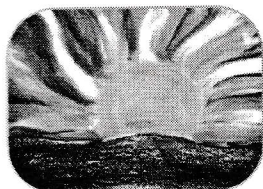


Emergence

Journal of the Spiritual Emergence Network of Australia

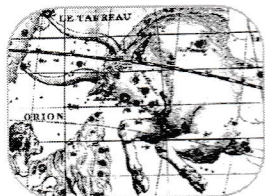
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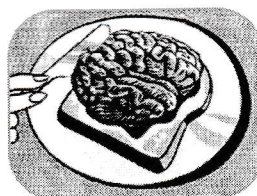
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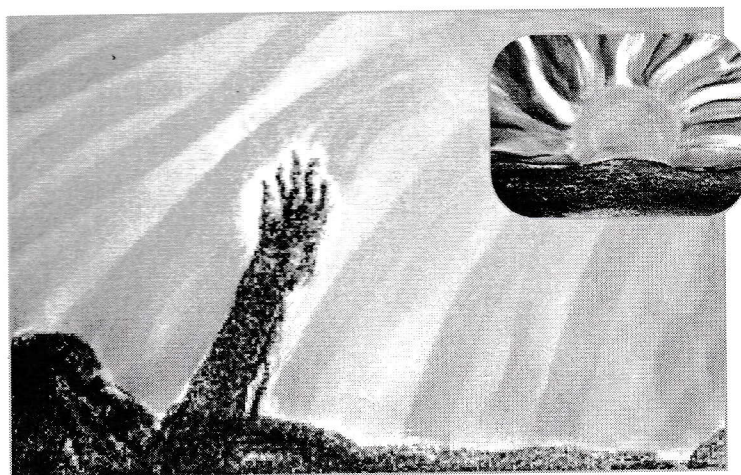


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Holotropic Breathwork

Interview with:

*Mary Madden, Marianne Wobcke,
Dave Misso & Donna Miso*



Q: What is Holotropic Breathwork and can you describe what's involved?

Holotropic Breathwork[™] is an exceptionally powerful, natural method of self-exploration and personal transformation. It was developed by psychiatrist Dr. Stanislav and Christina Grof. It is a synthesis of different methods used in many world traditions to activate the psyche, and is now practiced in many countries throughout the world.

HB is a safe and powerful way to enter nonordinary states of consciousness. Using controlled breathing, music, art, and focused, energy-release work in a group retreat atmosphere, participants may see emotionally charged images, sense energy moving through their bodies, receive intuitive insights, and clarify troublesome issues in their lives. Some of the possible experiences in a Breathwork session can include healing of trauma, stress relief, emotional expression & release and creative inspiration. Many people also report that it helps them connect to a deeper feeling of meaning and purpose in their lives, as well as a greater feeling of authenticity.

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Q: Having been developed by the Grofs, was HB developed specifically to assist people undergoing spiritual emergence?



No it wasn't.

Stan was interested in the healing potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness, first through the use of LSD and then later through more natural methods, which led to the development of Holotropic Breathwork.

Q: How can HB assist in spiritual emergence and spiritual emergency?

HB can assist individuals in spiritual emergence, but spiritual emergency often requires more complex resources including 24-hour care and skilled facilitation. There is no doubt that this work offers the potential for deep healing in all aspects of spiritual emergence. It is very important for those in spiritual emergency to be able to receive support from someone who is very skilled in working with non-ordinary states of consciousness.

While a person on a journey of spiritual emergence sometimes experiences confusion or disorientation or may feel overwhelmed, they are generally able to carry on in their daily life. For some, however, this transformational process of spiritual development becomes a crisis. Spiritual emergency is described by Christina Grof as a spiritual crisis in which the changes are so rapid and the inner states so demanding that, temporarily, people may find it difficult to operate in daily life. It is when the process becomes so overwhelming that the person's daily life is disrupted on a continuing basis.

From a Holotropic perspective a person in emergency would be supported and encouraged to fully express and release the material that is pressing to enter consciousness.

Q: Are you saying here that HB could be used in spiritual emergency, say for instance, when a person moves into a transpersonal crisis during an intensive workshop?

No, the entire focus would be on grounding the person, we do not work with spiritual emergency. If there is a period of time when that diagnosis is differential, we are still going for closure. If the process can't be grounded, then transfer to a facility that provides 24-hr care and

medical support is our best option. There are very few facilities that wouldn't medicate the process, therefore inducing a degree of sedation. It would then be up to the staff of that facility, negotiating with the client and family, as to how treatment would continue. This is not guaranteed to be an ideal option, which is why we screen people prior to weekend workshops. As facilitators we need to be in touch with our resources and capacities. Realistically, we couldn't provide around-the-clock care for a client for days following a HB weekend.

Ideally, a person in emergency should work with a practitioner who not only has a lot of professional experience with these states but who has also personally experienced the intensity of spiritual emergency. As far as we are aware, there are currently no structures set up in Australia that could provide 24-hour support to someone in a spiritual emergency.

Dealing with spiritual emergency from a Holotropic perspective can be likened to a paramedic dealing with a heart attack situation. The crisis needs to be dealt with and stabilised first before any remedial or other processes are employed, e.g. you would not get a heart attack victim to do anything that would further increase the risk of heart attack like strenuous exercise that would, under normal situations, be beneficial? So too with spiritual emergency — a person trained in Holotropic Breathwork would help to ground the person and, as previously mentioned, would go for closure. Promoting further non-ordinary state of consciousness work would be contraindicated where the person is in spiritual emergency. The aim is to support the person to integrate their non-ordinary state experiences into their every day lives.

Q: How safe is HB?

HB provides a safe container for the emergence of all material from the unconscious, be it perinatal (from during the period around birth), transpersonal, biographical (from life experiences) or spiritual. As such, the continued practice of HB supports the process of spiritual emergence — a person moves beyond ordinary human experiences, feelings, desires and ego-states into experiencing the transpersonal realms of consciousness. The emergence of material from the unconscious, including deep emotional issues, is guided by the inner-healing mechanism of the breather. The facilitator's role in this process is to ensure that the breather is kept safe at all times to allow the full expression of whatever arises in a session.

It is up to the individual participant, with our guidance, to know something of their capacity to negotiate

powerful, internal experiences and their ability to integrate these experiences into their daily lives. If the individual doesn't meet the medical and psychological criteria on our commitment and release form, then it is deemed unsafe they participate in the weekend format. Other types of processes may take precedent, such as individual therapy or, in some circumstances, a private HB session might be considered.

Q: Do you recommend combining other modalities with Holotropic Breathwork?

Breathers will often gain insights through their experience that will lead them to using other modalities. eg: massage, kinesiology, acupuncture, psychotherapy. This can assist them to integrate the material that emerges in a session into everyday life — whether it be perinatal, biographical or deep spiritual experience. The same is true for experiences emerging spontaneously in episodes of spiritual emergency.

Q: Is HB suitable for people with a history of mental illness?

In *The Breathwork Experience*, Kylea Taylor (staff member of Grof Transpersonal Training) writes:

"Persons who have a history of mental illness should not participate in a weekend workshop setting. Such a context does not provide ongoing support. Breathwork can be valuable therapeutically to some people with this history if they are in supportive residential environments or in ongoing outpatient treatment."

Some illnesses may make it difficult to benefit from Breathwork. In particular, two diagnoses — Bipolar Depression and paranoid personality may contraindicate breathwork. The excitement of the breathwork can trigger a manic episode in those who have a tendency toward Bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder, unless they are taking lithium and it has stabilised their mood swings. A tendency to paranoia may keep a participant from experiencing their inner material as their own. This could result in confusion between the inner world and the outer one and thus an inability to integrate the inner material." (p.11)

We support the above quote — we included it because it says exactly what we believe about working with mental illness and Kylea explains it very clearly.

Once again, it is about the context in which we are doing Holotropic Breathwork. What is important is the degree of support a person has outside of the process to deal with whatever emerges. A person with a history of

mental illness may not be contraindicated, per se, but will be assessed in terms of their capacity to deal with the material that arises in addition to the presence of an ongoing therapeutic relationship.

Q: Does HB usually involve emotional release work?

There can be a tendency to stress the importance of emotional release work in relation to emerging spirituality. We need to be careful that emotional release work doesn't become the dominant focus over and above all other experiences which are as much a part of spiritual development. From a Holotropic perspective, all material that is presented to the individual from the unconscious is considered important in terms of spiritual development. There is no searching or looking for a particular experience in a breathwork session. Whatever a person experiences in a session is acknowledged as coming from that person's inner healing mechanism and is accepted as part of the spiritual journey that person is on.

Contributors to this article:

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The next Australian Grof training module *Inner Healer, Outer Life: Holotropic Breathwork and Everyday Spirituality*, will be held in Melbourne from the 16-21 August, 2005. This is an Optional Module with Tav Sparks and Staff. For more information Contact: Vicky Nicholson: (03) 6239 1063 or visit www.holotropic.com