

ANALYSIS OF A PROCESS: CHANUBTASEL-P'IJUBTASEL¹ 2019²

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Knowledge for the Tzotzil is grounded in and constructed on one unifying category, *P'ijubtsel-Chanubtsel*. This category is [...]for Tzotzil culture foundational for the formation of the person. From this unifying category can be derived associated and interrelated subcategories [...]. Additionally, the formation of the Tzotzil person requires that each individual develop holistically in order to adequately participate in their family, community, and society.

Through *chanubtsel-p'ijubtsel* we can see values, as principles for life, that apply not only to interpersonal relations but also to relations with nature. The following testimony affirms this:

...We Tzotzil hold values concerning how we ought to live life, how to conduct ourselves before others, with nature, in ceremonies and with persons, to speak well, dialogue with, and greet others. Although we may not know people we must greet them by making way, letting them pass, and this must be done with much respect, for if we do so then they will know us through what we have been taught at home and by the community we are from, as the elders have said, because if we do not do as such, we demonstrate our contempt and we wrong our fathers and mothers by behaving as such, and this should not be so.

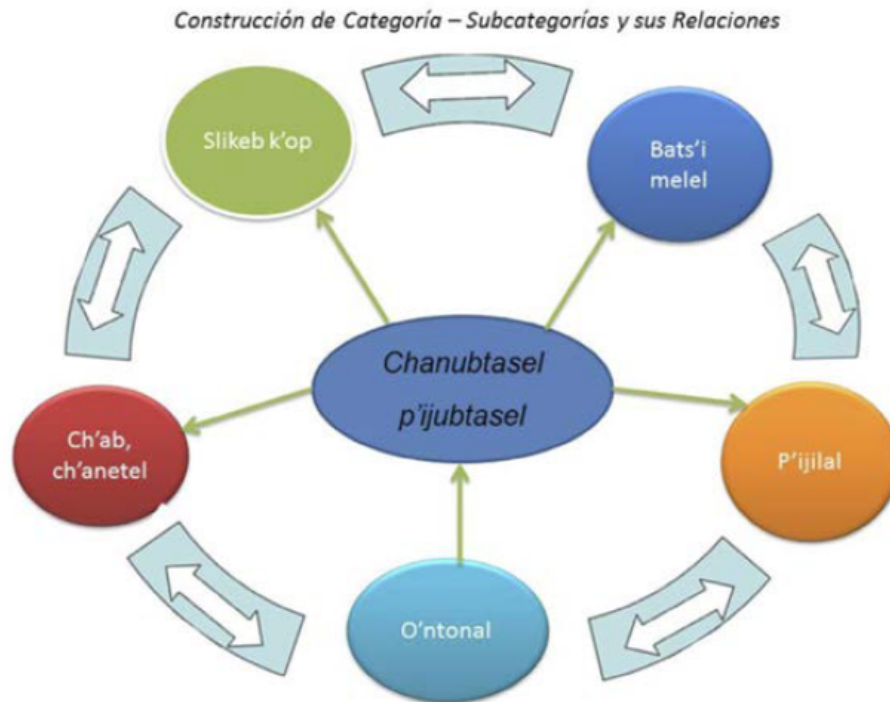
¹ The cognitive process necessary for understanding how to be human. As such, it resembles an infinite droplet that adjusts to life, the inner music that moves toward the outside, that is to say, a kind of dance of thought and the heart.

² Partial translation (pp. 69–93) of chapter four of Manuel Bolom Pale's *Chanubtsel-p'ijubtsel. Reflexiones filosóficas de los pueblos originarios*. Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2019.

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In these words we find profound values concerning life and human conduct, the importance of dialogue, of greeting, all which imply knowledge.



Fuente: Dibujo Manuel Bolom Pale

This figure represents our Indigenous thought. It illustrates the view that ethical inquiry allows us to discover a range of ways of life with different values for each person. Existence, science, and philosophy are woven in time through the word, and is related to the image it gives us, as if it were the morning light. That is the nature of the word: light cast upon the world that bestows a contextual dimension to the human being, an essence, an event, a color, a texture, a dimension and ever-changing motion. This figure represents this group of knowledges.

Language makes visible all that it names. This is why it requires the world itself as its counterpart, always waiting for the revelation of its nature through light and awareness of its condition. Without this glint of sight and sound

perceived on words in dialogue, humanity remains in darkness. The fire awakens the present tongue to shed its skin toward a clearing of moving elements, beings and visible places, where there are forests, streams, and *milpas* that surge with the thickness of language. It is a trace of daylight that shows the presence of thought and is shared from a point of view. In the words of the elders, it brings forth the absence, duration, depth, and speed of every expression scattered in the hearts of men. Perhaps the unseen seeks the light and accompanies us to a reunion around the fire with our grandparents, parents, and children, so that they will awaken a universe of perspectives.

Our Tzotzil language is such an expressive linguistic system that a single verb can be conjugated in many ways, but at times we are silent, and this silence many interpret as a sign of inferiority or ignorance. However, this silence is a manner of understanding ourselves, a manner in which our grandparents are masters of speech and of knowing how to listen.

After numerous reflections and conversations with elders, with the community that raised me, I can speak on our thought and our language. For us Tzotzil, speaking has great importance in context; living together has to do with understanding each other with words, history, orality, with knowledge and practices.

We go along creating our history with our words, creating our lives; conversation is not just an instrument for articulation, of narrating in an interlocutory way, but a way to represent our personal or collective identity. It is also an expression of something that lingers in our hearts, that goes beyond the circumstances of speech, talk, or dialogue.

Some of those conversations will allow me to mend my scattered thoughts. Conversation unites voices, gestures, and knowledge, the vision of voices, some very distant, others ignored, but incessantly building the imagined and felt face of the one with whom we speak, talk, and converse.

What is characteristic of speech in Tzotzil life is woven in thought with what is given by the collective. There exists a thread that ties words together, making possible a conversation, which is then transformed into lived experience, then into narration, which constructs a normative horizon for life. In a slightly different manner, we will place ourselves on a plane, consider issues having to do with Tzotzil thought or knowledge. This is not easy given the distance or proximity of tradition, given the identities of interlocutors. I will weave this together in the same manner as words are interwoven in conversations.

Every word has to do with our history, with time, and with the present in which we find ourselves; each word has a point of origin, a beginning, a flaring and a death, all of which are anchored in life, which is why it is necessary for it to unfold like the spiral of the snail, a symbolic representation of thought.

In Tzotzil we have three terms for snail:³ *tobtob*, mountain snail (edible); *puy*, river or sea snail (edible); and *uma'*, forest snail, the silent, reserved one (inedible). The snail becomes a concept for us that contains and exceeds the words expressed in dialogue; in our intervention, *tael bail*, it belongs to the important realities of collective life. The snail is the paradigm of symbolic thought, in which the present is still nourished by memory in order to comprehend the past; time reunite people. Through the mouth, *ti'*, of the shelled snail, whoever touches it, *tijvanej*, emits a prolonged and solemn sound that is an announcement for the collective to deliberate their problems.

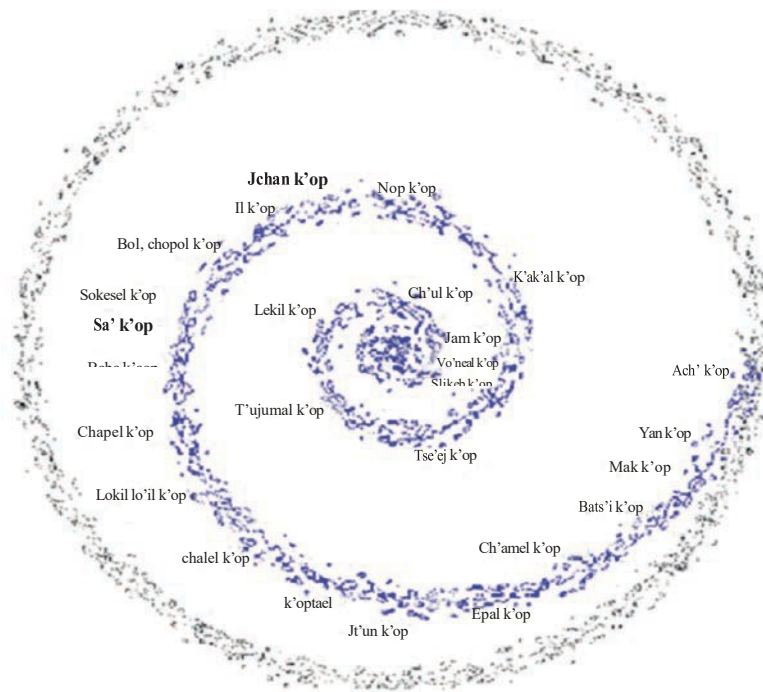
The snail convenes the communal assembly, where the collective word is awakened to give the *ejido's* or the people's response to the demands of their context. There, in this snail-like labyrinth, in the people's word there is a way of turning, *smelet*, *xcholet*, *sjoyet*[...] they form into assemblies, agreements are made, disagreements are resolved, *milel k'op*, *lajesel lo'il*, *makbel sti' k'ope*, *chukbel sti' ti k'ope*, *makbel ye ti k'ope* (further along I will say what each of these consists in). Here, the snail way of speaking is the house of being and the home it inhabits. It is to encounter the sense contained in words.

Since the time of the *totil-me'iletik* many more words were used to name them. With the passage of time many concepts were forgotten and others found, but what is most important lies in the fact that a concept reveals the purposeful passage of time.

That which is *k'op* is the fundamental material of existence and each of its expressions has adopted characteristics of the human being. It is a reflection of

³ It is an artifact, one that can be analyzed within a real context, effectively an object. But this object is part of a context of use, an artifact mediated by culture and constructed alongside time and the history of a linguistic community, because it is part of contextualized thought, and naming is an element of practice. It is constructed by the community in relation to everyday life. It is a process. In Tzotzil it is said that the snail represents a gray-haired old man or a seed, a cyclical process like the whorls of a snail shell, or the labyrinth of Xibalba which we will all enter and the end of the cycle of life. That is to say, it is death and life. It is a glimpse into two realities, of distinct forms of thinking and living. These contexts are of relevance to the organization of parallel spaces.

the construction of language and thought, the human qualities. Social interaction is the genesis of certain expressions, which social interaction constructs for itself, and carries with itself the subjective aspect of such human cultural production. Subjects are bearers of knowledge. It is a creative act in which expressions are resignified. Hence, *Jt'un k'op* refers to one who investigates or ascertains some fact, and *Jmak k'op* is the healer that can know how to limit a situation to a discursive level. To begin first with what is fundamental (which is the natural beginning point): each *k'op* has a unique virtue, which bears on how plots and arguments are to be composed; if one wants speech to be beautiful it must have heart, and one must be able to detect which parts are integral and similar between words.



The word walks along the paths of the terrain, along the trails of thought; but it is the voice and actions that weave peoples' collective dreams. The word transcends, carries a message which shares thought. The Snail is a principle of life, it calls us to respect, calls us to *melel*. That principle reminds us that the work continues, that we ought to act coherently, awaken our conscience, and strengthen our spirit. Language shows us distinct configurations of life so as to share with those around us, to comply with the cycle pre-established by and for others, the coming and going, birth and death, united in the cosmos.

For this, the *chanubtasel-p'ijubtasel* process is narrowly articulated in accordance with each individual environment; as we mature we are educated in multiple and varied forms of everyday life, in a manner such that with the passage of time our thinking is refined and we convert it into a sensitivity toward certain facts and events. They are colors, forms that we give to our existence.

In this process we mobilize observation, our hearing, memorization, reflective thought, and qualities such as sensitivity, intuition, and imagination, which permit us to create and recreate life and permit us to re-signify the cultural history bound to us, which is the ancient spirit of our culture.

In this sense we transform into recreators of cultural practices when we code and decode the ancestral message and its meanings in rites and myths that sustain the configuration and transmission of knowledge to new generations. We can say that cultural history is collected in language, at the same time that it nourishes the formative process. Legacies mark a different path to stimulate the interest of children, young people, and elders, following the logic of life that can be applied to other aspects of education.

The purpose of *chanubtasel-p'ijubtasel* is to train for life in a continuous process where education aims at fostering in the individual a desire for learning, the recognition of inherited legacies, and the desire to know more. It is a process that spurs the individual, social, moral, sensitive, intellectual, and creative growth of the subject. In the community there is always a strange and deceitful calm, which announces that something will occur at the least expected moment, from which we will run away or remain so as to challenge destiny. A calm stirring in our hearts, all together and no more; sitting around the fire is where the vague testimony of the *chanubtasel-p'ijubtasel* begins.

The episodes I record are of a familiar, daily, communal nature; they emerge from my wanderings and my mistakes. The distinction I make between family and community shapes my personal horizon. Undoubtedly, it is arbitrary and represents a high degree of subjectivity, of dark, dusty memory, of the secret life of words, where distant, unfinished dreams awaken; but in their movement, words are a bridge to express what I feel in each instant. I don't know if my memory invented what it narrates in order to master my life, or if it simply tries to prove, even to itself, that we all form, as a whole, an intertwined society, from which only shared memory endures. Memory begins where I was born. I confess that it is not at all easy to trace a path through the philosophical elements of *chanubtasel-p'ijubtasel*.

Walking the path makes the hidden, the forgotten, and the rusted visible. I remember, even when I was young, the sounds of the forest and fields, and as they reached my ears they affirmed my life and awakened my heart, sensitive to daily events. The voices of my grandfathers, grandmothers, my father and my mother, of the community, are still fresh in my mind and they continue to animate my walk.

As I grew up I became more and more integrated into the community, to the assemblies, to the meetings and gatherings; my father invited me to reflect on the sequence of events that began to impress themselves into my memory, which is somewhat scattered, and now sometimes tends to betray me. The *totil-me'iletik* taught me the good practices of being Tzotzil (I am referring to *respect*). Among the Tzotzil there are several concepts of great relevance: *p'ijjal*, *chanubtasel*, *sjam smelol*, *ch'ulel*, *ich'el ta muk'*, *sutesel*, *o'ntonal*. These were transmitted to me when they took me to the *milpa*; there was always conversation on our walk. Today there are many questions unanswered. The only thing I know is that our knowledge deserves to be revived, made visible, reflected upon, and shared. As a new generation we have the obligation to systematize our models for knowing so as to understand our surrounding reality better.

For this reason, we strive to find new forms of life and new ways to orient the logical structure of our thought, with the goal of having at our disposal a greater variety of possibilities for explaining the phenomena presented to us by Mother Nature in relation to human action. Now, we turn our sights toward the practices and thinking of Indigenous peoples. In this sense, contemporary Mayan culture has much to offer, given that its language is a complex system of creation, representation, and communication, and that its system of codes is extraordinarily important and contains great wealth.

Moreover, one can appreciate how the potentiality inherent in thought and action can come to facilitate learning. Tzotzil language, action, and thought are the tools our ancestors used and continue to use for developing the sciences and calendric systems. The teaching of our knowledge does not seek to replace Western, European, or Anglo-Saxon systems of knowledge, but offers rather a different focus on the process of learning, of that which calls for *chanubtasel-p'ijubtasel*.

And we are invited to recreate the severed thread of life, to heal the violated dignity of nature, and to recover our lost plenitude. The insurgence of these knowledges signifies that these knowledges are currently reemerging, enveloped in claims for appreciation and conservation of Indigenous wisdom

and philosophies in many areas. They emerge, yes, but with a renewed impetus. They assert themselves like fuel, as a presence gone unnoticed until, upon contact with the flames, abruptly and intensely bursts, ignited. They surprise and arrive, sometimes to frighten. They appear to some as impetuous, irrational, illogical, when not nostalgic and romantic.

We are now witness to how our knowledge burgeons and how we suddenly and secretly appear, stronger than ever, resilient and revived. Our traditions, cosmologies, cosmovisions, cosmo-sensations are new shoots from old roots. We will address some of the knowledge that allows us to redefine several concepts.⁴ Reflecting is a way, a possibility to continue rethinking our own walk in life.

Chanubtasel-p'ijubtasel is an integration. It is another method, another way of educating life. It is also collective, symbolic, mythical, political, economic, and ancestral wisdom. It is a resurgence of knowledge that allows the interpenetration of spaces and dimensions and of being in the universe. It is an inheritance of the feelings and thoughts of Tzotzil culture—these inheritances are imbricated on the lips of Tzotzil sages; it is an education by a different name.

Tobtob is a concept with primordial roots. It indicates the ground of Tzotzil Mayan thought, telling us where we have to go so as to integrate our knowings and permanently reconfigure what we know in relation to facts and language—that complex system of creation, representation, communication—and intersubjectivity.

Tobtob is passed down in the oral tradition as being consubstantial with the human being and, at the same time, indicates a model of thought, as indicated in the following.

Tobtob-Snail

The snail represents a direction, its center a beginning, a seed (*slikeb*), which our grandfathers and grandmothers employed as those who engaged in philosophical activities, that is, in constructing wisdom. These activities are not vertical nor horizontal but structured in a way that places them in a direct relation to language, to the sacred, and to dance. Some of these elements are part of everyday life, so routine that we are not aware of them, but they are there, practiced even today.

⁴ I want to clarify that not all the concepts have to be translatable to Spanish; what we are going to do are approximations. I translate them as a way to share, to build bridges, to understand the knowledge of a given space.

Tzotzil men and women have followed the laws of nature, abiding by the principles of the cosmos since the first day in which they had *ch'ulel* [inner soul]. In awe of the cosmic order, they formed ways of social life in accord with the natural order.

Our grandmothers and grandfathers maintain this special veneration of rain, wind, and earth, for in these dwell the *ojov*, 'lords of the sacred spaces.' Man forms part of the perfection of the universe, but it is a fundamental requirement that we observe and comply with the existing laws of nature, otherwise man would self-destruct together with the other beings that inhabit the earth. Understanding snail-like thought opens the doors to cosmic knowledge, and in that way we enter into contact with the force necessary for knowledge in general.

The snail is the *slikeb*, the seed, the beginning, a fullness or an emptiness (it is the one who gives birth to a fact or an idea). Then comes the placement of *jun*, 'one'; *chib*, 'two'; *oxib*, 'three', and these tend to form a circle. When you reach *lajuneb*, 'ten', you've reached the first half of the circle; then, you continue on the circle past *o'lajuneb*, 'fifteen', until you reach *balunlajuneb*, 'nineteen,' which will be the last number that you will gather in the circle. There are exactly twenty positions occupied, nineteen numbers plus the central numeral or snail.

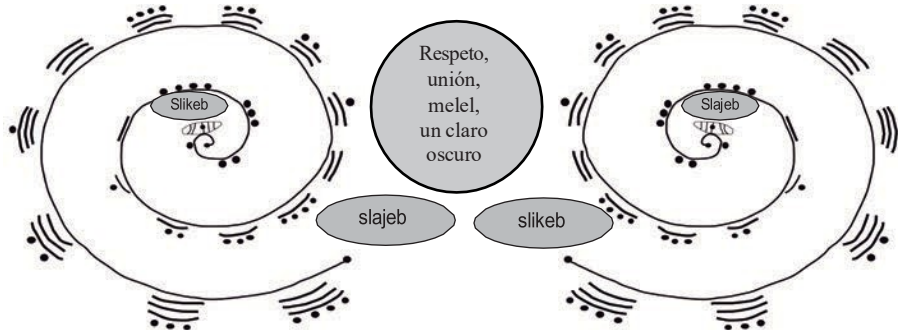
This teaches us that the snail-seed is the beginning as well as the end, and at the same time it is the center, the assembly, the meeting, the family hearth where the knowledge of each day is shared. Each number represents a face, a person that is related to time and related to respect; it represents intergenerational coexistence.

In other words, the first half of the circle, starting from the central-snail numeral up to *baluneb* (nine), has a young face. They are of the same group and are a sum total of ten faces. After the numeral *lajubeb* to *balunlajuneb*, they all have wrinkled faces; this is the other half of the circle and are also a sum total of ten faces. Thus, numbers illustrate a life-line engendered in the central-snail numeral, which is born and grows in the first half like dialogue.

In the other half one becomes an adult, ages and dies on arriving at the *balunlajuneb* numeral [...] What is marvelous about Tzotzil thought is that, on the next step, one is born again, and one lives in cycles without end. It is a continuous death and birth every time twenty is reached; dialogue happens in the same way, as it opens, matures, and dies every twenty instances and completes one cycle. Thus, we understand that the numeral *jtob* 'snail-twenty'

pertains to the birth of the next cycle. Hence, each score is the beginning of the following cycle, unto infinity.

In this way, the snail is related to the mobilization of hearts and reflections. Such mobilizations carry multiple messages which awaken our thoughts to the recognition that customs, traditions, myths, rituals, and ideologies hold an essential ancestral value for understanding our realities.



The figure pertains to the geometry of duality (two-dimensional), to the encounter [*tael bail*, encounter with oneself], old age, maturity, death, and beginning. The union, *melel*, signals how to pause the word, and is already a dialogue with the other. But also, there is a limit, within which there is respect, and it's called light-dark[claro-oscuro]. If it only reflects one of these elements or snails, then it would be incomplete.

The whorls of the snail represent the ways of transmitting knowledge, ways of thinking, ways of creating, and ways of speaking that involve multiple and varied procedures, often imperceptible, that persons invent in their everyday practices. There is a logic, where knowledge is the sum of the creative rationality of the collective, knowledge that doesn't need to be communicated in written form but is transmitted through movements, times, actions, events, and words.

Turning to oral tradition permits us to approach knowledge, to understand the problems of everyday life, of how *chanubtasel* unfolds. The interpretative reading of one's own language and forms of expression, in dialogue with the sense of being and doing, enables through the word the possibility of understanding events that have taken place around the lives of individuals immersed in the world of the everyday. This snail-approach takes into account the thinking, saying, acting, and feeling of ordinary people; it listens to the diverse and contrasting voices that are essential for making another history, this other manner of educating and forming the Tzotzil person.

Chanel

[*Chanel*] is a concept woven into Mayan history and thought that has entered into Tzeltal and Tzotzil culture. *Chanel* has its root in the Tzeltal language *chan* 'serpent'. Over time, as the years passed, at some point in this journey, it was modified, given another interpretation or simply retained a different meaning. *Jchan* refers to the first person of learning; the J represents the mark of the first-person singular, or it can be a noun for which accordingly the J represents the first-person possessive singular, *jchan* 'learning, serpent.' Ultimately, it has to do with a vision of the world. In the Tzeltal language, it represents the universe.

It is referred to as *ch'ul chan*, sacred serpent. It is closely related to what is written in the *Popol Vuh*. It is the root of the concept of learning *chan*, *ch'ul chan*, indicating something like a sacred learning, a sacred light, which illuminates knowledge, what is called cosmos in relation to a vision of the world. These are the readings of daily reality, from which continuous learning arises. *Chanel* is the sprouting of knowledge, just as the day is related to the travel of our waking hours *vik'el satil*, that opening of the eyes, that flickering that is life itself, while the night is repose, rest, where knowledge emerges for a vision of the underworld. It is possibly the other walk, in dreams, that which is said in Tzotzil *vaechil*, and *xanavel ch'ulel*, where there is a deep relationship between both concepts. It is attached to the walk of the nocturnal consciousness, the visit to other spaces, other imagined realities related to the experience of those realities traveled.

Memory is the key element that allows the constitution and achievement of knowledge. In Tzotzil thought and worldview, they conform to cultural categories such as the notion of complementarity, the predominance of the collective over the individual, the idea that learning is like channeling the force of the emotions into human action, etc. These categories are expressed in the Tzotzil language through verbal forms.

In Tzotzil, there are several words to name the ways of thinking and constructing knowledge, *chanel* and *chanubtasel*, to learn (implying the idea of meandering, of being flexible, having our thinking and our hearts ductile, just like our ideas and ways of teaching). That is to say: a way of approaching words and understanding, as part of a person, as a piece of oneself within the whole.

In Tzotzil when we say *chanubtasel*, etymologically, it means to unite again, in order to adhere our thought and our heart. Its meaning is to make learn or help to learn, learning-to-learn. From there originates another word: *jchanubtasevanej*, the one who makes, helps to learn or to unite, the one charged with uniting past experience with practice for future action.

Here the child is guided by the hand toward that which he will learn, so that he himself will learn it, obtain it, inherit it. It is a way of learning for himself. This is why the *jchanubtasevanej* is the facilitator for learning, the opener of vision, whose role is to help create the circumstances that facilitate the *chanel* of life and for life.

“To make learn” indicates a joint-action on the part of one who makes or helps learn and the one who learns, who carries out the principal role. The *bankilal* or *jnitvanej*, the guide, is the one who helps and takes the other by the hand to carry out a good performance and a successful learning experience.

To translate the word *jchanubtasvabej* would be to commit a mistake. Here, it is not about transmitting knowledge, but rather opening another’s vision through activities carried out during a certain period or throughout life. The focus is not on the one who helps learn, but on interpreting his reality in relation to his context, since the focus is not the *jchanubtasevanej* but the one who is learning.

A Tzotzil mother does not directly transmit her knowledge about making comales, pots, food, and so on, to her daughters. Instead, the girl learns by observing and practicing, which is done through questions when there is an exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, especially at the beginning, if something is not done well, like a, a comal, a pot, or a weave, the mother does not rush to scold or to give instructions, nor does she repair it, but she places the result of her work alongside the work done by her daughter. In this way, the daughter herself will come to realize her errors and will proceed in fixing them, improving through practice, until she achieves the knowledge she aspires to.

A father also does not transmit to his sons his knowledge through explicit activities. Rather, the child observes and practices, and goes along learning himself; if he errs, the father lets him realize it himself. It is a way for the son to get his *ch’ulel*, because if the father scolds him, he may lose his enthusiasm for the activity they are engaged in.

A Tzotzil child never says “my father or my mother taught me,” but rather *la jchanbe jtot*, *la jchanbe jme’*, *la jchanbe jlumal*, I learned from my father, I learned from my mother, or I learned from my community, or *la xchanubtasun jtot-jme’* “my father and my mother helped me to learn, helped me to know.”

When asked what their learning process is, the immediate response is to open one’s eyes and work with a single heart; they do not relate it to what is taught at school, “since all the teacher does is spend their time talking and we do not practice.”

Another important concept of learning in Tzotzil is the expression: *p'ijil o'ntonal sp'ijil yo'nton*, [...] wisdom of the heart, that comes not from the acquisition of knowledge from books or academia, but originates from achievement, step by step throughout life. It is an experiential knowledge that is only given by the experience of each person. As indicated in the phrase, *juju vo' sk'an tsp'ijubtas sba* ([each must become wise, careful, cautious, alert](#)), *juju vo' sk'an chchan batel* ([each must learn, must follow the path of knowledge](#)), it is necessary that each become wise by themselves and at the same time responsible for themselves, necessary that each person generates new knowledge and not simply repeat what is already known.

Fiestas, assemblies, gatherings, and rituals are moments of coexistence for members of the community among themselves and with the *ajovetik* community of heaven and earth. A *fiesta* is not just about fun, but its conviviality enables the unity of the community, *chanubtasel*, to rejoin the knowledge of one stage to another, the union of the cosmos with the members of the community. Therefore, the word *Jchanubtasvanej* is an adjective. The word *cha'* refers to the number two, *nub*, to join, *cha'nub*, to rejoin. It relates to prior knowledge and knowledge to be acquired, indicating skills.

I should say *jcha'nubtasvanej*, or the one who brings things together again, from one time to another, from one experience to another, from one knowledge to another, thinking (philosophical aspect) and doing (pedagogical aspect)—these two elements are fundamental for the formation of the Tzotzil person in relation to the multiple aspects of life.

Expressions such as the following: *Cha'chano*, *cha'suteso a vo'nton*, *cha' k'elo*, refer to a seeing again, a return of wisdom, taking back what has been constructed and what is to be constructed. These concepts represent the warp [urdimbre] and symbols to be used in thinking. As a community elder from the community in Jocosic would say, “you were formed here, you are a seed of the community, words capture your life.”

Here, cultural identity becomes visible as being a subject within a certain space, where one is bound, held. In this binding lies cultural richness. Therefore, rituals, *fiestas*, and daily activities are areas of intergenerational learning for the Tzotzil. New community officials are not taught their role beforehand, nor do they rehearse how to perform these roles. They do not learn the complicated dialogues by rote, nor the long prayers that they perform at different moments. They already know them in their heart, every embellished word, indicating that *chane*/learning took effect almost imperceptibly, through observation, listening and practicing since childhood, for both men and women.

Another form of learning, expressed in Tzotzil as *ta jchanbe jbatik*, means: “we learn from each other.” For example, when dialoguing, during assemblies, the sowing of the *milpa*, the harvest, and rituals, they learn, and they explain in order to support one another. It is clear that there are elements that generate collective knowledge and mutual learning, as they continue teaching-learning, and indicates each person’s level of knowledge.

Teaching-learning is reflected much more in the assemblies or in the settlement of certain problems at the community level, as each person has a turn to speak and to listen. There *xmelet lo’il* is generated, the order of the true talk. Understanding this cultural trait makes it possible to generate new knowledge.

That is why we cannot translate the concept of *jchanubtasvanej* as ‘teacher,’ but it is a way of generating knowledge, of make-learn [hacer-aprender], or help-learn [ayuda-aprender], unite-learn [unir-aprender]; similarly, *jchanolaj* is not simply “student,” but refers to the apprentice, the word-catcher.

Often, the *jchanubtasvanej* merely asks questions of the child, since the child already has the knowledge. Questions are used to provoke them according to their age and understanding, to interpret or respond to reality. This is a way of aiding them to open their vision and develop words (*Cholel k’op*). It is a way of awakening hidden knowledge or to affirm what has been observed and practiced. The acquisition of knowledge for one’s own is not about receiving knowledge, but about awakening that knowledge. *Jujun ska’n tsp’ijubtas sba* (each must take care of themselves, self-monitor, take the necessary precautions, become independently careful).

Chanubtasel indicates helping the child through questioning, so that they become self-reliant, to prepare them to be autonomous and eventually philosophize with reality and the context they find themselves in, assimilating it according to their way of being *taletal*, ‘showing the function of their thought.’ That is to say, being well in Tzotzil is expressed *jun o’ntonil*, a single heart. Some say it has to do with harmony, but when considered in relation to communal issues, *jun o’ntonil* indicates that a person is ethically whole. Ethics involves holding words in one’s heart and using them when necessary. Additionally, *jun o’ntonil* indicates learning, not memorization of an act or a repetition of another’s discourse, but rather following what is dictated by the heart. *Mu ko’oluk ti k’usi chale xchi’uk ti k’usi tspase*, what they say does not match what they do; *chopol xchanubtasvan*, a person who does not teach well or is not good for the child they are teaching, although they may with their actions teach others. These have to do with ethics.

For this reason, the Tzotzil say *ta jchan*, 'I will learn.' The act of learning, or the serpent mentioned in previous lines, resembles riding, navigating this vision in the zigzag of knowledge, in the swaying of everyday reality. Rising and falling equates or aligns with the living-dying the *Popol Vuh* describes clearly with the Twins. Learning for life, the human being does not die but transcends to another place in continuous learning. In life, *chanel* is not only present in day but also in night, it goes down and up, the underworld and heaven [supramundo]. The interpretation of reality given to life involves thirteen levels of heaven and nine levels of the underworld. Every Tzotzil group reads these levels differently; some three, others four. Some of these levels have been associated or interwoven with Catholicism. For this reason, *chanel* is the continuous travel between the underworld and heaven.

Chanel is to learn the multiple channels of knowledge (water, sky, earth, day, and night). To walk these paths signifies the crossroads of knowledge that can exist or coexist with nature. *Chan* could be said to be the sign of learning, spirituality, intelligence, wisdom, arts, skills, reasoning, logic, thought and heart. It is also related to behavior, the moral forces of the human mind and heart.

Chanel ta melel: learning truth, learning by sharing, winding through understanding. In other words, everything that responds to the authenticity of the sensibility of truth and that, in this sense, is in conformity with its own circular motivation.

Melel is what organizes life. Therefore, knowledge is the weft made by man. How is this knowledge elaborated? From a set of facts, perceptions, experiences, they are formed and affirmed by the inhabitants who live and practice them.

Thinking about how learning has to begin, with whom to begin the word, and how to end it—this is how *melel* emerges. We speak of an epistemology of knowledge in practice, not just in thinking or naming, but in doing (*pasel*). *Pasel* means to take, to mold, to accept insofar as it is given space. It is about taking a perspective, sharing the word. *Pasel* indicates that something happens, it implies assuming responsibility for that fact. *Pasel talelal* is to make the experience, and to make the experience indicates gaining something on the journey. *Melel* applies to multiple planes of life. To understand is to bridge from within, from the deepest part of the human being. In practice, it does not have to disguise error, but it is the act of the will to know: *jak'el*, to ask. *Melel* thinking is a way of living, a way of thinking, an order, a way of reading life and the contexts that are part of existence.

To share aesthetically *lek xmelet xbat*, indicates collaborating in a linguistic sense, in a practical sense, and in a factive sense. This is because aesthetic perception is only possible in human action, due to human nature permitting reflection on sensibility, and human sensibility carries a symbolic fabric of the meaning of experience in light of the real, the applicable, the visible. As such, human sensibility permits aesthetic perception, and with it, aesthetic truth, *bats'i melel* "the true sharing, truth, truthful.' It is a weave of physical sensibility that carries meaning, thus *melel* is a trace of the truth named and thus must be applied. Once named it is given legitimate existence. The ontological reality of *melel* belongs as much to the past as to the present, but it is not addressed in this way, since some only express it through deeds, as a foundation for something. We attempt to make it visible through language.

Melel is action, initiative that exercises the capacity for movement, where action permeates experience as an intense living of joy generated in dialogue. This joy is not necessarily peaceful, but can be problematic, involving rupture, sudden and inflaming the heart.

Melel is also related to what is woven in time, that is to say, with collective memory, of naming and practicing it. It is not gratuitous; it is a rigorous process of life, constructing and perceiving life. Therefore, its fundamental task is to make something absent present, in which the past belongs to memory and memory belongs to time, both converging at a point like the meeting of words.

For this reason, the problem of the past binds us to the nature of the present, with the aim of doing things well, because it needs to remain written somewhere. Testimony is what makes the above possible, through those who bind memory with events. Memory is configured according to the testimony, through sharing. *Melel* is the concept of speaking truth, but it principally involves sharing, to give it to others and not keep it to oneself. To bear witness, to speak about what happens, is to give the word. Events are simply what happens, takes place[...]; the events themselves are unique, they happen in a moment in a snail-like way, learning through sharing.

Memory is not only of the past, but also of the present. It is built in dialogue and sharing. It is a union of *ch'ulel* and *sjam smelol*, and we see the past as a way of looking at ourselves, remembering the words of our grandparents. It shows us that the spirit waits, attends, and remembers. Some Tzotzil interpret it through nature, fire, birds, the path, among others.

By repeating in the same manner *xmelet*, we wait for what is to come, attend to it, and ultimately remember. Waiting (*malael*), then, is a sign of maturity. Of this, everyone must bear their share, and thus it deserves attending to in the

present in accordance with the past. The whorls of the snail, that is to say, the necessary turns of language, are a reflection of the whorls of memory and the understanding of distinct levels of thinking-feeling from the heart. *Malael*, 'waiting,' is an act of thinking and doing that reveals a way of life and way of thinking and constructing that reality. Therefore, memory is for collecting testimony, for shaping and reshaping the fabric of shared stories, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. In the end it is a shared dialogue, so that we do not keep our words and die with them.

Therefore, *melel*, as we say in Tzotzil, is sharing. It is tied to joy, to being well with oneself and with the other. It is felt as something good because it is shown, it fits together, it is articulated and interwoven with the rest of the people. The members of the group become one, following the circle for coexistence. Being well is related to the origin, the starting point *slikeb*, since that is where the source of information emerges, from which you can have different testimonies about different events. We trust in the source from which the word is born, and it must be conveyed in the assembly or group. Truth is given in language and in actions, in conversation, and it is stored in hearts as a trace. When it is stored in hearts we are asked to faithfully keep it or share it. In cases of sharing we are asked to share it as it is. Therefore, it is important to remember well, and in this remembrance lies the agony of the heart when engaged in dialogue. It is for construction, and from that construction there emerges, sprouts, rises, and appears with verisimilitude words germinated from the heart to be remembered and woven in time.