buddhist at the time, how Buddhism related to your experience.

If you are a native Tibetan Buddhist: You will be shown a few stories. Please tell the researcher anything that you are reminded of: your own (or someone else’s) experience or what you think about them. Or you may be asked several questions regarding spirituality, Buddhism and Tibetan culture.

The interview is to learn about your experience, feelings and thoughts. Please feel free to tell us whatever comes to your mind. It will be most valued and appreciated.

How will the information be recorded and analysed?

The interview will be recorded by a recording device which will be placed between the researcher and you. The researcher will make notes during the interview. After the interview is over, the recording will be transcribed. The information you give will be cited and put together with other information as needed in the process of the research for finding a general theme, common structure, and unique elements. However, the information will not be analysed with any coding program or statistic program because the nature of the research is about exploring—learning—your experiences and views.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

There aren’t any advantages or disadvantages in a financial or social sense. However, you may find this participation an opportunity to talk about your experience to someone who is genuinely interested to listen. Hopefully, you will find exploring the subject and your experience interesting and rewarding, worthy of your valuable time.

How will my information be used?

Your information will be collated together with all the participants' data. These results will then be put together and used to describe a certain element/ characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism in a thesis for the award of PhD degree and in papers for publication in academic journals.

Will my information be confidential?

Your name and any other personal information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be used solely for the management of the research project.

Will my comments and views be anonymous?

To secure your anonymity and protect your privacy, all the necessary measures will be taken: any information that can reveal your identity will not be included in any writing.
If you, however, wish your name to be revealed in the dissertation and academic papers, you can so inform the researcher.

What happens if I want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any stage (by the end of May 2012), without giving a reason.
If you are withdrawing after having one interview with a further appointment, please tell the researcher whether she can use the information you gave in the first interview or you wish all your data to be destroyed completely.

If I am not happy, to whom do I complain?

Firstly discuss it with the researcher and see if there's anything that can be corrected to your satisfaction. If you feel uncomfortable to discuss it with her, you can contact Elliot Cohen, the supervisor of the project at Leeds Metropolitan University.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Exploring the relationship between Spiritual Crisis and Psychological Transformation among Tibetan Buddhists

Name of Investigator: Unjyn Park
University: Leeds Metropolitan University
Supervisors: Elliot Cohen, Prof. Gavin Fairbairn, Stephen Sayers

Please tick all boxes and sign twice, where indicated below:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and understand what is expected of me……………………………………. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at anytime before the end of May 2012 ……………………………………….. ☐

I give my consent for my opinions to be used in the study as data and understand my data will be confidential …………………………………. ☐

I confirm that I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study and if asked, my questions were answered adequately and to my full satisfaction…………………………………………………………………….…. ☐

Your name (use block capitals) …………………………………

Your signature ………………………………… Date ………………..

Data Protection Act

I understand that data collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on computer and that any files containing information about me will be made anonymous.

I agree to Leeds Metropolitan University recording and processing this information about my experiences and that this information will be used by for dissertation projects, and may be presented in other academic forums (e.g., academic journals, at conferences, or in teaching). I understand that information will be used only for these purposes and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act.

Your signature ……………………………………. Date ……………………

Thank you for this information. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire to be distributed to the students and teachers at:

COLLEGE FOR HIGHER TIBETAN STUDIES
P.O. Sarah, Dharamsala 176 215
District Kangra, H.P.
India

Hello. My name is Unjyn Park and I am undertaking research for a PhD at Leeds Metropolitan University, U.K. This questionnaire is for a survey to collect information about Tibetan cultural understanding of spiritual development as part of my PhD research. Thank you very much for participating in and helping me with my research.

I'm giving you a few descriptions of people. Please read, think, and answer each question without reading all the descriptions and questions through first. If you find you'd like to talk about someone you've already described earlier you can do so and add new elements accordingly. If you cannot think of anyone or anything, please write so and go to the next description.

Description A.

Can you think of any person who suits the description below? This could be someone you have read about or heard about. It may be someone you know. It might even be yourself. If you know a lot of people like this, please write "many" and then tell me a little about the person who comes into your head first. If you cannot think of anyone who fits the description, please say "none."

> Someone who has achieved a positive outcome from his/her spiritual practice. (The outcome doesn't necessarily have to be some great achievement.)

Some questions

1. Please tell me about this person. For example, their name and age, whether they are a man or a woman, whether they have a faith (e.g. Buddhism, Bon, etc.) and how you know about them. (In case of a living person, you don't need to write the name of the person if you don't want to reveal it or if you think that person wouldn't like the idea of being named here.)

2. What kind of positive outcome did they obtain?

3. Did they undergo any difficulty on their way to obtaining this positive outcome? Yes/No

If you said “yes” to question 3.

4. Please describe what kind of difficulty it was.

5. Do you think the difficulty that person went through had any role or meaning in his/her acquiring a positive outcome?

If you said “No” to question 3,

6. Do you think that doing some spiritual practice was somehow related to the fact that the person didn’t undergo any difficulty in life?

Description B.

Now, please think about anyone you know or have heard of, who fits this description.

A person who is spiritually highly developed.

If you can think of a lot of people like this, please write 'many' and then tell me a little about the person who comes into your head first.

Some questions

1. Please tell me about this person. For example, their name and age, whether they are a man or a woman, whether they have a faith (e.g. Buddhism, Bon, etc.) and how you know about them.

2. What about this person makes you think that he or she is spiritually developed?

2-1. Is it your own judgement? Yes/No

If not, from what sources did you get the impression that this person is spiritually developed?

3. Do you know if this person underwent any difficulties during their life, such as any kind of illness, unhappy event? If so, please describe it briefly. For example, what happened, how long it lasted, and how it was resolved.

4. Do you think this event has any meaning in terms of his or her being spiritually developed?

5. Could you briefly describe (at least as much as you know) what particular spiritual practice he or she had undertaken?

Description C.

Now, please think about anyone you know or have heard of, who fits this description.

> Someone who may be spiritually highly developed but is seriously doubted by many others.

If you know a lot of people like this, please write 'many' and then tell me a little about the person who comes into your head first.

Some questions

1. Please tell me about this person. For example, their name and age, whether they are a man or a woman, whether they have a faith (e.g. Buddhism, Bon, etc.) and how you know about them.

2. What about this person makes you think that he or she could be spiritually developed?

5)

2-1. Is it your own judgement? Yes/No

If not, from what sources did you get the impression that this person could be spiritually developed?

3. Why do you think people don't believe that this person is spiritually developed? What is their reason?

4. Do the people who doubt this person form any kind of a group? Do you think they share any common characteristic amongst themselves?

Description D.

Next, think about:

A person who has experienced a life changing event—whether it be a dramatic event or a quiet but insightful moment. After this event, he or she learned some spiritual lesson or became spiritually motivated.

Some questions

1. Please tell me about this person. For example, their name and age, whether they are a man or a woman, whether they have a faith (e.g. Buddhism, Bon, etc.) and how you know about them.

2. What is it that happened? Please describe the event in a few sentences.

3. How do you think the event changed that person? Please give some examples.

4. Do you think that kind of event would have the same sort of influence on most people? [Do you think other people would undergo a similar change if they experienced the same kind of event?

5. If you said “no” to question 4, what do you think was special about this person or what did this person do to produce such a change?

Description E.

Lastly, think about:

> There is someone who has been practicing the spiritual path with sincerity and diligence. Perhaps he or she is very pious, takes great happiness from the spiritual life and hardly seems to do any wrong. All of a sudden, this person loses meaning of what he/she has been doing.
>
> Or, some event or change happens to this person that the person and/or others start to doubt whether he/she has been doing the right thing all this time.

Some questions

1. Please tell me about this person. For example, their name and age, whether they are a man or a woman, whether they have a faith (e.g. Buddhism, Bon, etc.) and how you know about them.

(Has this person already been mentioned above? If so, please say so and add anything more you’d like to say about him or her.)

2. Could you describe this event briefly?

3. Did he or she get over the crisis in the end?

4. Do you know how they got over it?

5. Did he or she seek advice from others? If so, from whom did they get it? Do you know what kind of advice was given?

6. Did the person get support from others? Please describe what kind of support came from whom.

7. Did this event bring some change in this person's lifestyle?

Some questions for reviewing this questionnaire

1. What is the first thought comes to your mind after answering all the questions above? (Anything is okay.)

2. Did you find any of the questions difficult to understand? Which ones?

3. Did you find any of the questions difficult/impossible to answer? Which ones/why?

4. Did you find any of the questions interesting to think about or discuss? Which ones/why?

About you:

- Sex: M/F
- Age:
- Ordained/ Lay person
- Nationality: Tibetan from Tibet/ Tibetan born in India/ Non-Tibetan

  (If you are not a Tibetan, please specify your nationality.)

- To which group do you feel you belong? : Geluk; Kagyu; Nyingma; Sakya; Bon; None.
- Where are you based at the moment? : in India; in the West.

Contact Details (Optional)

As I will be carrying out further studies in the near future, it may be helpful for me to contact you again. If you would be willing to consider participating in a future study or if you might be able to put me in contact with someone described in the answers you gave, please give your contact details below.

Your contact details will be filed separately from the questionnaire and will not be revealed to anyone.

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Email address:

Thank you very much for your help and participation.

Unjyn Park

Example of Transcript of Interviews: Lobzur-la

Tsepak: (greetings and explaining the purpose of visit)

Lobzur-la: I don't have much to say.

…

T: Before the Chinese came to Tibet, occupied Tibet, he was an umdze, a chant master at Namgyal Monastery. But then Tibet was occupied. And then the Chinese caught him and put him in prison.

U: So Gen-la didn't do anything. Just because he was a chant master, just because of that he was put into prison immediately? He didn't do anything like……

T: (in Tibetan) She is asking if the Chinese put you in prison because you were an umdze. You did not do anything special to protest against the Chinese? The reason for your arrest was that you were an umdze?

L: (Tib) Yes……..

U: So this was 1959.

T: A date, 12th.

U: Which month he can't remember.

T: Yeah.

L:…….

T: Basically what he was saying is that he was at Norbulingka when His Holiness actually left Tibet. He doesn't remember the exact date. Maybe it was the 10th or something like that. He's talking about the Tibetan date I think. His Holiness left Tibet on the 17th of March or something like that, if I remember it correctly. When he was in Norbulingka as an umdze, a chant master, there were also people (sung sang) who supported him with the chanting, people, monks who had a good voice as well as people who played musical instruments, and those who made ritual cake offerings (torma). So there were about thirteen including himself as umdze. They had to go wherever His Holiness went. If His Holiness went to Norbulingka, they had to go to Norbulingka too. If He went to the Potala, they had to go to the Potala too. So when the Chinese invaded, when this happened, H. H. left Tibet they were all at Norbulingka. After H.H. left, they moved back to the Potala. He says maybe the date was the 10th. By the 11th they were in the Potala. Then he says maybe it was the 12th, the next day. What happened was, he was actually asked to go with H.H., to go after him with provisions. Clothes, food, all these things, I think. That's what I asked him *thugu*. He was assigned to take provisions to H.H. But then, what happened was that on the actual day he couldn't leave. The Chinese started bombarding the Potala. I think, he says that night, he went over to, it's kind of you know, an estate of Namgyal Monastery in Phenpo. The place's name is Tsangrocen. So he went there. He ran away from the Chinese. Before then, they caught him and asked questions like what he was actually doing in Namgyal Monastery. He said he was the umdze. They tried to catch him but he fled to Phenpo Tsangrocen.

T: (Tib) then, at Phenpo Tsangrocen what happened?

L: Yes, yes…………

T: (interrupting L) (Tib) I need to translate for her every now and then.

U: (Tib) Since I can't understand, he needs to interpret for me.

T: (Tib) Since she can't understand Tibetan fully, I should translate for her. If you tell me a lot at once, I find it difficult to remember everything.

L: (Tib) right, right. (Everyone laughs.)

T: So what he was saying is, he went to Phenpo Tsangrocen. And then, I think, on the hills of Tsangrocen, there was also a hermitage of Namgyal Monastery. So people used to go there for meditation retreats. He went there. Twelve of them actually. They were all preparing to leave Tibet to follow H.H. But then, in the meantime, what happened was, there was someone called Du-ngel-la. Du-ngel-la is like someone who takes care of the treasury and the estate, like a cashier or treasurer. So, Du-ngel-la somehow got a letter from the Chinese. In the letter it said "From now on nobody will be questioned about what they have done or be harassed. So people can go back to where they were before, whichever position they were in, and resume doing whatever it was they used to do. Nothing will be done to them." So this letter with this message arrived at the hermitage. Because of that, Du-ngel-la told them to come down. And then they came from their hermitage to Tsangrocen. And this thought of staying, still nobody really was thinking of staying in Tibet but rather of following H.H. But when they reached Tsangrocen, when they came down the hill, they saw Chinese soldiers coming. Actually they were surrounded. So, they really, he felt so much fear inside. It was avery difficult time. And some people in that village, the local people suggested they not give in to the Chinese. And there was a discussion between the monks and the people. And Lobzur-la said "It's better to surrender to Chinese."

U: Is that what he called 'dung ngel'?

T: That time, yeah. There was so much suffering, fear and difficulty. So the local people were saying that they should not give in to the Chinese. Their plan was (0.20.48) to have these monks, including Lobzu la himself and others also, hidden under stacks of hay. You know after harvests, they have this hay piled up to use for cattle. So the local people were going to hide the monks and not let the Chinese see them. Then they saw the Chinese coming. People said "Don't flee. Just hide in the hay. Then Lobzur-la felt so much suffering and fear, he thought he should just give in to the Chinese. Finally they gave into the Chinese. After that, from Phenpo the Chinese said they would take them to Lhasa. To go to Lhasa from Phenpo, you have to cross a river by a boat made of yak hide. So they were put into a boat. While they were being put into the boat, the Chinese there asked somebody who this person was indicating Lobzur-la. And then the person who actually responded to the questions said, pointing at him, "He has nothing to do with politics. He is only somebody who takes care of rituals, nothing to do with politics." Of course Lobzur-la is saying "We had no idea what politics were." Still this was what that person said. And they put him onto a boat.

U: So he was put in jail because he was in charge of rituals?

T: I think what he was saying is basically that they asked about him in particular because he was better dressed, in better robes, you know. That's why they picked him up.

T: (to Lobzur-la) Lobzur-la, she is asking if you were imprisoned because you were an umdze.

L: (23.37) ………………… (37.14)

T: [You may have heard of this book. Kungo Tharing, and Ama Tharing. Ama Tharing-la wrote a book, *Daughter of Tibet*. Her autobiography. If you have seen that book, the author married Kungo Tharing. Kungo Tharing was one of the officials who came to India with H.H. Anyway, their estate was used as a prison.] They were taken to Tharing, Zhiga. But when they reached there, it was full. There was no space for any more inmates. So from there they were taken to Donkhar, just below Drepung Monastery. So together with them from Phenpo, there were forty or fifty monks. There was also a Cidung(??) the person who interprets for them. Cidung was also caught. He keeps giving names.

(to Lobzu la) What was cidung's name?

L: Makji Tsangcen Loga. Tsangcenloga called himself Tsangrocen. He was also like a commander, makji.

T: So they were taken to Donkhar near Drepung Monastery. Makji was actually put on some kind of throne. The rest of them were just pushed in. there was no real space for everybody. It was just crowded and they were kept there. The next day they were taken to a big ground, and made to stand. They were surrounded by Chinese soldiers with guns. Some had machine guns pointed at them. So everybody was saying things like "Oh, we are going to die." He said to them, 'we don't have to fear anything.' Of course everybody was suffering so much, with so much fear inside. He said, “It’s our karma. We can do nothing.” So that’s what he said. And then while they were standing there, surrounded by soldiers, some Chinese soldiers brought in other higher, maybe generals and officials, military officials.

U: Chinese officials?

T: Chinese. Together with them, the Tibetan Makji came. Then the Chinese military person visited them like he was on a tour. After that somehow, they were not killed, they were taken to Norbulingka. At Norbulingka...he was going through stories like, where the monks lived, where the guards for H.H. lived. There was also another place called *mag-gar*, like a garrison, a military garrison. So there were more soldiers. But then the guards for Norbulinka were sent from there. So when they reached Norbulinka, where they were taken to was this Tsenselinka. From the 7th to the 14th Dalai Lama, when each of them came to Norbulinka, they had their own one built.

U: Private quarters?

T: Quarters, yeah. Tsenselingka was the private quarters of the 13th Dalai Lama. So when they were taken there, Lobzu la saw many monks and high lamas there. He saw the Umdze chenmo of Drepung Monastery, also of Gomang Monastery, also the umdze from K****ling, and many aristocrats were there in tents. The fifteen of them from Phenpo were put in a separate tent. So he could see the others. The reason he is saying all this is because, in the beginning when they tried to interrogate him about what he had been doing since age eight, he didn’t tell them he was an umdze as such. He just said he had this job. Serving but not having this title, you know. Doing the ritual but not as the master. But because he saw all these other umdzes, you know, kept in the tents, he thought, maybe it’s better to say honestly that he was the umdze for Namgyal Monastery. That’s when he actually admitted he was the umdze. So this was the background story about how he told them he was the umdze. After they were put in this tent, they were taken to (44.22) the mag-gar, somewhere below Norbulinka.

U: Mag-gar is Tibetan?

T: Mag-gar is Tibetan. Mag for military, gar for house. There was a house for guards. You can call it military barracks or garrison. Where military training happens. So they were taken there. Before they were taken there, they were taken to Tsenselingka. There they were put into tents with other monks and lamas, and then, they were made to work, ploughing and other agricultural work. Originally he was told that they would be kept there for three days and, after that, would be released. They were kept there for, he’s not very sure, clear about how long. But maybe about a month. From there they were taken to the mag-gar. In the mag-gar, they were made to do manual labour, including digging ground, removing stones and agricultural work, all these things. This place was called Kyutsangrithrö (retreat).

L: (46.00--50.26)

T: Basically they were made to work on a stretch of field. Ploughing and growing various crops, and they were also made to do various types of training. After that they were taken to a site where the Chinese were building a hydro-electric powerstation. In order to build a powerstation, they actually used many other lay people, also many nomads (a bohor). So he saw a lot of lay people who had also come to work there. He says he cannot remember the name of this power station.

U: It’s okay. I don’t really need the name. Maybe you can tell him that I will find it from books.

T: (laughing) *Re, re*. (translating for L)

L: Lokkhang di…..(52.08)

T: Basically he moved from the prison to this construction site of the power station. But he cannot remember how long he stayed there. He spent quite a long time there.

U: Maybe a few years?

T: It seems quite a few years.

L: (He has been fidgeting his fingers slowly, trembling all this time, and suddenly lifts his head.) Na jinphak! (Na chenphak?? Na jenphak??)

T: Na jinPhak? Na jinPhak.

L: The power station's name is Na jinPhak.

U: I thought he was getting tired. So he was trying to remember this name.

L: (56.05)

T: At Na jinphak, they had to build this dam. Previously Aufschneider, the German man, Heinrich Harrer's friend, you know *Seven Years in Tibet*?

U: Ah, the expedition people.

T: Yeah, originally they had an electiric power station built. That was expanded by the Chinese. They went further, actually to cut the hills and make a dam. It was so huge that they had to carry lots of rocks. After they'd been working there for quite a long time, they were moved to Norbulingka. Where, as he said earlier, the bodyguards for H.H. were trained (Norbulingka'i mag-gar), they were moved there.

L: (53.47—01.02.35)

T: I thought he was earlier saying that he took care of dead bodies. I thought he was saying something like that. I wanted to be sure what he was saying. Now he's speaking clearly about what he was doing in Drapchi. Drapchi is a military base. Within that base, there is also a prison. Drapchi prison. Probably what he was saying is that from Norbulingka he was moved to Drapchi. While in Drapchi, what he had to was, you know, to gather fuel, wood for the fire for making food for prisoners like that. Also there were other things to be done inside the prison. Lots of things.

T asks L how many years he stayed in Drapchi.

L says he can't remember that kind of thing. (→1.08.09)

T: Actually I'm trying to get it clear but he diverted. (what did he try to get clear???) Earlier he was talking about when he was in Drapchi prison. Before he went there, they were taken to Zhol, where there was some kind of court. He was given a fourteen-year sentence. And there, they had to say what crime they had committed. The court decided that "you had done this, and this, this, this." Based on that, the verdict was that he had to stay in prison for fourteen years. I was trying to check whether this was before he went to Drapchi or after, but he diverted. Anyway, whether he was given the verdict at Drapchi (1.10.09) or before he arrived at Drapchi, after that he was sent to Nyingthi in Kongpo region. And there they had to cut trees.

U: So Nyingthi was the prison.

T: Nyingthi was also a prison. They also had to do lots of labour. He says they had to cut trees with water. Cutting trees with water.

U: Uhh?

T: Ha, ha, ha.

U: Some Chinese mystical tree cutting method!

T asks L about this, how they used water for cutting trees.

L explains.

T: Actually the Chinese were building some kind of tunnel. There was a machine that sliced logs into planks using water. That's what's called chuzhag.

T asks what else he did.

T: They also had a vegetable farm, to grow vegetables to make food for inmates.

U: So this is the last prison, Nyingthi?

L:………..

T: So Nyingthi was the last prison. He was actually saying that, after he was released from the prison, that time was the worst for him. Because inside the prison, they were all inmates so they couldn't criticise one another. You know calling and giving all these names. Because everybody was the same – prisoners. Once they were released, he felt worse, because when he was out in public, they had some kind of hat they had to wear. Zhamoyöpa. You are kind of blacklisted. Like putting on a hat, calling the name.

U: He didn’t have to actually wear a hat?

T: That’s the term they used.

T: A Tibetan idom, Zhamoyöpa?

(Dividing recording file)

T asks L whether they actually wore a hat.

T: Actually inside the prison in Nyingthi, they actually put on some kind of hat made of paper, like a cone shape. Tibetans call it tsenzha. The cone-shaped paper hat was put on your head. Then it was announced ‘he’s a zhamoyodpa’. So ‘zhamoyöpa’ was considered like a word meaning criminal. Inside the prison, you had to wear a zhamo when you were forced to acknowledge that you had committed this and this crime. Each time you said “I committed this,” you hit the gong you’d been holding. They did that in prison, but after being released one didn’t actually wear the hat. [This was said referring to his experience in Nyingthi. Lobzur-la is saying that the Chinese actually announced that from today this person is one with a hat. Once that’s done, everybody in town, in Lhasa, knows that this person is one with a hat. So because of that, after his release from prison, now everybody in Lhasa is aware that he has a hat. Because of that people had a certain attitude towards him. It was worse than being in the prison. What happens is that even though you are out of prison, you don’t get good food. You are given, you have to do, this and that job now, you know, cleaning toilets with your bare hands, and also sweeping the streets, or whatever else they ask you to do. Or like going out to a, there’s a patch of land where you can cut, you know, bundles of grass. Not wood, some kind of grass growing, which you cut in bundles, which is used for fuel in Lhasa. So the government asks you to do various jobs. But they don’t pay you anything, no payment. So if you want to feed yourself, you really have to find some job privately so you can get some payment. But it was difficult because everybody is actually judging you that you were some kind of… That’s why he was saying it was more difficult outside the prison than inside the prison.

U: I see.

T: So he told the story you know about how difficult it was after he was released from prison. Inside the prison at least he was fed something. Then he had difficulty outside. After 1979, when the first Tibetan delegation from here, Dharamsala, was sent by the Tibetan government in exile and H.H. to Tibet, as part of that group, there was Lobsang Samten-la, the elder brother of H.H. Lobsang Samten-la had been in [the] past, before 1959, had had this title, Chikyapkhyenpo. Also he knew the monks in Namgyal monastery. So he knew the old system. So he knew Lobsur-la also. After Lobsang Samten-la came to Tibet and visited different sections of the populace…somehow the Chinese had been brainwashing people too much. People didn’t have much idea who this person had been before. They just believed whatever the Chinese said. That’s why when you are called somebody ‘with a hat’ there’s some kind of judgement on you. Then Lobsang Samten-la came and visited different people. After that people were made aware what the situation was like, not like what the Chinese said. So people’s judgment of him changed. So after then, it was much easier. He’s saying H.H. usually says Lobzur-la had been in prison nineteen or twenty years. But he says it’s more than that.

T: (in T) Did you stay in prison longer than 19 or 20 years?

L: It is more than that.

T: So, it was worse outside the prison when he was amongst ordinary people. In prison if you do your job and others do their jobs, you don’t criticise them and they don’t criticise you. Outside, everything that was difficult to do for other people, you are made to do worse things actually. One of the examples is that, because you have a hat on you, you have no social status, and you are told to respect even a small kid. And other people, because they already have some prejudice against you, you can’t say anything to them. Because if you do, they would easily criticise you. You can’t do much. But inside the prison, if anyone says something to you, you can also tell them you have this. But outside you cannot do this. Another example of the difficulties of that period is that, even during the winter when the water freezes, sometimes dams also freeze. Then the flow of water is stopped. What they ask you to do is actually to go into the river naked. Imagine how cold it is in winter time. Because the water is also frozen, you have to try to unblock the way, the frozen bit. You have to go into the water, the tunnel whatever it is, and try to open whatever is blocked. That kind of thing had to be done by someone with a hat. They never paid him for that. After doing what they asked you to do, you had to find a job to actually feed yourself.

T to L: It was 1979 when Lobsang Samten-la came.

L: Was it? Oh.

U: Was this work ordered by Chinese officials or Tibetans?

T translates the question and L starts to explain.

T: Actually what was done was, the orders came from Tibetans. Of course, there may have been Chinese officials behind them. They don't come forward, you know. Tibetans tell you to do this, do that. Everything's ordered by them. There is always another person with 'zhamoyöpa'. Where you stay, in your room, there is somebody who keeps an eye on you. They check whatever you do. If you have to go somewhere, even to buy tsampa, you need to report to this person, "I'm going there to buy tsampa" or if you are going to do some work at somebody's place, you have to tell them. You are going there to do this job. So wherever you go you have to report to this person and get permission from him. You can't go without telling this person. So there was neither freedom nor rights at all. That's why he is saying it was worse than prison.

U: How many years did he live in Lhasa like that before he decided to come here?

T translates and L answers. (L's answer does not follow the question exactly. Once he gives a brief answer to my question he resumes his story following his own plot. So T reorganises L's answer for me.)

T: He's not clear about how long he was in Lhasa. While he was in Lhasa, of course he worked for the government whenever he was asked to do something. In the meantime, he also found time to work for people so that he could earn something for his livelihood. So he was cutting these bundles of hardened grass sort of thing. After sometime, he was sent to this nearby village called Drip near Lhasa. In Drip there was Tsechokling Monastery. So in that area, not in the monastery, the government was thinking of making some vegetable garden there. A huge piece of land was there. And they needed somebody to look after the land. Nobody who was not with a hat wanted to do it. You know the saying "my parents are not fine," "my family's not fine." Finally they found Lobzur-la. The person in charge of that area in Lhasa (Lhasa has four divisions—north, east, south, and west) found him and sent him there. Nobody else wanted to go so he had to go. He was living there alone. Around that time, the mission of the elder brother of H.H. came to Tibet. One day Lobzur-la got a message from Lobsang Samten-la, saying that Lobsang Samten la was going to visit him one day. Lobzur la says, if Lobsang Samten-la somehow managed to visit him in Drip, he would find Lobzur-la in rags. No proper clothes, he was just wearing very tattered clothes. But somehow Lobsang Samten-la couldn't visit him in Drip. Then another message came saying that "I have to leave tomorrow. So just come over to see me." So Lobzur la met one of his relatives and prepared some tea to offer, and visited him. He was with Kungo Takpun??, the official, Taklha Phuntsok Tashi. I think Tak-ring is some kind of military rank. (T checks this point with L) So they met and talked with each other. At the end they offered him a piece of meat, and also radish cut into cubes. So Lobzur-la says he enjoyed it. (L was laughing and making a big gesture with his right arm.) In Tibetan custom, you exchange gifts. So they gave him, in fact they found that Lobzur-la was in very very poor health. So they offered, but they said this was an exchange, you take this meat. So that was really good, he says. And then, about coming to India, of course, in those days, you had to have some connection here. Because Lobsang Samten la and Kungo Takphun-la visited him, they reported to H.H. about Lobzur-la's health. So the monastery considered sending somebody to Tibet to take care of him. Then he learned about this and sent a message here not to send anybody.

Because if the monastery sent someone there, and the Chinese found out about it, then he would be in trouble. He didn't want any trouble for himself or for others. Then some arrangements were made for him by his relatives. Also one of his students, got permission for him to come here from Tibet, Lobzur-la had a student in the monastery here. This student Kelsang sent an invitation as a relative. Because of that letter, his application was made with the help from his relatives. The relatives of course had to pay a bribe. (laughing)

U: I was thinking how strange to get official permission to come here with an invitation from someone in Namgyal Monastery.

T: Kelsang-la here wrote the invitation as his 'relative'. So somehow he got permission. As soon as he got permission, his relatives and students told him "now you must leave as quickly as possible because the Chinese might say something else next".

U: That was about 1980?

T asks L.

L: The year I came to India….there it is written on the photo that Yizhin Norbu gave me.

T: 1984 January the second. (reporting to L and checking whether the date is according to the Western calendar, L confirms it.) So he got that picture with H.H.'s signature on it.

U: Then just a few questions. He reported to H.H… But first, he did a lot of manual labour in prison, but did not receive a lot of beatings, and stuff?

T---L.

T: [L becomes suddenly lively and smiles and laughs softly during this speech.] He was not actually beaten in prison. Because whatever work he was assigned to do, he did sincerely with effort. So they didn't have any reason to beat him. But the Chinese said, "Although you do your work really well, deep down you still hold something that you are not actually disclosing to us. What is that? Tell us." And his response was "My intention is not to leave this prison. But if I did want to leave then in order to do that, I have to criticise somebody, pinpoint somebody and their mistakes. By doing so I could gain some favours from other prisoners or the prison guards. And then I could be released. I'm not doing that. Because, first of all, I don't know these people from before so I have no way to criticise them. I don't know them. I do not want to say something against them just to get out. This is my feeling. I always think of helping people, prison inmates, not harming anybody. This is what is deep in my heart and nothing else." That's how he responded.

U: Then, he reported to Gyalwa Rinpoche that the most difficult thing was the fear of losing compassion or patience towards these prison gurards?

T…….L…….

T: Actually he means losing compassion towards the inmates. That's what he's saying now. You know in prison what the Chinese were looking for is for you to bring out some fault in other inmates. If you can do that, if you can say "this person is such and such, doing this and that," any kind of bad things you can pinpoint. If you can do that, sometimes what happens is that you are released from prison. You are doing the right thing, what they want you to do. If you do that, Lobzur-la thought, of course, you might be released. But the other person in prison still suffers more because you have pointed out his mistakes, and crimes. So the other person suffers more. Because of that, he always felt it was not right to criticise anyone. If you do that, you are losing compassion for that person because you make the person suffer more. Then the Chinese also want you to do those things. If you criticize a fellow inmate then they also lose compassion towards that person. In a way you also lose compassion towards the prison guards as well, making them do something that is not right. In that way, it's like you are losing compassion for everybody around you including the prison guards. He says now, "Look, this is what human beings survive on, love and compassion towards others. If you have love, everyone is happy. If you don't have love, no one is happy. You know that's what he meant when he talked about losing compassion. So in prison, everybody called Lobzur-la "Azhangla"

U: Uncle.

T: Yeah, Uncle. Because everybody loved him. He cared about others. He gave us one example. Dhungkhor, one dhungkhor, dung khor is the name of an official rank in the Tibetan government system. So there was this one dung khor.

(T and L checking about this official's name.)

T: So, his son was in prison. Also what happened was, he actually brought up lots of crimes, even like he disclosed a lot of things about his father. So because of that the father was put in prison and the son was released. That kind of thing, the Chinese made people criticise even their own parents. If you did that, you were released. Lobzur-la's intention was never to do that.

(L sits back against the wall, looking somewhat content and detached at the same time)

U: How about losing all these lamas including H.H., and not being able to practice? Was it difficult? Was he ever upset about it?

T…L…

T: All these experiences we have had are from our karma. What I underwent is from the karma that I had accumulated. Once accumulated, karma is not purified simply. If I had not accumulated the kind of karma, I would not have been put into prison, would I? No, I wouldn't have struggled in prison otherwise. Because I have accumulated the karma, I had such experiences. One needs to think that way.

[And regarding what happened to H.H. and other Tibetan Lamas] It is something very sad, depressing. You have no one to rely on spiritually. I think I must have had very bad karma.

U: Yes. Especially he couldn't practice.

T…L…

T: The minute your lips move, they say oh, he's saying some kind of prayer. Even if you are wearing a mask, they would see some kind of movement, and suspect you are saying a prayer. So there's no freedom, no right to make any kind of prayers, not even 'om ma ni pad me hum'. The situation was like that. They were absolutely black (nakpo nakkyang).

L…………….Without prompting, L goes on as soon as T pauses.

T: So, all they were thinking of was destroying religion. You know, in Tibet, we have *shingpar*, these wooden blocks carved for printing *pechas*. Those were used to carry manure, because they are religious objects.

U: Was it very painful for him?

T….L……

T: It used to occur to him 'Without pecha, how can we now learn anything or practice? They really are thoroughly destroying cho". Very sad to see those things used to carry manure, or used for fire wood.

U: Did he sometimes have dreams, dreams of Lamas, something that kept him going? Some kind of signs?

T…..L……..(49.45)

(L's answer doesn't fit the question so T asks again. But the whole answer sounds interesting.)

T: [edited to suit L's original speech] He said that basically when the Chinese brought in these wooden blocks for scriptures, and used them for carrying manure and fuel, the only thing he could think of was "this is really sad, their only intention is to destroy dharma." Then as this thought came to him, he also felt like it strengthened his faith in lamas and the teaching. This is where the lamas' teachings are preserved. And they are destroying it. It gave him pain but also made him stronger and kept his faith going on. That's what he says. So he, in the past, before H.H. left, when he was at Namgyal Monastery, during those times, he had participated in long life puja offerings for H.H., making mandala offerings, things like that. Again and again he had dreams of those times and those things. He was exhausted and upset in prison, but he would have such dreams again and again. Even in prison, he had dreams of those things.

U: Before he went to prison, what kind of education had he had?

T…L…

T: Whatever Namgyal monastery had them do, he had to do that. Memorising different prayers, in order to qualify for admission you have to memorise and recite prayers by heart, then you have to memorise all these different rituals, even training in playing different kinds of horns and trumpets, all these things. Basically what he was saying is that whatever the tradition had been at Namgyal monastery, they had to follow it. In the past Namgyal monastery didn't include Buddhist philosophy as part of its study curriculum. After coming into exile, H.H. established a philosophy course. Before that, all they did was just to keep to tradition.

U: I think it's lunch time, isn't it.

U and T thank L. (the end)

L: Nothing was clear.

U: No, I really learned a lot. Thank you.

2nd Interview: 26th March 2012

U/T: I'd like to know what age you were when you became a monk. Before you became an umzde what kind of education did you have, and how long did it last?

L/T: From the time he was very small, he learned reading at Sera, although he didn't live in the monastery. He became a novice monk (Getshul) at around 8 or 9 years old. His uncle (Azhang), Tupten Zopa, was already in Namgyal Datshang. So he took Lobzur-la to Namgyal. Lobzur-la became a monk. At that time, during the 13th Dalai Lama's reign, he took ordination from the 13th Dalai Lama himself. A novice monks' initiation. And there was a rule that the 13th Dalai Lama had, that whoever wished to join Namgyal monastery must first be a member of one of the three big monasteries—Sera, Ganden, and Drepung. Unless they have first been admitted to one of these three, they can't join Namgyal Datshang. After that, he was not an official member of Namgyal. In order to be accepted there, you should first memorise texts for prayers for all the deitys (Mahakala, Dharmaraja, Palden Lhamo, etc), as well as their practices. He did that. He recited all these prayers in front of the 13th Dalai Lama. But in order to become an official member of Namgyal, on top of being able to read and memorise texts including the three Tantra cycles of Chakrasambara, Guhyasamaja and Kalachakra, you had to reach a certain physical height. Only at 15 could one qualify by that criteria. But still, he was short and poorly built for his age. Up until then, they had all these ritual dances to learn. At one point one of the monks who played the Deer resigned. Then Lobzur-la had to fill in, maybe he was 13 or 14 at the time. Once he had memorised these rituals, then he recited them in front of the 13th Dalai Lama. So, before he before his formal admission, he had finished all his studies and had taken on the role of mask dancer playing the baby deer. He had been given his seat in the prayer hall as well.

T:..

Because he did all his memorising quickly and could recite the prayers in front of the 13th Dalai Lama, he was admitted before he reached 15 even though he would be tall enough only when he reached 15. An exception was made for him because he had already memorised all these prayers for the four deities. He went to the prayer sessions. Like other monks, he joined in serving tea during prayer sessions. There were 21 monks doing this job out of a total of 175 monks in the monastery. Of course, not everyone would come to the prayer sessions. But those who serve tea should definitely be there.

(U checking whether L has a problem with his eyes. Since L keeps rubbing his eyes, looking tired.)

[Above is his story from 8 to 14]

So, he had been admitted into the monastery. They held a Cham dance every year. Every year he played the baby deer. You are not promoted until a new monk comes to take your place. Then, for a while he was a horn blower—those long thin ones. As for serving tea, you can be exempted from this,., only when there are 21 people below you. For five years he was a horn-blower. Before this there were one or two years when he didn't have any responsibilities. Then he was promoted to chant leader (skadbsangba), assistant to the umdze. The duties of a kesangwa do not include playing music, they also have to serve teas. Becoming a kesangwa and a musician can be done at the same time, though. After 5 years, he became a karpon. You know mandala dances during big initiations? He was promoted to be a karpon — the leader of the mandala dance which was performed at various times of the year. After that he was made umdze.

U: When he was young, was he hot tempered? What kind of personality did he have?

L/T: He was not hot tempered. He was a rather humble person. If you were not humble, people would not like you. You would not be allowed to stay in the monastery. He played with others, but, if you fought you get expelled. He was a humble one. People liked him.

U: Was it your choice to become a monk?

L: Becoming a monk was not really my choice. I had some relatives who were monks. So my parents placed me with one of them.

U: When ordinary people read those texts and prayers for each Yidam, they need to receive wang and lung. Does it mean he was given all the wang and lung required to have access to the texts in order to read and memorise them?

L/T: At first, when he was memorising the prayers of the Tantric deities, he received wang from Ling Rinpoche and other lamas [collectively]. From time to time these initiations were given. When you are part of the monastery, however, whether you have received wang or not, you can't keep quiet during the prayer sessions, as all others are moving their lips. There are some parts of the prayers that are forbidden for those who have not done the retreat for that particular practice or received the initiation. Still you can't keep quiet. You have to go along with the assembly. There are some cases where people who have not done the initiation for the retreats are not entitled to read the texts. Even in those cases, you can't keep quiet, and you go along with the rest. But except for those cases, you were supposed to recite all the time.

U: Sometimes, when people are given initiations by H.H., they have dreams. Does he remember any dream or unusual feeling he may have had?

(T asks the question and L smiles.)

L/T: On those occasions, as a result of the bagchag (imprints from the past) each of us has, one may have a good or a bad dream. Whatever it is, it's due to one's bagchag. So there is nothing joyous or depressing about dreams.

T asks again whether L has had any dream. U laughs. L looks away and laughs loudly.

L: Of course, you have all sorts of dreams, whether during wang or on any other day. There's no need to be emotional about dreams. Good dreams are only dreams. Dreams during wang and dreams on any other nights are all merely dreams. (T: He is dismissing us. U nodding and smiling) They are all unreal.

U/T: This kind of thing is rather important for the research.

L/T: I had dreams during initiations such as meeting the Dalai Lama, or being in an assembly of monks and receiving initiations. But that's because I had been to prayer sessions. There is nothing to be excited about these. His Holiness says that even if you have a dream of being in an assembly of monks, it is not necessarily a good dream if the monks' robes are pale or faded. Others could be good, could be bad. Anyway, they are nothing to be excited about. I had nothing special. When times are good, you are with your lama, you go to prayer all the time, then because of those imprints from daily life, you can have these dreams when you are told to check your dreams. Also, when times are bad, as when nothing good is happening, then accordingly you have bad dreams. It's mostly from the imprints from your daily life.

U: Then when he was in prison, he had more of the bad sort of dreams?

T: He's stating things in a very general way, indicating you know…

L/T: Yes, he did have. When he was in the prison labour camp, he dreamed of having to go to work. Even today, he has dreams of the labour camp. He sometimes has dreams of having to work to earn his living as he had to do earlier in his life.

U: But earlier, I asked him whether he had dreams about lamas and Buddhas while in prison camp. How did he feel after those dreams? Did he have any kind of feelings or did he just think of *tongpanyi*?

L/T: Yes, he felt very happy because those dreams gave him a hope. Tibet is the country of Cenrezig. A petal of Cenrezig's lotus fell on Tibet. When he had those dreams, he felt like he was being looked after, blessed by Cenrezig, and H.H. When he had these dreams he felt that way. The accumulated karma varies according to each individual. The results fall to each accordingly. As he must have accumulated the corresponding karma to get into prison, he was put into prison. Not everyone was sent to prison. Only those who had the karma for this went [to prison]. If he had had the karma to be killed there, then he would have been killed there.

(This questions was not really comprehensible for L.)

Interview 3: 10-05-2012

U/T: H.H. says that when he asked you about the difficulty you had in prison, you said to him that the danger in prison was the risk of losing compassion (*nyingje*) toward the Chinese. Is that your thought or was there really an occasion when you felt you were going to lose *nyingje*?

L/T: When some child criticised his parents, his parents were sent to prison. Then the child was released. That kind of things happened in those days. They were asked to criticise the other inmates in order to get out of prison ourselves. So the purpose behind the Chinese making them criticize their fellow inmates, relatives, parents, and friends was that they could uncover others' faults and the person doing the criticizing could be released. He felt that it wasn't right to make trouble for somebody else just to get yourself get out of prison. Our daily prayer is "may all sentient beings be happy and free from sufferings." You are not thinking of the happiness of a few people, of freedom from suffering for a few relatives. The prayer is actually about all sentient beings. This is the daily prayer he had been saying when I was in prison, facing those challenges. He really felt uncomfortable when the Chinese asked him to criticise others. If he criticised somebody, then it pleased the Chinese, which he didn't want to do. When the Chinese are pleased, you are released. They are asking you to do something which is not right.

U: He did not get beaten up or maltreated in any other way for not criticising others?

T: He didn't say anything about that. The reason he worried about the danger of losing compassion towards the Chinese and other inmates is because of the daily wish you make for all sentient beings to be happy and to be free from suffering. And if you pleased the Chinese by criticising somebody, then you are also letting them create negative karma for themselves. Because you are giving them the opportunity to create negative karma, your compassion is an empty word. Your prayer is made up of empty words (khatongpa). Your prayer is for the happiness of all sentient beings. And when you are facing these challenges, if you criticise your fellow inmates to please the Chinese, actually you are making them create negative karma. Even if they don't suffer from the result of this in this life, they will suffer from it some other time. They will have to suffer the consequences. He felt that way.

U: In some case, when people refused to criticise, they were beaten up by others. I heard in Drapchi it happened. So he did not face this kind of thing?

T/L: It didn’t happen to him. Because he really did whatever work he was given very obediently. They said that on the surface he was good. Because of that, when the time for criticising arrived, the guards said to him, “You work really fine. But there is one fault inside you, which is that you don’t criticise any other inmates. That’s not good. You should criticize people.” Then his response was “I don’t see any fault in other people.” He had only love for other beings. That way he felt he was fulfilling his prayers not to harm anybody. [Repeating the child-parents story] [by doing such things] He says we accumulate karma, don’t we. Of course, you don’t have to respect the Law of Causality. If, as the Chinese think, there is no karma, then there are no past and future lives. Then perhaps you can criticise somebody, and enjoy getting released from the prison. But that’s not the case. We have to suffer the consequences of the karma we have created. Teachers say that we accumulate karma, don’t they? If you’re not careful of your karma, then there’s no chance of acquiring happiness or Buddhahood. If you don’t create any negative karma and keep continuing with your practice, you are actually heading towards the goal, enlightenment. If you create negative karma, you have to suffer the consequences again and again. If you don’t engage in this kind of thing, you are actually on the path to enlightenment.

(U says she’s asked all she wanted to ask and thanks L & T.)

L/T: All the lamas say “Don’t create negative karma (sdig pa), create positive ones instead. So that’s what we need to do. But what the Chinese wanted you to do in prison was to create negative karma.

U: Then, would you say that those twenty years of prison life were actually beneficial to you?

L/T: They was beneficial. When one is put in prison, you wonder why, don’t you? On the one hand, he was put in prison because of his past karma. You have your own illness of mind, don’t you? That’s called ‘kyon’. In prison, there were so many chances to create more negative karma by criticising others. As the Chinese blessed you for doing that, you were at risk of being influenced by them, the dear blessing of the Chinese (khongtshobyinlabdjodpa). But what he tried to do was not to criticise others. As he didn’t criticise others, he could find himself happy. He felt no animosity towards others. That way, his own illness of mind (semsgyinatsha) was being cured.

(The remainder of the interview is about the consent form. His name is Tubten Chokde.)
Namgyal Dratshang Dorje Lobponzurpa: Vajra Master of Namgyal Monastery

Gen Jangchup

-Form: lectures on Atisha'sThe Lamp for the Path of Bodhicitta

The first class is fully transcribed except for last minutes which are answers to questions from a Tibetan young man whom Jangchup wanted to be present in the tuitions. Agreed with Elliot that transcribing everything is not necessary. Decided only to keep the relevant personal account transcribed.

Recording 1: 19 April 2012

-Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes

0.00-- 3.50 outlining the topics of the text
3.50—29.16 Atisha's life: about his practice, what a great teacher he was, how he came to Tibet and composed this particular text
In this account, the earlier part (until 7.20) where Atisha has a barche around the time he acquired the siddhis is noteworthy. Atisha has a barche and soon after that, GPT says gods and masters inspired him to awaken bodhicitta. GPT does not pay attention to the barche and fleetingly mentions it. Following is the translation from 3.50-7.20.
Atisha was such a knowledgeable person as H.H. these days. He became rather proud and believed there was no one who understood Dharma better than he did. To conter his conceit, many lamas and deities offered him various profound texts of tantra practice. Then he understood all of them without any other's help. So he became a greatmaster of tantra and acquired clairvoyance and other supernatural abilities. At that time he had some kind of **barche(5.29)**. Around that time it occurred to him "I should one pointedly practice, relying on trantric methods, to achieve enlightenment. His teacher came from one month's trip away in a second using his supernatural ability and said, Clairvoyance and seeing gods and buddhas are nothing compared to awakening bodhicitta in your own mental continuum for the sake of benefit of all sentient beings. So, Atisha was already a great person but all these gods and masters inspired him to awaken Jangchubsem. Then he made a firm determination. Whatever happens, I will practice only on jangchubsem. He went to Bodhgaya and started practicing to awaken jangchubsem. One day Chenrezic appeared and praised him, "Son of noble breed, well done, well done. You understood what the enlightenment of all the buddhas in three times is about. You penetrated the

mind of all Buddhas."(7.14) after that, Atisha always gave his disciples advice to develop bodhicitta (7.20).

29.16-- three kinds of people.

People are grouped in three (31.30)—those with small capacity, middle capacity, and large capacity.

32.06 If we make an example of a journey to Delhi from here. Let's say there are three people, one who has Delhi in mind as his destination, the next who would go only till Chandigarh, and the last who aims only to reach lower Dharamsala from here. Then the road from McLeod Ganj from Dhasho is common to all three. Then this 'small person's path' is a common step that is shared by middle and great persons. From Dhasho to Chandigarh is common only between middle and great persons. And from Chandigarh to Delhi is only trodden by great person. Like that, small person's practice (such as seeing the negative aspects of samsara) is common to all-whether one's goal is enlightenment(practice such as generating compassion, loving kindness) or liberation (practice such as understanding four noble truth, etc.)33.50

There are two kinds of small person. Pleasure of samsara—pleasure of this life and pleasure of next life. If one aims to have a better birth and conditions in next life, that is called small person of dharma. If one is interested in the wealth and other pleasures of this life then, that is called small person of non dharma. If one thinks that next life will be also suffering. It doesn't matter whether I will be born as human or celestial being. I need a fundamental happiness (dewa). This is called middle person. If one merely aims to achieve liberation, he wouldn't be enlightened. One, however, who achieves enlightenment would anyway acquire liberation as by-product. One who wants liberation will get better birth naturally. One who wants better birth will naturally have happiness in this life. It doesn't mean these people will become rich at all. It is possible for some to become famous but that's not the meaning of it. The happiness is about the peace in one's mind (rang gisemgizhide di). In whatever situation, one can stay calm and relaxed (36.42). But if one's goal is being happy in this life and puts effort into it, it hardly comes. Yet it naturally comes if one's goal is at happier next life.

39.30--- thosjunggisherab—understanding from what one read and heard, "this may be...it seems to be…Occasionally the thought may arise but it will be momentary.

samjunggisherab—after thinking about it oneself, coming to "Indeed, it is…." When one seriously investigate whether next life exist or not, one would be relaxed. But the wisdom of thought level would not fully influence one's behaviours. For example, if you have anger about something, read about the cause and mechanism of anger. Think about it for

ten minutes in the morning, again after lunch and evening. It won't bring any change in a few times. You will however notice change after several days.
gomjunggisherab—fundamental change comes from this. 42.40
44.10-: I used to be good at studies until age twenty four. These days I've forgotton most texts. So no need to talk about these days. Those days I've tried myself that method I mentioned earlier. Once some one harmed me a few times (nod pa ke—exactly what kind of harm or hurting behaviour 'kho' did was not said). About this I had an argument with my elder brother. Then when I was going somewhere, I saw him coming from the other way. Then I couldn't keep walking on that road anymore. Of course, that person wouldn't harm me just then. But since I was cowardly, I couldn't go straight ahead and went another way. That time I understood what fear is, how it feels. (45.16—45.21 ?????) Then I thought 'this is anger' then I started to think about it 15 minutes each in the morning, afternoon, and evening. After three or four days, I bumped into him again. This time I could walk ahead on my way. But I wasn't able to talk to him. So I kept on thinking another three or four days. Then I met him and could stay near him a long time. [In the monastery] we used to go to have tea at nine in the morning, and three in the afternoon. Then I was bound to see him there. So this time I could go there for tea and stay with him in the same place, even talk with him. Yet deep in my mind there was some kind of discomfort. I was smiling but the smile was not coming from inside. Another several days I thought about it. Then I saw him. This time I was unusually happy, no uncomfortable feeling about him at all. On my way down back to my place, I found the latrine and the gutter so beautiful. They didn't look the usual place. I was overjoyed. [He is laughing so much then suddenly regains composure.] like that, if one thinks, that brings change. 47.02 Those days I didn't really practice meditation. I was studying Buddhist logics. You know, if you make a mistake while debating in front of many others, it's really embarrassing. So, I guess one thinks really hard. It makes one's thinking faculty(rig pa) very sharp and focused…. And its brings benefit to oneself directly(49.00). as an example, several years ago, HH had some stomach problem in Bodhgaya. [2002 January] Doctors who examined him said it would have hurt a lot. Perhaps HH stayed calm because he was so good at meditation. Later, however, HH said that He saw very poor people through car window on his way to the hospital. Then it occurred to him "I am being looked after like this by all these people. Who will look after them when they are ill?" This thought brought about deep compassion towards them. After that, his pain was much reduced. Like that, positive thought immediately brings about benefit to oneself. 50.20

I heard that there was a great practitioner in Kham. It was around 1960 or 61. Those days children accused parents, students had to accuse their teachers. Then this practitioner was beaten by people for a couple of hours each day. You know it's called 'tamzing', wearing hats. Then later around 1990 the lama was still alive. Gradually practicing dharma was allowed then. You see, now he is restored as lama again. There are all these people who used to beat him. Many people felt uncomfortable. Having understood this situation, the lama said during his teaching one day. "Many of you had to beat me before. There is no need to feel bad about it at all. I don't feel bad now, and I didn't feel bad before either. I was given the best opportunity to practice at that time. I feel great pleasure that you offered me such a wonderful opportunity. What I mean is, when it was announced that there will be beating the next day, I would wait thinking all this beating will help me to develop patience which is essential for achieving enlightenment. I never saw the faces who were beating me. It had the danger of arousing resentment towards them. So I kept my face down. When beating was all done and everyone was going back, I prayed that I would achieve the essence of tathagathagarbhas through this, and they would achieve the same. Every beating, I repeated this practice. In my life time, best practice was done at that time. Therefore there is no need at all for any of you to feel uncomfortable. 52.55 You see not only he escaped the risk of being unhappy, he had great pleasure and the opportunity for practice.

There was someone called "Gen Lamrimpa" in Tibet. While he was in prison, it was not allowed to do any kind of practice. Yet he kept his robes. More importantly he kept his practice in his mind continuously. The life quality was obviously very low in prison. Food was very sparse as well. Nevertheless he would each time leave a spoonful of tsampa aside. Some people would fight over who's got more. Then he would say "You don't need to fight over it. Anyone who was given less can take from me." Then everyone would be happy. Later he said that he had the best opportunity of generosity in prison. The point of generosity practice is the intention to give and to help. If you are giving a little while you have plenty, you won't practice much of that. But if you are giving when you have so little, you end up practicing it a lot. So he was full of joy. 55.00 One young man in Amdo was given death penalty. On the morning he was taken to shooting ground, he told people who were looking at him with sadness and worry. "Don't worry. I used to be a guy who knows only fooling around, drinking all day. Here I recited 100,000 times of every mantra I could remember. I feel great! Stay well. I really had a good time." 56.25

If you see the next life as real, your perspective on life becomes wider. A situation in this life turns smaller. If there are no past life and next life in one's mind, whether they really exist or not, this life grows larger in one’s mind. Then one ends up being swallowed by the concerns of money, etc and pursue pleasure(de wa) not the real happiness (zhi de). This kind of happiness(dekyi) does not make your mind relaxed. If you get one difficulty, the whole life seems to be difficult. If you think previous and next life, and see others having difficulty, you won’t be overwhelmed with your own problem. They have a place to place their hope. Let’s say if I have 10,000 rupees and you have a few hundred thousand rupees. We both carry 10,000 rupees each on the way and lose them. Then I’ll be in trouble since that’s all that I have. But for you, it hardly matters. You’ve got other money left. All the troubles of this life still come. You will be hungry, short of money, or sick but that’s merely a little part of the whole experience. 59.10

So if you don’t practice compassion and loving kindness, you see only yourself in your perspective. you see people who say “there is no one like me who had this much suffering.” But this is not reality, it’s only in your head. having abandoned the Buddha and teachers, you cry and feel that you are all alone in the whole world. If you don’t think about benefiting others, you yourself become small. You should always carefully examine where your thoughts head for, whether they head for the next life or this life only. 01.02.45 for example, when I was ten, I was away from my parents to go to school. I had some difficulty at the time. No need to recount each difficulty, anyway I had some difficulty.

Lesson 2: 23rd April

[Without text and exegesis]

40’38’’ …………..I was the youngest child of nine. My parents were fairly old by the time I was born. I was sent to my eldest sister’s house in the city for school. The sister would give food only to her own children, but not to me. At that time I got some physical illness. When I was nine, my brother came to see me. He was already studying in a big monastery. When he saw me how I was living there, he asked me if I wanted to come with him. I said yes.

Later, whenever I remembered those days, I couldn’t stop tears even when I thought I was not upset, well into my twenties…..Then I lost my endurance for those difficulties. The disturbed mind at the time caused srog lung (Life wind) illness and my body became weak. That time, at my sister’s, I had hatred (khondzin), or dislike. “They are not being nice to me!” This kind of dislike arose so strong until I reached age 15. Whenever I happened to talk about that time, I would shed tears without meaning to. I would feel embarrassed but still tears would swell up. It was that strong. Then around 17, I was learning about Jangchubsem in Prajnaparamita class. During the class, I learned that all the sentient beings were once my mother in one of my numerous past lives. When I gave a thought to it, that helped me to get rid of that upset feelings. Well, there was a little bit left. Later when I thought about it, I found that they had given me the biggest favour. If they'd, you see, been so nice to me, it wouldn't have occurred to my elder brother in the first place, to take me away from there and to help me become a monk. On top of that, I wouldn't have said 'yes' to my elder brother. Whether I understood Janchubsem and wisdom of emptiness, I had a little feeling or faith by then that they were something really important and profound. Seeing His Holiness, attending some teachings given by Him, and having the opportunity to study in the monastic college, I found all that so great. It seemed to be enough, whether it really was or not. I felt I was given enough. If they had been affectionate to me, it would have never happened. (He is guffawing by now.)

On one hand, my elder brother wouldn't have bothered with me. On the other hand, it is unlikely that I would have wanted to leave with him. So it almost seems to me that they introduced me to the Dharma. If a Buddha blesses and leads someone to the Dharma, it would be difficult to lead so directly. Thinking this way, they were unbelievably good to me. Here, the only difference is with my perspective. What they did remains the same. I hated them a lot before and there is what they did. Now I find them of great kindness and there is exactly the same of it. I think all acts are like that—they all have a benefit and other side. So what matters is how one make use of that act, how one sees that act. There is no point of thinking that he was bad to me. Whatever conditions (rkyen) you get, it is possible to turn them to be positive ones for you. The other way, you could be unhappy wit whatever conditions you get. There is no way of saying a situation is good or bad definitely. It's easier to see that way. When we are angry with someone, we feel that that person brought about this anger. I used to say that [s]he gave me 'life wind' illness. It all depends on how you see the situation and what you do with it. is also possible. Some times it turns out to bring a bad result when others were favourable to you. If you see it this way, one's own enemy is the biggest teacher for him in practicing Dharma. The enemy is giving the opportunity to practice patience paramita! Without them, how can you practice it, ever? You think you give things to beggars. Yet they are actually offering to you generosity paramita just then and there. If someone teaches you Dharma, he's giving it to you. Yet whether you take it is up to you. If you do not keep the virtuous wish and take Dharma, well, you don't take that fortune (so nam). If the teacher gives you teaching but you don't apply it in your mind, then you haven't taken it. Then, think about all sentient beings and Jangchubsem. Every and each of them are giving compassion and loving kindness to us. If you don't practice it, then you are losing to accumulate that fortune. Your enemies, beggars, and anyone who tempts you to break your vows are giving you enlightenment itself. After all, each paramita is like money that you pay for enlightenment with. Then why are we not enlightened? Because we didn't take them. Instead we take anger, criticism, and all other upset feelings. I think that practice means to lean to take the right thing in each situation.

Recording 3: 28th April 2012

Duration: 1.29.31

- Beginning of the lecture is transcribed because the theme particularly sets the scene for his account.

Whatever you do, you should always keep a good motivation for it, that through that activity you will achieve enlightenment.
0'0"- the motivation for an activity turns the action into virtuous one(dgeba). 10.46 Especially it's not necessary to make a positive karmic link with those who awakened Bodhicitta in their mindstream. Harming them still would cause them to raise their compassion, and to pray, for those who harmed them. "With this link with me, may he get benifitted!" And the benefit does come to the person. (mapping the spiritual path) 5'15 Little ones cannot think about the matters for tomorrow and the day after tomorrow other than those right then and there. As they grow older, they become able to think about tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and after a month. "Holidays are after a week!" They can make a plan, don't they. Then, they grow even older, they can make plans for the next year or two. Then by twenty, they can think make plans for their life. By fifty or sixty, I'll do this or I won't do this. That comes around then, doesn't it. Then in those thoughts about future, they have thoughts about becoming old, what to do or what will happen when they are aged. Once they have become eighty, ninety years old, that kind of plan does not occur to them. Even those who talk about it do not have any plans for future deep in their mind. Therefore, among Kebuchunggu, those who are a bit better, they think further ahead, what's going to happen to them after a hundred years. "After a hundred years, a person who is continued from me will be born." Based on this, in terms of this kind of thinking, we can talk about the path of Kebuchunggu. Again, having achieved happiness of next life and all that, we ask, "Is that enough, just like this? I will have to die again. There's danger of having to suffer again. If you are born again, die again, born again then die gain." Then this, not having to die, cutting off the cause of suffering. In this

way of thinking you investigate. And on this, you start to feel assured that rooting out the cause of suffering is possible. That's the beginning of the path of Kebuding.The third stage is "there are people who work to have a better next life, people who work to achieve liberation. But how can I help those who suffer. To help them, I need to be enlightened." Enlightenment is, let's say, the ability to help beings to be free from khorwa (endless rebirth). Does it really exist or not? If it does, can I achieve it or not? Having investigated it, you acquire faith in it. "I can achieve it in order to help every sentient being in the Khorwa if I make use of it when the need arises." You call this the path of Kebuchenpo.

18.35 If we say, how Buddhism comes to us in the first place, it's not like taking for granted what the Buddha said and just following it. It is first seeing what death is, what the reality is. If reality is like this, then I need to do this. From here, we can talk about the practice, the path, and its contents. We say the ground(zhi) and the path(lam), and the result. Investigating what the reality is like is the ground. It has nothing to do with nyamlen (practice). That comes in the path, which brings the fruit. Here the first question at the ground is whether we will die or not, next is whether the mental stream will be disconnected or not.

22.15 **(his story in terms of investigating whether next life exists or not)** Well, when I was about twenty…I'd become unwell before twenty one. Having got sick, I didn't stop my study and was doing every practice I was supposed to do. It was very difficult as you could see. I got high fever, and pain in my chest. 22'44", I just persisted like that. Then one day, it occurred to me what if there is no next life. Well, I became a monk when I was ten. Since then I just believed that there would be a next life. I took it for granted and never doubted. Then I started reading 'logics' at fifteen. If it's proper, logics should be read objectively. But dialectians are proud[zhedkhog, exasperated self-esteem] . They are proud of logics and their own logical stances. It's think in logics objectively. I was like that. Then it hit me "What if next life did not exist? What if it's not true that actions in one life make a difference in next life? Then, learning so hard like this is the worst ever in life." This was not influenced from outside. It was something arising from inside, from depth of my heart. After that, always in my mind, I was asking whether next life exists or not. If next life really exists, the result of that life must come from what I do in this life. If it is true, all those who never give a thought to next life are like little children. 24.06 Quite frightening for them. If there is no next life, you know there are lots of people who exert hard for that, it's okay for those who try just a bit. But there are people who have gone through hardships. They are just making fool of themselves. 24.26 So I thought that I should find out whether next life really exists or not. Then I really became so detached and objective. I abandoned all those ideas that I was a Buddhist, a Geluk member. I wanted to find out. 24.42 These days, I can't really say I'm objective. I must have grown proud [of Buddhism] a bit. But back then, I was being objective. Therefore, I ended up having to ponder whether to keep practice Buddhism or not, whether keep my monkhood or not. At one point, it occurred to me "There are lots of talks about ghosts, spirits. If those talks are true, they will be supporting the existence of next life. Some people are said to be possessed by spirits, to have met, or talked with, them. If what they contacted was indeed other consciousness, not the trick of their own mind, then it would become clear that the mind itself is not merely a trick." People in my culture don't give a second thought to ghosts. Ghosts are just assumed to be around. But I thought that I'd better investigate whether they really exist or not. When I thought like that, there were two groups of people: those who would ascribe any problem to ghosts. If they are just a little sick,they would say it's because of spirits, and have all kinds of rituals performed. But they wouldn't see a doctor. Many of those cases are fraud. Either the person makes it all up or others make it up. People who see that simply conclude that every such case is a fake. Having seen a fraud, they believe that every claim must be a lie. What happened to me was, around the time the thought occurred to me, everyone was gone to Bodhgaya. Our monastic dormitory had around eight hundred people. In the entire monastery, yet that period, there were about thirty people. I was staying at a retreat place. Around nine at night, I heard something growling from a distance. I was frightened. Then I thought that it was a great opportunity for me. What an opportunity to check out whether a ghost really exists or it's an illusion. I hurried towards the room where the sound was coming. The sound lasted a couple of minutes. But I didn't find anything in that room. It was not useful. Then once I went to see my family in Nepal. Then one bride was brought to my home. Before she arrived, we could hear her shouting outside. Her face was all red. She was wriggling in a bizarre way. My father thought she got sick from the sun and brought her in. My father had some knowledge in pulse. So he was checking her pulse. Then suddenly he jerked and stiffened. This bride became okay immediately. Surrounding people murmured that it must be a ghost. Then my father shrieked "What should I do?" in such clear Tibetan. He did know a little Tibetan but not that well or in clear pronunciation. Then I felt excited since I had not seen Tibetans for a while. Since it spoke in Tibetan, I felt as if a friend of mine had arrived. So I said, "You don't have to be upset. Tell me why you have come here. If there is something we can do for the reason why you came here, we'll be able to help you. We have no supernatural abilities. So, if you don't tell us why you came here, we can't know a thing." Then it—my father—had a deep sigh. Then it was just like a normal conversation between my father and me except for that it was in Tibetan. It said, “I don’t have any special reason. They came to Mani place (where mantras are carved into stones). So I came along. I am the protector of Mt. Pisang (a local mountain in his home in Nepal)” Then we talked about all sorts of things. Then it left. Then I thought that it was not quite right to call it illness. Illness cannot be moved to other person just by checking the patient’s pulse. None of my family members knew whether I was investigating on rebirth. They couldn’t have made it up for me. It was strange. It wasn’t enough to make me believe in rebirth, either. 30.33 My own feelings are not enough to demonstrate that they exist.

Lesson 4:

……………..

One day Gen Gyatso (his best friend who is a teacher at the monastic college IBD) arrived at my parents’ house. I told him what I had been thinking, but not quite everything. We decided to find out if these spirits and protectors are real. If they are real, at least, it proves some of the descriptions of immaterial world in the texts, wouldn’t it. So we went to stay in a cave on the hill nearby. We took some beddings, and most importantly, things to make black tea with. You’ve heard that gods takes only the offering of black tea. So we prepared tea, and put a bowl of tea between us. Then we started to recite mantras tapping the cup with a stick, calling for Tsheringma. But nothing happened and we came back the next morning.

Then about 10am, villagers brought a woman who had the eyes only showing the white parts, wriggled around. She hissed like a snake. Then she demanded to see a monk. My mother came to see me and Gen Gyatso. So we went out to the yard. Then this woman looked at me in such furious way and almost barked and hissed at the same time. I said “Who are you?” She shouted, “Tsheringma!” (He laughs a lot.) After this incident, I came to conclude that spirits do exist. But then I felt that the existence of spirits did not prove my next life.

U: Then did you start to collect some other kind of proofs?

G: Ah, yes. We could talk about it next time.

Lesson 4: 30th April.

No personal examples.

Lesson 5: 2nd May

[I arrive a bit earlier than others. Before class, we have a short chat.]

G: You asked me last time about the time I nearly died.

U: Yes, er, are you ready to talk about it?

G: Why do you want to hear about it?

U: Well, I want to know whether our suffering in our mind also has a meaning. Like the hunger Gen Lamrimpa had to endure to practice generosity, like the beatings some other man you mentioned endured, problems in mind might be something important in practicing dharma? This is my question, an important question for me. My research is about the suffering of mind, many forms of suffering. I haven't decided what kind of mental suffering is useful for practice, what aren't. Like you had doubt in your twenties, and tried to be objective, I try to be open to all possibilities. So, I am open to craziness if it ends up making the person wiser and happier. Not that I suspect you belong to this category. Someone told me about you, your doubt in the doctrine. But that person only told me that you learned something very important out of that. When I heard about it, I don't know, I just felt it was important to meet you. Er, does it sound strange?

(Janchup makes a half smile.) During class, he says he collected articles about near-death experiences, and stories of children who can remember their past life from Indian news papers.

Lesson 6: 5th May

No personal episode

Lesson 7: 8th May

37min….topic on the middle capacity, importance of reasoning.

When I was very poorly, in the end, I had to go back to my parents' house [in Nepal from the monastery in South India]. I had not found enough evidences that rebirths do happen. But I was so weak, I am not sure whether I was disappointed. Then one day I was so weak, my mother and sister thought I was about to die. My mother was wailing next to me. My sister was rubbing my arms and hands with something warm. I looked around at my mother and sister. Then, from the depth of my mind, (indicating solar plexus) some kind of happiness arose. It felt okay. It was okay. I was not afraid or worried whether there should be another life waiting for me. After that I very rapidly recovered from that critical state and went back to the monastery to resume my study.

Lesson 8: 11th May

He weeps while elaborating on the topic about the devotion to one's teacher. He mentions his first teacher used to wait for him to come back from duties. Then, the teacher would seat him across small table and teach him a text verse by verse every night.

Interesting point he makes: One needs to make a karmic link (delwa) with a bodhisattva even by throwing a stone at him. Without a karmic link between the individual and a bodhisattva or a lama, the bodhisattva cannot help him. Once there is a karmic link, the bodhisattva will wish to help you because bodhisattvas have only altruistic intentions. Buddha's disciple Mogalyana was once bitten by a dog living with a family while going his round of daily begging. Later the dog was born as a boy to that family. On his way to that family for begging, he recognised the boy as the dog, and saw that the boy would grow into someone who harms the family. He decides to take the boy and persuades his parents to make him a monk. When it was agreed, Mogalyana takes the boy and educates him until the danger of harming the family disappears. If the dog had not bitten the arahant, the arahant would not have recognised him. He would not have taken him to save from committing negative karma.

U: Are you saying the buddhas and bodhisattvas do not have the same influence on all people?

J: They have the power but the need to use the power would not arise without the link. So first you need to make a link with bodhisattvas.

48min. more examples on people who suffered in prison, but no personal examples.

Lesson 9-12.:

Only one personal examples regarding Tantric practice, 'Look. With such little sonam (accumulated good karma), I can manage to spend just about three hours on reading or studying these days. I do not have the right conditions for such practice. Pushing hard and hard to study logics in my younger days, I've got srog loong disease. Maybe you should know better how to balance your study and other things. [Earlier the point was about balancing the concentration meditation and analytical meditation.]

[Examples are taken from tantric practioners' stories. Jangchup asks us neither to record nor to make notes of the stories. Number of examples are taken from Lobsang Tenzin's biography. I did not tell him that I had already read it. Two more occasions Jangchup bursts into tears while talking about 'teachers'.]

Lunch: 22nd May

(I am making a formal offering of lunch to the monastic community of Jangchup's monastery. I also invited Jangchup and his friends for lunch to a restaurant. I bumped into him on my way to the restaurant from his monastery.)

U: Teacher, during those classes you gave, you never actually told me how you became convinced of rebirths. If you remember, you only told me how each phenomenon seemed not convincing enough.

J: (silence for a few seconds) At first you just accept. Then, you ask why. Then, again, you accept. It is like that, there's nothing special.

U: Ah, so, you didn't find any evidence?

J: (silence for a few seconds) You know, one day, I was in my room in the monastery (after coming back from my parents' home). For several days, [the Dalai Lama] was giving teachings at my monastery. I was too weak to attend. At lunch hour, some others came and said that he wanted to see me. No one had told him about me but he knew. He told me to go to a hospital and get checked up.

U: (remaining in silence) Isn't it possible that someone told him?

J: You might think so. (silent a few seconds) But that was not the first time. Once, a few years before that, I was standing amongst the crowd waiting to watch him pass. He had his car stop and motioned to me, then he asked me how old I was.

U: Ah. How old were you then?

J: Seventeen.

U: Teacher, do you feel….he recognised you from the past life?

J: (Stiff for a few seconds) I never asked him. Well…. Past life… once Denma Loche rinpoche called me from behind with a different name. Then he said that I used to be very weak in my past life as well (making a half smile).

U: Are you ever interested in pursuing any extra information on it?

J: It is not necessary to know what you did, where you lived, and who you met, like that. You need a conviction.

U: Ah, I don't have it. Even though I feel it probably exist, I feel that I don't have the right piece to make it true enough for me. But you…and the Dalai Lama……

J smiles brightly. We arrive at the restaurant. I feel rather unsure about what he means.

Interview with Nechung Kuten Thubten Ngodup

At his residence inside Nechung Monastery, Ganchen Kyishong, Dharamsala.

[Conversation on research topic, my purpose for the interview. I tell him about our previous meeting 11 years ago. Given about 40 minutes]

T: So, you want to hear about Tibetan dharma protectors' possession, what kind of feeling it is, what happens, how it happens.

U: Exactly, but focusing on your personal experience.

T: I am Nechung Kuten, medium of protector Nechung. There are three stages to become an oracle. The first is family lineage. If a family member, for example, father is an oracle, then when the father's gone, the child becomes the medium. That kind of lineage happens to lamas mostly.(we talk about lama lineages for a minute) like that, some mediums become through lineage (rgyud pa). Second manner is when someone has a special characteristic in their rtsa, lamas with expertise (tob chenpo), recognise them and train them step by step. The third kind is like Nechung. If a lama trains someone to be possessed by Nechung, Nechung wouldn't possess him. Nechung chooses with his own wisdom mind (yid shes pa). It is his own choice. When Nechung chooses one in consideration of whatever….karma, personality…whatever, then, the Dalai Lama and other lamas take time to examine the chosen candidate step by step. That way I became Nechung Kuten. There's no lineage. No one can be trained.

U: So, the Dalai Lama divined to confirm you were chosen?

T: (thinking I meant the Dalai Lama chose him by divination) No, just suddenly Nechung possessed me. From my perspective, it just all happened.

In 1984 the previous kuten passed away. We searched everywhere to see if anyone was possessed. But no one appeared. A few times, newcomers from Tibet approached claiming they were possessed by Nechung. But did not pass the exam. So for a few years there was no kuten in the monastery. Then when there was a great function with Drepung monastery, it just happened suddenly. You know when you have an electric shock, it was just like that. Then I collapsed on the floor. There was a commotion, and it was reported to the Dalai Lama. After three or four days I met him and other lamas. He asked me what kind of feelings I had, what other things happened before then. Then he said he would have it examined. It was 31st March. Then it took about five months for all the examination to be completed. Then I became Nechung Kuten. At first the Dalai Lama told me to practice Hyagriva meditation. While I practiced it, Denma Lochoe and Khamtrul Rinpoche prepared various measures of examination. Because Nechung Kuten is officially a cabinet member of Tibetan government, all the cabinet members were present when I had the first official trance.

U:How old were you about that time?

T: thirty.

U: When it was first time, it was like an electric shock. How about these days? Do you still feel that way?

T: When he arrives, it's the same in a way. But there is difference. At first it was very sudden. Now it gradually comes. Also small amount of electricity. It is less hard.

U: So the first trance was amongst all these people. What about your awareness? What happened to your awareness?

T: It was like everyone, all the sounds were receding into a distance, farther and farther. That is the same nowadays. I sometimes think it is not too different from falling asleep. But there are some physical differences. I feel that my heart beats very rapid, breath louder and bigger. I also feel my hands become much bigger. It can't be real, can it. But I feel like my hands become very big and hard. However long the protector stayed in my body – whether twenty minutes, thirty minutes, it feels like to me two or three mins. Just nodding off briefly. If it was 45 minutes to other people around me, then it would feel like 5 mins to me.

U: If you always loses your awareness, like sleeping, do you ever feel or know about the protector?

T: No not really. But when I was in Korea (he's a friend to the family of my friend in Korea), Korean shamans have some close relationship with their gods. Are they Buddhists?

U: Some of them might be personally Buddhists. But the practice is not related to Buddhism. They often feel the presence of their god around. Does that kind of thing happen to you?

T: No, other than my trance, I have no memory of relating to him. I never thought that could happen.

U: Have you ever wondered why Nechung chose you? Do you have any oracle in your family lineage?

T: None at all. My family is of a tantric lineage. For many generations, they had one child, only one son at each generation.

U: So you severed the family tradition? (We both laugh)

T: Yes, since I was young, I was told by some lamas that I should not abandon my family tradition, which was quite prestigious. But I wanted to become a monk since young age. My father was not against it and agreed I could stay at a monastery.

U: Which lineage?

T: It is called Nyang.

U: (showing surprise….as it's a very famous historic family with small population…..then he talks about his family lineage for a few minutes)

U: the tantric lineage in your family tradition, do you think it could have been related to your being chosen as medium by the god?

T gives a length story of his family lineage but off the topic.

U: Could I hear a little about your childhood?

T: When I was 6, we came to India. At that time, Tibetans were all poor. My parents were also poor. They worked on the road construction site. I helped them.

U: How old were you then?

T: Nine. I was still paid quite decently (bursts into laugh). [Description of his parents' labour]

U: Sounds like it was fun even if it was hard. Your parents sound also very nice.

T: Yes, my father walked me to monastery every morning and took me back home in the evening until I felt ready to stay in the monastery.

U: So you had a quite happy childhood in spite of moving to India. But what about just before the 'lhabab'? Did you have any different feelings or symptoms?

T: I have made an interview with the government magazine before. Have you read it?

U: Yes. I didn't want to repeat the same question but actually that part of your story is very important for my work.

T: Ah, It's exactly like that. I didn't have any problem until then. I always liked painting and I was given a duty to look after coloured objects and other things used during rituals. I also loved rituals. So until then, I don't think I had any sad, upset feelings or illness prior to my lha-bab. Even after I became the head of the monastery as the medium, I take part in various rituals and decorative projects.

U: Yes, I know. I have one Manjushri statue decorated by you.

T: (looking pleased) Do you? Um, I still think, I didn't have any problems. But certainly spontaneous possession caused much fear and anxiety.

U: Sure.

T: But that's because the spirit was trying to enter my body. Until then I was happy with my life. Having said that, I am happy with my life this way as well. Also, whatever I felt is not the point. A kuten was needed. I happened to be chosen as one. So I do my best to do the job and to help the government, to assist the Dali Lama.

U: Have you ever thought about what kind of change it brought to you personally?

T: Not sure. It’s difficult to imagine what difference there would be. I would be still living in this monastery. Not as the head, but still working as somebody who’s in charge of rituals. But the benefits I can create for the world, ah…, I can help to be created is far greater this way. That will help me as well.

[Time’s up]

Do you read German? My autobiography was published as hard cover book in Germany. If you could read, you might find something you need there.

U: Ah, do you elaborate more on your trance there? [T: Maybe…..Um…not so much more] Sadly, no German. But with the interview you made in the magazine, that will do. Thank you.

Drolma. 5th May. At Jaejung Sunim's house. 11.10am -12pm.

[Consent form…..]

U: You told me last time about your illness. Could you tell me more about it?

D: I was fourteen. It just happened quickly. I lost appetite and became quiet at first. In a few days I became very lifeless. My parents took me to a hospital. (She's from Lhasa) They could not find what was wrong with me. So they took me to a Tibetan doctor. He gave them some medicine but I threw up whatever my parents tried to get into my mouth. So, in the end, my parents, my father carried me on his back to a lama's house. This lama belongs to Nyingma [tradition].

U: Was he your family's lama?

D: No, he was famous with his healing skills and helping people with various rituals. He told my parents that I should be completely wrapped in orange cloth and have a new name. He performed a ritual but I don't really know what it was. Because my parents thought that I was going to die, they asked the lama to perform the ritual as soon as possible.

So, I heard, the next morning my father went to market and bought clothes in orange. But the kind of pure orange clothes were not easy to buy. So he brought orange fabric as well. They had me wrapped in this fabric like a baby all the while the prayer went on. A few times some water and grains were sprinkled over me. Then my new name was decided. When the ritual was all over, I looked at my mother for the first time in days. It took a few weeks to recover from the weakness. All this time I was wearing orange garment.

U: did you say it changed you a lot?

D: It did. My mother said my personality was very different from what it had been like.

U: In what way?

D: (giggles) Before that, I used to be a very shy girl. I didn't dare to speak to strangers. Even with my friends, I was usually the one who listened. But after that, I became very boyish. I started to hang out with new friends, spend time with others outside.

U: Were you ever curious what happened to you, what that illness was?

D: No, not exactly. I don't know if there are any others who get healed from illness by wearing orange clothes and having a new name. Even in Tibet, my neighbours thought it was rather unusual. But, that's what lamas do. They know and they decide. My mother…liked me as I had been before illness. She didn't really like my new outspoken, man-like behaviours.

U: haha, you must have been really like a pretty doll to her. I don't think you are particularly boy-like. But I understand, my parent didn't like me when they thought I was trying to outsmart them. So the personality change, your family think, is from your illness?

D: Yes. My father thought that the change was not bad. After I finished my high school, I found there was nothing to do. So I decided to leave.

U: You didn't consider getting a job or going to university?

D: Well, getting a job, my mother considered it. I was too restless. I wanted to leave. When I was twenty I persuaded my father to let me go with one of his friends' group to India.

U: Yes, you told me about the difficulties you faced on the way here.

D: I had a visa when I came to Nepal. So I didn't have the kind of suffering many people go through. Once I ran out of my money, I started to work as a cleaning person at a hotel. Then I worked in a cyber café, a restaurant.

U: Now you are a masseuse.

D: Two years ago, an American man taught sport massage to a group of women at the refugee centre. It was only for two weeks. But at the end of the course, he said I was very gifted. He gave me the folding massage bed which he brought from America.

U: Wow, certainly it was a good bed. I really liked that I could keep my neck straight with my head in the hole. By the way, if you found the life in India so difficult, why didn't you go back to your parents? I don't mean you should have. I left Korea eleven years ago. I myself never considered going back to settle in Korea.

D: I didn't want to go back because……if I go back, I will marry and have children and so on. I don't really want that. Living as a refugee is, you know, it is unstable. Giving massage to foreigners is my first job well paid. But it's not something that brings regular income. But things that I could not even dream of in Tibet happened here. I guess they are important for me.

U: like what?

D: I met my lama. I found one.

U: Oh. You have a lama.

D: It is *** Rinpoche. I was in Manali to stay with my friend a few days. My friend told me that a famous lama was staying in Manali for a few months. She wanted to get blessings from him. I didn't really care for it. But she insisted I come with her. When I met him, I just cried on and on in front of him. He didn't ask me why. But I felt as if he understood me. I also felt that my purpose in coming to India had been fulfilled.

Unjyn: (jokingly) You fled to India to meet him?

D: Strange, isn't it. I hadn't thought about finding a lama. But I just immediately understood that meeting him was important for me. There was no doubt that he was a very important person for me. After that day, I went to his teachings every day. I didn't come back to Dharamsala on the day I had planned to. After the teachings were over, I visited him again. He gave me instructions to start preliminary practices, and told me to come to his teachings every summer when he returns to India. U: I see. He doesn't live in Manali?

D: He has a centre in France. Normally he lives in France. I came to know some of the injis (foreigners) who are close to him. They invited me over to France to visit the centre. But this French embassy wouldn't give me the visa. They think I try to settle there. I just want to see my lama a little longer.

U: That's a shame. So, you found your lama in India. It was worth the trouble.

D: If I had not left Tibet, you know, I wouldn't have understood what the Three Jewels are about.[64] My cousin in Tibet, she still has no idea. Until I came to Dharamsala, I had called myself a Buddhist but had no idea who the Buddha was. I sometimes have a phone conversation with my cousin who lives nearby my parents' house. She has no idea what the three jewels mean, poor thing, may Great Compassion helps her. She goes to lama to get helps. But that's it. You use lamas' expertise when you want something done. After that, you have your life in the way you like.

Life is hard here, and it is hard [in Tibet] as well. I went on pilgrimage to Bodhgaya[65] twice, and was even able to invite and take my father there. This kind of fortune was not imaginable [in Tibet]. My mother could have had the same fortune and accumulate good karma only if she had accepted it.

U: Your mother didn't want to come?

D: She didn't. Maybe she still finds me like a stranger, poor lady. (with a pause and a smile) I have been going to the Saturday doctrinal classes. (hiding her mouth with her hand) The teacher Lobsang is really good. Sometimes a little difficult to follow. But these days, I've begun to understand just a little bit of what Gyalwa Rinpoche (the Dalai Lama) says during those long teachings.

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[64] The expression 'three jewels' refers to the Buddha, the Buddha's teachings, and the community of those who practice the teachings. Being a Buddhist is often defined as those who take refuge in these three jewels. As with English vocabulary of divinity such as 'God' or 'Christ', the 'three Jewels' may be sued to convey emphasis on one's claim in an argument: for example, 'By the three jewels, I never said that!'

[65] The Indian town where Gautama Siddhartha is said to have become enlightened, and thus become the Buddha, is now a major centre of pilgrimage.

U: Oh, that's fantastic. I heard, though, Gen Lobsang is very a hard teacher.

D: Yes, he never says any jokes, hardly laughs. But he is very patient with us. You know, he's familiar with teaching intelligent monks (sounding a bit rueful). He explains the meaning of prayers. He tells us about bodhisattvas, who's who, what we are supposed to think when we look at them the sacred paintings (we smile at each other)

U: What difference does it make to you? If you don't mind asking it this way again. You know, because I need our conversation for research.

D: Oh yes. You know, I feel something about life is clearer for me. I have a destination. Of course, sometimes I am exhausted with life here. But, here I can learn about choe (truth indicating Buddhism). I can also be closer to the Dalai Lama, even if I can't be near my lama. After all, they show me the same path to reach my destination.

U: Very noble. When you are exhausted with life here, that kind of thought comforts you?

D: Not always. More and more often, I have dreams of the Dalai Lama. I am amongst crowd waiting for him. Sometimes I make flower offerings to him. That kind of. Well I have my annual recharge when my lama comes back in summer.

[Interview ends by Jaejung sunim arriving from her classes. She brings food from the canteen at the monastic college. Half a joke, half seriously, Jaejung comments that sharing the 'food for intelligent monks' is auspicious. Drolma looks rather touched., Further interview cancelled because her father passed away three days later.]

Kelsang Lhamo

Interview date 17th March, at her house.

Unjyn: Ani-la (the nun helping me for interviewing Kelsang Lhamo) and I came to hear your story of how you became a Lhamo (female medium).

Kelsang Lhamo: There is nothing special to say.

U: I see. But each person would have a little different story from others, wouldn't they? I am collecting stories of individual Buddhists experience. Your life [experience] wouldn't be same as other mediums.

K: Each differs from others'.

U: Sure. That's why I want to hear your story.

[Conversation on my university, consent form….]

K: I am 80 years old. Ah, I have been a medium for many years [suddenly stands up and brings biscuits, and makes tea]

U: You came from Tibet, didn't you?

K:I was born at Burang near the border. We worked hard. I was born on the day of Guru Rinpoche's birthday (5/10) of monkey hear (1 day in every 12 years: very auspicious day). So, there were many events to see. My mother went to see some [performance] then bore me on the road. There was a lot of hardship at the time as we had little to eat and drink. After 'kundun' left, my family also left Tibet. When we arrived at Bhutan, some Bhutanese told us that Kundun[66] had reached India. When we heard this news, we were so happy. My body was relaxed. On arriving Derang (in Arunachal, India), there were many policemen. There were many nomads selling curd and dried cheese. We heard from Indian police that Kundun had arrived at the Indian border. So we were celebrating.

In Butan, it was so hot. It was so windy as well. [Traveling there] was very hard. All round it was green chilli farm. We all had headaches, so we asked those Bhutanese farmers working in the chilli field. They told us to go to Senge Jong. Six of us walked and walked up and down the hill. It was scorching hot. When we finally arrived at the monastery, there was a caretaker monk. He gave us corn tukpa[67]. I had not seen corn in Tibet. However hungry I was, I couldn't eat it. From there on, we kept traveling by begging. Some

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[66] Kundun is one of the epithets for the Dalai Lama which is used by Tibetans. Kelsang Lhamo uses 'kundun' and 'Dalai Lama' to refer to the Dalai Lama.

[67] 'Corn tukpa' probably refers to a bowl of soup made of corn meal dumplings in broth. Tibetan dumpling soup traditionally use barly flour.

Bhutanese gave my sister and her baby poison, and they died (this was a common belief among Tibetan migrants at the time that they were being given poison by unwelcoming locals). We stayed in Bhutan for three years working hard. We planned to move to India so as to follow Kundun. But, some Bhutanese told us that, in India, we would die from heat and food poison. But we wanted to join Kundun. I fell ill so much on the road but didn't die. I couldn't die before I met the Dalai Lama. We arrived at Darjeeling (for four months), then at Kulu-Manali. There we lived for ten years working as kuli[68] and other odd things. There were no houses. Yet out of Kundun's blessing, we were happy. Every single day we worked on the road. Men were given 1.75 rupee, women were given one rupee per day. It took a lot of hard toil to get that much money. Most of this wage went into buying food stuff. Grains cost money, oil cost money, let alone meat. That kind of life lasted about ten years. One day Kundun came. He had said just like this. 'Whatever money you have, don't spend it all on eating. Try to save it. Later there will come a time when you will be able to meet your parents, to meet your family and beloved ones.' When HH came we had nothing. I stayed in Darjeeling about 4 months, and in Kulu-Manali about ten years.

U: When did 'god' come (lha bab)?

K: When I was about thirty one or two._At that time, I was ill. I could not move around or meet people. In the settlement, Dun-zom Rinpoche (She refers Dudzom Rinpoche who was the first head of Nyingma group in exile. Dzongsar Khyentse's grand father) was giving a teaching inside a retreat for tantric practitioners. I went to that place like a crazy woman, throwing some clothes away.

U: Do you remember all that?

K: No, how can I? Goddess does her things. I don't have a clue what she does when she does it in me.

Interpreter: In Korea, gods stay with their mediums all the time. They eat and sleep in the same room.

K: Do they? Maybe Korean gods are stronger than Tibetan ones? (laughing out)

U: What happened when you ment Dudszom Rinpoche?

K: (ignoring the question) [After the incident of meeting Dudszom Rinpoche]I stayed in the settlement a little while working in fields. Rinpoche gave me some advice. I was ill and my husband was ill as well. Then I came to Dharamsala forty years ago. When I was in settlement I was told coming here would be beneficial for me. Kundun asked who opened [my] channels. I met Trijang Rinpoche and Ling Rinpoche. I told Trijang R I didn't want to receive god. He told me I would die otherwise. Costume was prepared for my first trance. I am so poorly these days and I cannot even stand up to perform during trance. So the goddess would not 'descend' (possess me) very often.

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[68] porter

U: Did your goddess descend first in India?

K: In Tibet I could not go to meet any rinpoche, Chinese would not allow any to get near rinpoches. In India I [and my husband] were barely meeting our needs working as porters and could not afford to visit one. My godess is Yodonma. (lhamo) Yudonma is not a bad good. She is one of 12 protectors. She is not one of those minor local gods. She is one of the goddesses who made pledge to Guru Rinpoche.

U: Yes, I've heard of her as a dharma protector.

K: Yes. So you need a full set of attire and tools such as a mirror and an arrow to perform a trance. It's not like you can summon her anytime you want and perform a grand show like some village gods. From the upper garment to the shoes, all garments must be properly prepared. I performed so many trances for Gyuto Monastery[69] so people used to call me [my goddess] 'Gyuto protector'.

U: So, how old were you at your first trance?

K: I was thirty five.

U: Before you became a Lhamo, what was it like? Were there any signals?

K: I was very ill. When the road construction was complete in one site, people moved on to another place. But I was not able to move with others because I was too weak. It took many days to catch up with others. Sometimes I would be unconscious. Or I would have no memory how time passed or what I did. I had several occasions when I nearly died. I'd gone crazy. I really went mad and I threw out all my clothes and anything we possessed. Dudzom rinpoche gave me confirmation/channel-opening. Have you ever had an audience with the kudung[70] of Dudzom Rinpoche?

U: No, I haven't.

Ani-la: I have only been at the presence of the kudung of Tijang Rinpoche.

K: I first became ill when I was 25. [Now I think] It was the goddess. It felt like the goddess was entering. Yet I did not know it was the goddess. I didn't know anyone who knew about trance or god-illness. So I just remained ill until Dudzom rinpoche gave me the initiation into the lineage of Yudonma. (pauses)

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[69] As one of the two monasteries that have monastic college for study of tantric rituals, Gyuto runs a course of higher level than that run by Gyumeh monastery.

[70][70] Kudung refers to a mummified body of a renowned master which is kept in a specially designated chapel. Normally, kudung is not worshipped in public but, similar to an alive master, is paid respected individually.

U: What kind of symptoms/signals did you have for the goddess entering your body?

K: (disregarding my question, resumes her talk) There is a lineage of this goddess. One needs to be initiated into the lineage to become confirmed.

U: I see, so it was Dudzom Rinpoche who initiated you into the lineage?

K: He … (some explanations on Dudzom Rinpoche's descendants). I was unhappy. I went to see Rinpoche and he said it was okay. Just stay. If you don't have the channels opened and [receive the god], you would die.

U: Were you ill? What happened before you met Dudzom Rinpoche?

K: A-yo, a-yo, I was so ill. For about ten years, I was very ill. Without any cure, I was left ill, and I seemed to go mad. My behaviour was so erratic. I would toothpaste. I would devour green chillis from the field. On my way to India or while I was working at road [construction site], I was ill wherever I was.

Wherever I went, I was so ill, I was not aware where I was.

U tries to ask whether K had sought to meet any other authority prior to her meeting Dudzom. While U checks the wording with Ani-la, K resumes her story.)

We were not allowed to turn mani-korlo. Even then, I had to work. After confirmation, I fell less ill.

No one around me knew what was happening.

In Orissa, wherever I was, I was ill. God made me run around. I suffered a lot. Sometimes people like me who didn't get confirmation, went mad and jumped off rocks (to kill themselves) when the gods abandoned them. The god can throw you into river. If I don't receive the god, the god would harm me.

In Orissa I had good dreams. In pilgrimage, on mountain tops, peas, large walnut tree, there was sign of Yudonma's costume. Clear dreams, very happy, roaming hills and lakes, big prayer flags, on top of hill there was a big lake. That kind of dream. Orissa and Bodhgaya are also sacred site of Yudonma (supramundane godess). I went to many sacred sites. Where I went, there were gods.

Godess does not always stay with me. These days only on the new year she comes in.

Every month Gyuto monastery called me for ritual, but it was not trance,

in front of Yudonma's shrine, in my house, I still perform monthly ritual. (Lha-rgyal-ri: that area). Normally I offer black tea everyday.

In trance, there is some pain.

Chos-‘brel-zhag. All rinpoches told me I would die if I don’t carry this out. Senior lamas still ask me to perform some trance. Some aristocrat told me Yudonma is a powerful goddess (with a story of protecting his apricot tree). I still get requests but I am so poorly I can perform trance.
(I asked her how she started divination, how she learned it, but no answer………..she kept saying that she tells people not to come if they don’t trust her.)
My life? I suffered awful lot but I helped a lot of people. If something is helpful, it is noble. that is dharma, Kundun also says so. Sa dang lam bzang.
Lha is formeless. Lha comes and goes, but I don’t remember.

During second visit, she showed the scroll-painting of Yudronma Godess. At the back, the red hand-marks of the Dalai Lama and his signature were clearly visible. However, she did not provide any more detail on ‘channel opening’ or her trance.