

# *The Healing Breath*

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**THE HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK NUMBER.**

**CELEBRATING STANISLAV GROF'S SEVENTIETH YEAR**

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## **I BREATHE FOR AMERICA**

**A blessing for all Americans after the events of 11<sup>th</sup> September**

**by  
Joy Manné, PhD**

I breathe for America  
With my in-breath I take into my heart all those who lost their lives,  
On my out-breath I send peace

I breathe for America  
On my in-breath I take into my heart all those who lost family and friends  
On my out-breath I send peace

I breathe for America  
On my in-breath I take into my heart all those who lost citizens  
On my out-breath I send peace

I breathe for America  
You are everybody's country  
On my in-breath I take into my heart all those citizens from other countries  
who died  
On my out-breath I send peace

I breathe for America  
On my in-breath I feel gratitude for my place in the free world  
Bereaved though we all are  
And on my out-breath I send peace

I breathe for those in the countries that hate America  
For in truth it is themselves and their own countries that they hate  
And on my out-breath I send them peace

I breathe for the parents of those who committed these horrible acts  
For they are part of what is hated most, and are now obliged to hate more  
On my out-breath I send them peace

I breathe for the person who organised this crime against all of us  
For it is himself that he hates: himself, his family, his friends, his country, his  
world  
Is what he hates.  
That is what he wants to kill, and cannot  
And that is what he wants us all to hate  
And I will not  
Nor will I hate him  
I breathe for his unbearable suffering  
And on my out-breath I send him peace

**STAN  
BY  
KYLEA TAYLOR**

Joy asked me to write a short something about my experience of working with Stan Grof “as a person.” Let me share a few memories:

**Stan in 1984 in an evening dance at Esalen**, hugely enjoying the energy of the group and his own dance while wearing a large shamanic mask. I think my favorite Stan persona is that of the ecstatic shaman, completely swept up in a non-ordinary state while drumming, dancing, or chanting.

**Stan in 1987 staying patiently with a woman breather** who was not quite finished each time she did another piece of body work — I watched, really touched by his extraordinary patience and compassion. I have seen this re-enacted so many times since that first occasion. Stan has infinite, all-night type patience with a process if it is needed. Every time I watch him work or talk, I learn something.

**Stan in 1988 listening quietly** as our training group argued extensively about whether or not to include spouses at the next residential meeting of the group. After a long while, he simply said, “it seems something wants to happen here” (“something” meaning inclusivity and risk to open the circle). This minimal intervention made me realize that ‘following the Inner Healer’ was about trusting the trajectory of life and what arises in ordinary circumstances, and not just about doing that during Breathwork experiences.

**Stan, in trainings and conferences, inviting, welcoming, dialoguing with, admiring, and encouraging the major thinkers** and practitioners of transpersonal psychology and science. With each person he is open and excited to discover what gifts each interaction will bring. Without taking the time to make an exhaustive list, I have clear memories of him enjoying dialogue and sharing experiences with Angeles Arrien, Joseph Campbell, Ram Dass, Michael Harner, Albert Hoffman, Jack Kornfield, Ervin Laslo, John Mack, Ralph Metzner, Arnold Mindell, Dick Price, Jill Purce, Colin Ross, Rupert Sheldrake, Rick Tarnas, Charles Tart, Frances Vaughn, Roger Walsh, and Andrew Weil.

**Stan, (in 1992 it was, I think) at the International Transpersonal Association Conference** bringing his work full circle back to his home city of Prague; leading a Breathwork session for 300 participants in the gymnasium formerly used to train communist athletes, with his mother, in her eighties, assisting. I think of Stan as a transpersonal ambassador. He speaks Czech, English, German, Russian, French, Spanish, and reads Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit (not to mention medical, psychiatric and physics jargon!) so, in traveling around the world, as a Breathwork facilitator or lecturer, he has provided a cultural and professional bridge for transpersonal ideas and a way for people from different cultures to have deep experiences side by side.

**Stan's infectious giggle.** I particularly remember the giggle in prolonged form during a skit done by Jack Kornfield, who enacted a swami explaining the Grof Perinatal Cartography on the occasion of Stan's 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Stan's love of food.** Gathering clams and oysters on the beach at our training on a British Columbia island, then making bouillabaisse for everyone. When the prospect or sight of fine food arises, his eyes get big, his smile broadens, and he is fully present with each taste in each moment.

**Stan, expecting us, the people he was bringing along as trainers, to risk and grow,** while providing an atmosphere of non-judgmental nurturing along with a good structure and pace to protect both us and the people with whom we were working.

**With loving appreciation for Stan's teaching and example,**

**Kylea Taylor**

**TO THE JURY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SIGMUND FREUD  
AWARD:**

**FROM  
STANISLAV GROF**

I was very pleased and honored when I found out that I had been nominated for the International Sigmund Freud Award for Psychotherapy offered by the city of Vienna. As suggested, I have prepared a brief list of my contributions to depth psychology and psychotherapy as a basis on which the Jury can make its decision.

Before I do that, I would like to address two important points. I am aware that the early years of my research were in clinical use of psychedelics, an area that is considered rather controversial, because of the widespread unsupervised use of these substances, particularly by the young generation. However, the decades of daily work with non-ordinary states of consciousness have convinced me that responsible work with them has extraordinary therapeutic potential and that research of these states would revolutionize psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy. I have tried to bring supportive evidence for this assertion in my writings.

Some people might also question to what extent my work which, at least initially, involved the use of chemical substances is really a continuation of Sigmund Freud's work. To this I would like to respond that I have found psychedelics to be powerful and relatively unspecific catalysts of psychological processes, which bring deep unconscious material into consciousness. They do not create the experiences that they induce, but make them available for study and psychological processing. In this way that can be of invaluable help in psychotherapy. Since my wife and I developed holotropic breathwork, we have been seeing similar experiences without the use of chemical substances.

As far as the use of psychedelics in psychotherapy is concerned, I would also like to mention Freud's closing comment from the sixth chapter of one of his last books, **An Outline of Psychoanalysis**, that in retrospect sounds almost prophetic. It shows that the idea of chemical assistance in psychoanalysis is not something that would be alien to Freud and that he would oppose.

“But here we are concerned with therapy only in so far as it works by psychological means; and for the time being we have no other. The future may teach us to exercise a direct influence, by means of particular chemical substances, on the amounts of energy and their distribution in the mental apparatus. It may be that there are other still undreamed-of possibilities of therapy. But for the moment we have nothing better at our disposal than the technique of psychoanalysis, and for that reason, in spite of its limitations, it should not be despised.”

Here now is my story: During my professional career that has covered a period of more than four decades, my primary interest has been research of the heuristic and thera-

peutic potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness. This included ten years of research in psychedelic psychotherapy in Prague, seven of these years (1960-1967) as Principal Investigator of the psychedelic research program at the Psychiatric Research Institute in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

This was followed by seven years of research of psychedelic psychotherapy in the United States, the first two years as Clinical and Research Fellow at The Johns Hopkins University and the Research Unit of the Spring Grove State Hospital in Baltimore, MD, and the following years as Chief of Psychiatric Research of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center. In this capacity I headed for several years the last surviving research project of psychedelic therapy in the USA.

From 1973 until 1987, I was Scholar-in-Residence at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, where I developed jointly with my wife Christina a powerful non-drug form of self-exploration and psychotherapy that we call holotropic breathwork. We have now used this method in workshops and in professional training in North and South America, Europe, Australia, and Japan. We have also worked with many individuals undergoing spontaneous episodes of non-ordinary states of consciousness.

During these years of psychotherapeutic research, I have made the following contributions:

1. Developed theory and practice of psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy and described it in my book *LSD Psychotherapy*, which has been until this day the only comprehensive treatise on this subject.
2. Published over 100 articles and the following books, discussing the theoretical and practical implications of modern consciousness research for psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy:

### **BOOKS:**

**Realms of the Human Unconscious: Observations from LSD Research.** Viking Press, New York, 1975. Paperback: E. P. Dutton, New York, 1976.

**The Human Encounter with Death.** E. P. Dutton, New York, 1977 (with Joan Halifax).

**LSD Psychotherapy.** Hunter House, Pomona, California, 1980.

**Beyond Death: Gates of Consciousness.** Thames & Hudson, London, 1980 (with Christina Grof).

**Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science.** State University New York (SUNY) Press, 1984 (ed.).

**Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy.** State

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University New York (SUNY) Press, New York, 1985.

**The Adventure of Self-Discovery.** State University New York (SUNY) Press, 1987.

**Human Survival and Consciousness Evolution.** State University New York (SUNY) Press, 1988 (ed.).

**Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis.** J. P. Tarcher, Los Angeles, 1989, (ed. with Christina Grof).

**The Stormy Search for the Self: A Guide to Personal Growth Through Transformational Crises.** J. P. Tarcher, Los Angeles, 1991 (with Christina Grof).

**The Holotropic Mind: The Three Levels of Consciousness and How They Shape Our Lives.** Harper Collins (1992), (with Hal Zina Bennett).

**Books of the Dead: Manuals for Living and Dying.** Thames and Hudson, 1994.

**The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness.** State University New York Press, Albany, N.Y., 1998.

**Transpersonal Vision: The Healing Potential of Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness.** Sounds True, Boulder, CO, 1998.

**The Consciousness Revolution: A Transatlantic Dialogue** (two days with Stanislav Grof, Ervin Laszlo, and Peter Russell). Element Books, Rockport, MA, 1999.

**Psychology of the Future: Lessons from Modern Consciousness Research.** State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y. (in press).

The above books have been translated into German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Russian, Czech, Polish, Bulgarian, Greek, Turkish, Japanese, and Chinese.

3. Created a new extended cartography of the psyche that includes, besides the *biographical-recollective level* and the *Freudian individual unconscious*, two additional levels - *perinatal* (related to the trauma of birth) and *transpersonal* (including the ancestral, racial, collective, phylogenetic, karmic, and archetypal matrices).

4. Developed with my wife Christina holotropic breathwork, a method of psychotherapy that uses non-ordinary states induced by accelerated breathing, evoca-



tive music, and focused body work, and a training program for holotropic breathwork facilitators that has certified over 600 practitioners in various parts of the world.

5. Formulated jointly with Abraham Maslow, Anthony Sutich, and Jim Fadiman the basic principles of transpersonal psychology, a discipline that explores the full spectrum of human experience and attempts to integrate spirituality and science. Received from the Association of Transpersonal Psychology (APA) on the occasion of its conference in Asilomar, CA, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its existence, a special award for my contributions to the development of this field.

Transpersonal psychology has been rapidly growing since its inception in the late 1960's. At present, it is being taught at several American universities and accredited schools, has two special journals, and symposia at professional conferences.

6. Attempted to provide a solid theoretical basis for transpersonal psychology by exploring in my writings its relationship with various revolutionary advances of new paradigm sciences.

7. Founded the International Transpersonal Association (ITA) and functioned for many years as its president. Organized seven large international conferences of this association in *Boston, MA, Melbourne, Australia, Bombay, India, Santa Rosa, CA, Eugene, OR, Atlanta, GA, Prague, Czechoslovakia, and Manaus, Brazil.*

# THE PRACTICE OF SITTING IN HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK

BY  
KYLEA TAYLOR

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*My first Breathing experience was not memorable.  
My first Sitting was unforgettable.*<sup>1</sup> ~Jack Silver

Jack Silver, a certified Holotropic Breathwork practitioner, wrote of his heart-opening experience while Sitting for the first time for his wife in a workshop with 100 participants. In the Sitting experience, he felt he was Sitting for all in the room, for all the world. He goes on to say that Sitting, rather than Breathing, might well be the real spiritual practice of Holotropic Breathwork:

Later, I mused that the real teaching was the Sitting, the Breathing only a means of distracting our attention away from attainment-oriented practices, while the affect of directed attention, compassion-in-action, and opening of the heart occurred and became manifest. So strong was my first Sitting experience.<sup>2</sup>

I, too, have felt for a long time that Sitting is as at least as important a component in the Holotropic Breathwork experience as the Breathing. They are complementary of course. The Sitting role requires a Breather. Likewise, the Breathing experience is greatly enhanced by the practice of having a peer Sitter for each Breather. Silver writes, “For me, the Breathwork has two practices, two teachings.”<sup>3</sup> Those two practices, Sitting and Breathing, exist within a ritual structure that underlies and supports Holotropic Breathwork — its principles, its theories, and its practice.

## SITTING IS PART OF THE RITUAL<sup>4</sup> SETTING FOR HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK

Holotropic Breathwork is a technique, but it is better described as a ritual structure that provides a safe *set and setting*<sup>5</sup> — a container for whatever wants to happen when breathing into a holotropic or non-ordinary state of consciousness. Stan Grof has said that because someone in a non-ordinary state of consciousness has extraordinary sensitivity to external factors, it is vital that the experiencer understand (set) the purpose and general approach of the technique, and that he or she know what the physical and interpersonal

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<sup>1</sup> Silver, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *Ritual* is used in the anthropological sense of the word.

<sup>5</sup> *Set* is the cognitive construct of the process; *setting* is the container in which the process occurs.

elements of the situation (setting) will be. (Grof, 1980, p. 307.) All the components of Holotropic Breathwork work together to provide a theoretical set and setting that can contain most deep processes. Both set and setting provide the protection, permission, and connection that inspire participants' to trust and go as deeply as possible in each Breathwork experience.

Stephen Gilligan, a teacher of Eriksonian hypnosis and psychological theorist who developed the therapeutic model called Self-Relations, describes the characteristics of ritual,<sup>6</sup> including, "...a predetermined behavioral sequence....special symbols mark ritual space....pre- and post-phases are used as inductions into and exits out of ritual space. And binding commitments are secured to promote involvement and heighten the drama and significance of the event."<sup>7</sup> All these elements are included in the structure of a Holotropic Breathwork workshop.

## **THE SITTER/BREATHWER DYAD IN HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK**

Holotropic Breathwork is most often done in a group setting and includes two Breathwork sessions. Participants work in partnership so that one partner is the Breather for one session and the other is the Sitter. In the second session there is reciprocity and the roles reverse. Thus, there is one-on-one supervision of the Breather at all times.<sup>8</sup> There is also overall facilitation by certified Holotropic Breathwork Facilitators, but the one-on-one attention by peers, provided by the Sitter function, is a very important component of the work. The partners agree to serve each other in this time-limited and context-limited way. This agreement is one of the "binding commitments...secured to promote involvement and heighten the drama and significance of the event."<sup>9</sup>

## **HOW SITTING CAME TO BE PART OF HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK**

The Sitter/Breather dyad was added to the Holotropic Breathwork technique quite organically and spontaneously. Stanislav and Christina Grof had been facilitating groups of Breathers and experimenting with various ways of structuring group work at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. One day, Stan had a sudden back injury that prevented his doing direct work with the participants. With necessity as the mother of invention, the Grofs decided to ask the participants to choose partners and facilitate *two* sessions of Breathwork so that the partners could reciprocate in attending to each other. The design worked so well and was so appreciated by the participants that the Breather/Sitter dyad was incorporated into the Grof model of Breathwork.

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<sup>6</sup> The word *ritual* is used here in its anthropological meaning.

<sup>7</sup> Gilligan, 1997, 180.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, 1994, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Gilligan, 1997, p. 180.

## GIFTS FROM THE SITTER TO THE BREATHER: LEARNING FROM THE ROLE OF SITTER

### One on one attention – the practical aspects

In Holotropic Breathwork there is implicit permission to access deep, unknown places. Protection must be commensurate with permission. The balance of both creates safe set and setting that allows one to go beyond where he or she knows the way. The Sitter's duty is to take care of ordinary reality so the Breather can let go of having to monitor the environment and feel free and safe to go as far into the inner world (non-ordinary reality) as possible. The Sitter fetches a drink of water, supports the Breather on a walk to the bathroom, covers up the Breather if the Breather is cold, holds a hand, and reminds the Breather to continue Breathing if the Breather wants that kind of assistance.

The Sitter also protects the Breather fiercely from intrusion (*e.g.*, by others or environment) and from self-harm or from harming others (*e.g.*, by bumping into the wall or other Breathers.)

The relationship between someone in a non-ordinary consciousness (Breather) and someone who remains grounded in ordinary consciousness (Sitter) is a sacred and delicate one. It requires a reaching of consciousness on the part of the Sitter, an attention to nuance, and a meditation on the chasm between the two states and the bridge that can be built to join them. The value of the Sitter is not just in his or her ability to one-sidedly see, hear, or touch. The healing of the original wound (*e.g.*, omission of nurture or abuse in childhood) cannot take place outside of relationship, because it is the very lack of relationship that *is* the wound. The gift of the Sitter is that the Sitter responds *in relationship*. The relationship is the two-way flow of seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, touching and feeling. Relationship, the essence of the sacred web of all life, is present and is available to be experienced and acknowledged in the Holotropic Breathwork workshop in the form of the Sitter/Breather relationship.<sup>10</sup>

### Witnessing in Breathwork

A Sitter is certainly more than a tool for a Breather to get plenty of tissues or to get that extra blanket adjusted more quickly. Being a Sitter can also be infinitely more than just a role one must tolerate and trade in order to Breathe in the *other* session of a Holotropic Breathwork workshop.<sup>11</sup>

I remember Stan Grof talking about Ashley Montagu's thesis<sup>12</sup> that a newborn baby needs the experience of being seen, heard, and touched. I think many of us have been wounded by an early experience of not being seen, heard, or touched. The Sitter/Breather relationship can begin to heal that wound.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor, 1991p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, 1994, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Montagu, 1966p. 49-67.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, 1991, p. 5.

Tenderness, both emotional and physical, is a major part of corrective experience in a Holotropic Breathwork session. When Breathers are reliving birth, or early childhood, they often feel the trauma of omission. They did not get the sponsoring they needed at those early times. The regression allows, to some degree, a corrective experience of being well nurtured and re-parented. Because of the group context, there is a feeling of safety in receiving physical touch that would be difficult to achieve in a one-on-one therapy session. People have had significant realignments in self-concept from such nurturing contact, feeling at long last, I am touchable, I am wanted, I am seen, and it is okay to be here (be born, be alive). Compassionate witnessing can also balance the experience of reliving trauma. A kind witness who sees and is empathic, and who is willing to feel into the pain the Breather is experiencing, can make the experience tolerable.<sup>14</sup>

A Sitter who is a crucial part of such corrective healing usually feels a deep satisfaction from his or her ability to give such a gift and make such a connection to the Breather.

In Holotropic Breathwork the holotropic state often spontaneously includes a bimodal consciousness. At the same time that one is deeply in the experience, one also usually has a witness self present to sponsor the reliving of trauma, a feeling of cosmic unity, or other experience. The Breather's Sitter, witnessing the Breather's experience, also sponsors the Breather's inner witness self by modeling (being an outer representation of) the witness function or role.<sup>15</sup> Having a witness heightens the Breather's awareness so that witness part of the Breather is awakened even while the Breather is fully engaged in, for example, the reliving of a perinatal experience.

### **Learning non-doing as a “helper” in Breathwork and in ordinary life**

In Holotropic Breathwork, the holotropic or non-ordinary state activates the Inner Healer so that it can show both Breather and Sitter the trajectory of the healing energy. In interacting with the spontaneous healing energy, the Breather, the Sitter, and the Facilitators refrain from interference, such as anticipating, directing, or enabling the unfolding process. The act of supporting or midwifing the energy without getting in its way is called “non-doing.”<sup>16</sup> Neither Sitter nor Breather has to know where it is going, or what will be the outcome. They need only cooperate with the Inner Healer as it reveals itself moment by moment. Activated by Breathwork, the Inner Healer [inner wisdom, higher power, Spirit] moves through our inner huge, dark warehouse of a psyche, shining a light. The light finally focuses on and brightens some neglected corner from where is found the perfect piece of not-yet integrated material. This seems to be selected when it is ready to come forward into consciousness. Our job as Sitter for the Breather is to trust the Inner Healer's choice of material and method, to witness what is coming forward and, as ap-

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<sup>14</sup> Taylor, Publication Pending.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Sparks, T., *et. al.*

propriate, to encourage expression and integration of the material.<sup>17</sup> As Sitters we also have the opportunity to learn a great deal about ourselves.

## **Widening the focus of awareness**

Sitting is a type of meditation. It is similar to Vipassana<sup>18</sup> meditation. In Holotropic Breathwork, a Sitter sometimes focuses in a one-pointed way on the Breather, and sometimes has a multi-focused consciousness. In the latter case, the Sitter is practicing (usually without consciously doing so) holding simultaneous awarenesses of the Breather's process and needs and all the inner emotions, motivations, and thoughts that are moving through himself or herself. This wider focus of awareness may also at times expand beyond the Breather/Sitter dyad to the container that holds them both. That container includes the Holotropic Breathwork techniques and theory, the Facilitators, the other Sitter/Breather dyads in the room, and the energy that is being created in the room at that moment.

This practice of widening consciousness is another way in which Sitting makes new skills available to ordinary life. I remember a time when a TV camera crew came to film a Holotropic Breathwork group session with the permission of the participants. The crew was experienced in aiming a camera with technical skill at many subjects, but the men did not seem to be experienced with being in close proximity to many people in deep emotional process. From the blank, dissociated looks on their faces, and the many times I saw each of them with camera hanging unused at their sides, looking amazed at a Breather's process, I imagined that their own emotions and memories were being triggered by the folks on their mats on the floor. I think, because of the TV crew members' lack of practice with simultaneous holding their technical skills, their own emotions, and a compassionate attention to others, that these camerapersons were overwhelmed and needed to dissociate from one or two of those foci in order to process what was arising for them.

As Sitters and Facilitators we all have these moments of dissociation when attention strays or disappears, but with the practice of Sitting, we are gradually able to hold more of ourselves, more of the other, and more of the environment in our conscious awareness simultaneously.

## **SITTING — AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AND BALANCE OURSELVES**

### **Observing our own fears, desires, and distractions**

The fears and desires that usually manage our lives unconsciously arise in meditation practice and may also arise while Sitting. I have heard it said that relationship is the best guru. Sitting, as meditation, provides us with a setting where we are less distracted from our unconscious motivations. It also puts the focus on our present moment of relationship with our Breather and with any of our judgments about the other participants in the workshop. Sitters have reported epiphanies realizing their judgments about their Breather or

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor, Publication Pending.

<sup>18</sup> *Vipassana* is a Buddhist practice of mindfulness.

nearby Sitters had been recreations of patterns in relationship in their lives. They have, in the Sitter role, the opportunity to reclaim and understand projections they have unconsciously been putting upon others.<sup>19</sup>

Sitting enables us to become more aware of our own emotions and motivations. This often has a balancing effect on our personalities. In the Sitting role, as well as the Breather role, we move *holotropically*,<sup>20</sup> towards wholeness. We become more conscious of our own inner dynamics so that, instead of reacting to situations with a limited repertoire, we can respond appropriately in a variety of situations with a greater range of inner resources.

Although people are complex and don't necessarily fit into neat categories as those listed below, we usually can recognize those tendencies and strengths we have and those we need to develop.

### **Balancing a tendency to over-emote**

For people who easily express emotions, Sitting is a balancing time in which they practice knowing, naming, feeling, but then instead of expressing (the Breather role) they have the opportunity to practice another skill — one of letting the emotional energy move through without acting on it. This can be particularly helpful in strengthening this Inner Sitter. They can learn skills that will enable them to Sit more calmly with their own emotional parts, so that they are not as dependent on others to play the calm and analytical role in their life.

People who have most often been in the “patient” or “client” roles may feel they are often in the *receiver* role with others, but that they don't have much to give others. These Sitters can be pleasantly surprised to learn how much they really can offer to their Breather. This opportunity to be in a *giver* role emotionally can produce a significant change in self-concept.

### **Balancing a tendency to over-analyze**

For people who are best at analyzing and discriminating, Sitting provides a chance to do that without verbalizing it. In the silence Sitters can notice that process, name it, and perhaps even feel the emotion that might be associated with it. They can notice when analyzing is a useful skill and when “knowing” or “understanding” or “maximizing” might be an outdated defense against simply feeling and being in the mystery of the present.

### **Balancing a tendency to over-control**

For people who consider themselves controlling, who often had very good need in childhood, or even in the present, for controlling themselves and others in order to protect themselves, Sitting is a time when there may be space to notice more clearly what is happening when such a need or impulse to control arises. The Sitting role requires that one

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<sup>19</sup> *The Ethics of Caring* (Taylor, 1995) is concerned with how caregivers can become conscious of fears, desires, and longings, and how these unconscious drives result in unconscious counter-transference in caregiving relationships.

<sup>20</sup> The word *holotropic*, coined by the Grofs, means *moving towards wholeness*.

defer to the Breather's Inner Healer — following and supporting, rather than controlling, pre-judging, or directing that process. Thus, if one's inclination to control arises, it will be noticed just because one is performing the function of Sitter.

### **Balancing a tendency to over-support**

People whose main inclination is to support, who tend to put their own needs aside, and who often behave co-dependently in relationships, will likely find most aspects of Sitting familiar. They will probably learn more from the Breather role. But still, the practice of Sitting may teach supportive types how to empower a Breather, rather than enable or do their work for them. It may also provide the meditative space to notice one's own co-dependent impulses. For example, if a person is crying expressively, it may be a new experience to allow someone to express those painful feelings fully, rather than to impulsively try to fix or comfort the person.

### **Learning to Sit with our own process of any sort**

In general, the practice of Sitting in Holotropic Breathwork strengthens those parts of us that can act as resources when the rest of us is "in process." It strengthens our ability to act as our own internal Witness, commenting on, understanding, and mediating our complex emotional reactions. It also strengthens our compassion, the Nurturer part that can provide us with self-compassion even in the face of our most virulent inner Self-Critic or Self-Blamer. Through our empathy with our Breather, we also strengthen our connection to our own feeling, sensing selves. The practice of role-modeling the Witness during the intense process of a Breather strengthens our Witness to be able to stay present during our own periods of intensity. The practice of role-modeling compassionate caring and service to a needy Breather increases our ability to be compassionate with our own internal neediness.

### **Observing others gives permission**

A Sitter focuses on his or her Breather, but sometimes a Sitter widens his or her attention to see or sense what is going on with a Breather nearby and sometimes broadens his or her focus to the whole room. I have often heard a Sitter describe a similar experience to this one that Jack Silver describes in his first Sitting experience:

I looked up and was overwhelmed with emotion. My heart had opened up, and I was caring not only for my breather (my beloved), but the room as well. I felt I was sitting for the World. The joy, exaltation, pain and sorrow of the World flowed through me as I witnessed.<sup>21</sup>

When the focus is broadened in this way, the Sitter also has the opportunity to discover what is possible, from watching other Breathers. In other words, the Sitter can learn for his own future benefit as a Breather that the scope of permission and protection

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<sup>21</sup> Silver, 1999, p. 1.



is quite large in Holotropic Breathwork, and that processes he or she may have suppressed, need not be suppressed in future sessions as a Breather. Likewise, learning occurs when the Sitter works in a cooperative way with the Facilitator with the Breather, providing nurturing touch to the Breather for a corrective experience of childhood omission, or assisting the Facilitator with Holotropic Breathwork's form of bodywork. The Sitter often learns from watching the Facilitator work with Breathers nearby as well.

## **LEARNING IN HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK APPLIES TO EVERYDAY LIFE**

### **Learning to Sit with death, birth, grief, and major crisis in ordinary life**

Some Holotropic Breathwork participants have noticed that the practice of Sitting prepares one to be with and to “follow the process” as it unfolds in life outside of Breathwork sessions. Sitting seems to increase one's ability and willingness to Sit with the changes of life. The most intense of those changes involve death and rebirth in all its forms. Kathleen Silver and I, each independently, wrote about the preparation which the practice of Holotropic Breathwork had given us for Sitting with each of our fathers' deaths.

Kathleen Silver writes:

About a year and a half ago, before my father died, he spent much of his waking time reviewing moments in his life where he felt regret. As he and my mother had then been living with us for almost two years, I was witness to many an hour of long, painful descriptions of what he essentially felt were personal weaknesses in his life. At first this review was grating and tiresome to me. I felt angry that he was “negating” a life that I had always viewed as uncomplicated and filled with heart and wisdom. Thanks to a Saturday afternoon conversation with Jack Kornfield,<sup>22</sup> I soon was able to Sit for my father, as I would in a Breathing session for a Breathing partner. I was able to understand that what he was in the process of doing was a life-review.... I began to encourage him to really open up his feelings about these moments in his memory and to talk to me about them. I did this mostly by asking questions. My intent was similar to that of the Facilitator who is helping with bodywork during a Breathing session — encouraging, giving permission to one who might otherwise be too shy or private. When a person knows they will soon die, many of the things that would previously be concerns fall away and the truth is much easier to speak. Interestingly enough, the things which angered my father most about himself were also the things which angered me most about my father — acts of omission. Fears that pulled him away from what he sensed were right actions. He was not mean; he was just silent. He gave me, as his

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<sup>22</sup> Jack Kornfield is a Buddhist Meditation teacher, founder of Spirit Rock Meditation Center and author of several books, including: *The Path with a Heart* and *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*.

Sitter in the last few months of his life, one of the most important lessons in my life — that to be with someone in the fullest sense of the word, you must put yourself aside and listen and look with your heart. Through his pain, he also drove home the value of the lesson Joseph Campbell called “following your bliss.”<sup>23</sup>

And, I write about my own experience with my father:

I simply could not have been there without the experience I have had over the years of Sitting and Breathing. Sitting with my father proved much more difficult than sitting in a Breathwork session. He was dying of terminal cancer. The two weeks were one long Breathwork session.

My father was a man who had no metaphysical education, no New Age interests, and no afterlife illusions. He was completely surprised by intense, nonordinary states of consciousness in his last weeks. At first he didn't know he was “hallucinating,” but he quickly caught on after a few days and actually became somewhat adept at it. He could go in and out of experiencing, then commenting in turn on the “hallucinations.” He was having vivid visions and performing what seemed to be shamanic work. His eyes were focused intently and his hands moved constantly in the air before him interacting with various unseen symbols that appeared to have meaning in his life review....It was difficult to understand what these symbols meant to him. One thing about death is there is never a sharing group after the “session” [as there is in Holotropic Breathwork] in which you find out what was going on. The symbols he mentioned were intriguing, though, and sometimes I thought I could get an intuitive glimpse into his world. He saw and worked with lots of cords attached to things and vehicles. He spoke of paths, rooms, booths, bundles, and a television with switching channels. The work he was doing seemed important to him. We participated, or held his hand through fearful parts, or just sat quietly watching....

My father's process triggers my process. He is embodying my unresolved fear of pain and self-disappearance. I look at him and see his skeletal, wasted frame that will be soon traveling on the conveyor belt into the crematorium.

“Where am I going?” he asks me, raising up a little, his eyes locked with mine. I am ashamed not to know, but I admit it.

“I don't know,” I said. “It is a Great Mystery.” He sinks back. I think he agrees, but he is a little disappointed. I feel the present grief of missing him already in his ordinary state of consciousness and the anticipatory grief of missing him forever.

Now he asks us, “Should I go with them?” My brother eagerly inquires, “Who?” My father does not respond. So I venture, “Can you trust

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<sup>23</sup> Silver, 1996, §(2) 1.

them to lead you?” “Trust them?” he wonders. “Yes, I guess so. That’s a good idea.” And for the moment he relaxes.<sup>24</sup>

## **Learning to sit with change and ultimate death in one’s own life**

Skill in Sitting is of use in caring for friends. The skills and focus of Sitting are practical, maybe even crucial, in parenting and grandparenting. The final place where we will use our practice of Sitting is in Sitting with our own loss of self and the change involved in giving up the body and life as we know it. The practice of Sitting with another’s pain, fear, grief, and loss of control in the face of transformation is the practice we will need ourselves in facing those final moments.

When a friend had an acute episode of spiritual emergency, Ray Kelly used his Sitting and Facilitating skills to work with the situation. He wrote, “I had a major ‘ah-ha’ experience....I finally realized that the Grof Transpersonal Training modules were segments of ‘life’ and not Breathwork as a separate experience. Prior to this, I had unconsciously segregated them in two distinct places. It dawned on me that the ‘container’ was never meant to hold the lessons forever.”<sup>25</sup>

## **Learning to move beyond co-dependence in relationship**

One of the really useful practices of the Sitter/Breather relationship is the practice of reciprocity. The Sitter’s role is to give whatever support the Breather requests (or to call the Facilitator if one is uncomfortable with a specific request). But the role is to give, to put the focus on the Breather. If there is a conflict between one’s own needs and the Breather’s, one generally tries to accommodate the needs of the Breather — the one who is in process.

On the other hand, when one moves into the Breather role, one is focused on receiving. The Breather is specifically not responsible for the needs of the other, the Sitter. So if a Breather is co-dependently thinking that it might be too much to ask the Sitter to hold a hand or get the Breather a drink of water, the Breather knows that such thinking is his or her own process. The Breather’s job is to ask for what he or she needs to facilitate the process, not to worry about the Sitter’s reaction. Conversely, the Sitter’s role is not to take personally any request or action by the Breather who is “in process,” but just to support the Breather’s process with an attitude of surrender and service.

This learning can translate to ordinary relationship outside of Breathwork. One couple I know learned through the clarity of the Breather/Sitter roles how to distinguish who was in process and who was assisting. When it seemed like they were both in process at the same time, they clarified it verbally. If they were both in process, they alternated roles of “Breather” and “Sitter” by passing a Talking Stick object back and forth. Whoever held the object was the “Breather” and the “Sitter” listened attentively until the object was passed back again.

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<sup>24</sup> Taylor, 1996, 8(4), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly, 2001, 13(3), p. 7.

## Asking for what one wants (assertiveness)

If the Sitter has an attitude of service, the Breather can begin to surrender to being served. Part of that is to begin to be able to ask for what he or she wants — to actively participate in the receiving end of the “give and take” of life. Many people don’t know clearly what they need and want. Some who do know what they want, don’t think it would be possible or appropriate to get it. Even if they do know what they want and think it would be possible to get it, they sometimes have great difficulty in asking.

What comes forward in a Holotropic Breathwork session probably went underground long ago from lack of sponsorship. “Positive” or “negative,” the experience probably was buried in the unconscious and until now never has had another human presence and a ritual setting to sponsor it. Somehow the Inner Healer recognizes proper conditions, and the material comes forward. At that point our task as Breather... is to sponsor the material so that it can be embodied and integrated.<sup>26</sup>

The Breather has very few “duties.” The Breather lies down in an open body position, breathes faster and deeper than usual for an extended period of time, and (importantly) asks for what he or she wants and needs to support the process that emerges in the non-ordinary state. The practice of performing that “duty” can have the side benefit of training in assertiveness and the repeated and corrective experience of being cared for in the way that one needs and wants. The Sitter who encourages the Breather to do this learns how to empower another person.

## Saying no to what one doesn’t want

Saying no is as important (sometimes more important) in assertive behavior as asking for what one wants. In Breathwork many people relive situations in which as a child or adult they felt afraid to say no and helpless to set a boundary.

In a Breathwork session, even if a person asks for something (*e.g.*, wanting the Sitter to hold a hand), there will come a time, further on in the session, when the Breather doesn’t want to hold that hand anymore. For some people it is a real benchmark to tell someone to stop touching them, or even to let go of that hand, especially if they know the Sitter is enjoying being helpful. The role of Breather gives permission to experiment with saying “No!” and to set those boundaries.

Breathwork can be a practice in differentiating oneself (and what one wants) from the other (and what the other wants.) In the process of practicing this, Breathers grow to trust the Inner Healer and their own inner impulses, and feel growing confidence in a basic right to set boundaries with their own bodies and psychological processes. From time to time Sitters may feel rejected when a Breather says what he or she doesn’t want. This can be an opportunity for a Sitter to learn how to let another person have their process, to not take that process personally, and to look at one’s reaction as one’s own process.

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<sup>26</sup> Taylor, Publication Pending.

## SUMMARY

### Holotropic Breathwork as a meta-practice

Marty Boroson makes the case that Holotropic Breathwork is a meta-practice for the Breather, providing a container so large that it contains any experience from any spiritual or psychological practice. For example, one might enter the holotropic state and experience deep mystical states, or have a kinesthetic spiritual experience with automatic yogic postures or spontaneous sounds. One may have imagery from not only the major religious traditions, but also from smaller sects and from shamanism in all its ethnic forms. It is also possible to have, in a spontaneous way, many of the healing experiences that occur in traditional psychological therapy. Marty writes:

Holotropic Breathwork, free to meander everywhere and anywhere across this spectrum, brings us directly to the cutting edge of our evolution. It requires only that we lean toward the truth that is emerging now and here, in the deepest and farthest reaches of the present moment. With unprecedented openness — in theory and method — it embraces all the ancient forms of worship and all the modern means of personal growth, and even holds space for those paths yet to be invented. Through it, we can gain access to the entire spectrum of consciousness, to all the magnificent dimensions of Being, and we can travel along any or all of wonderful therapies and paths, aiming always, steadfastly, at the one, integral goal.<sup>27</sup>

In Breathwork we tend to consider Breathing as the practice. In this article I wanted to acknowledge the silent, but quite powerful partner in Holotropic Breathwork — Sitting. Boroson describes Holotropic Breathwork insightfully as a meta-practice. Sitting as well as Breathing is part of this meta-practice.

Sitters who are present and focused on relationship with their Breather and the-m-selves experience, in ways appropriately unique to them, whatever they are next called to learn about themselves. Depending upon what needs developing or balancing, Sitters may learn more about empathy, emotion, impulse control, dissociation, or their own value as givers to others. They may strengthen their internal functions of witnessing and nurturing while providing care to others. They may learn to take turns with the giver and receiver roles in their own relationships. They may learn to broaden and intensify their focus of attention while practicing presence. They may learn at some point, as Ray Kelly did in his “ah-ha” experience (above,) that Sitting cannot be contained in a Breathwork session, but flows out into “ordinary life” as a greatly enhanced ability to be present to more of Life, more of the time. All of this practical and spiritual education comes respectfully, appropriately, and spontaneously in the meta-practice of Holotropic Breathwork while Sitting for another in relationship.

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<sup>27</sup> Boroson, 1998, 10(4), p. 5-7.

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**STIMULATION OR SUPPORT:  
ON THE USE OF MUSIC IN HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK  
BY  
WILFRIED EHRMANN**

Ingo Jahrsetz writes in his recent very good book on Holotropic Breathwork (HB), *“Holotropes Atmen – Psychotherapie und Spiritualität* about the use of music in the breathing process:

(The music) is not a background, nor is its purpose to provoke particular emotional content .... Rather it can be taken to be a general stimulus of energy which emphasises what the soul of the person having the experience is releasing at that instant: e.g. if the content of the experience is emergence (Aufbruch<sup>28</sup>) and lightness, the music will correspond to this; depressive content is supported by melodies of loss and mourning; aggressive content by equivalent rhythms; and sacred experiences by sacred music. (Jahrsetz., p. 159)

When music is perceived within an altered state of consciousness it gets ‘remodelled’ according to the needs of the person having the experience: e.g. someone who is intensively loving will discover the music of love in most sounds.

Evocative music can promote altered states of consciousness in a specific way and at the same time contribute to them in such a way that the completion of the arising Gestalts (pictures, visions, energetic formations, body perceptions, memories), can be achieved. (Jahrsetz p. 160)

It seems to me that in these citations Jahrsetz confuses cause and effect. He thinks that the music *“emphasises what the soul of the person having the experience is releasing at that instant.”* If the soul is releasing lightness, the music is effortless, if it is releasing sadness the music is sad, etc. But in a typical HB group which may be made up of 20, 30 or 100 participants, how is it possible for the soul to release effortlessness in everyone at one instant and sadness at the next, and the music be supportive for everybody all the time? Of course the facilitator will have an eye on the group and follow his/her intuition with regard to the appropriate way of supporting the atmosphere by choosing appropriate music at any particular moment.

In spite of the facilitators efforts in selecting the appropriate music, even in very small groups where five people are lying on mats and five different souls are on their way, most of the time they are having very different experiences. One person may be floating peacefully in the outer spheres, another is curled up in cramps, a third is enraged, while a fourth breaks out in laughter—what music should be chosen under these circumstances? Obviously there is no one piece of music that can heighten and support all of these feelings at the same time. As facilitator, one might perhaps choose a compromise,

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<sup>28</sup> It is not clear to the author what Jahrsetz means here.

or support what seems most necessary in the circumstances, or what is most intense, or follow any other criteria. I regard the assumption that the music is always right for what is happening as an illusion and a palliative. Music of the required intensity is an integral part of the holotropic method. It is not something that the facilitator can choose to include or leave out. This tool, i.e. the music, like any tool in therapeutic work, brings up particular problems which cannot be dismissed by stating that, by definition, there are no problems.

The most frequent experience is that participants in a breathwork group where the breathwork is accompanied by music represent a spectrum in their feedback that ranges from “the music was completely appropriate and to the point” to “most of the time the music disturbed me and sometimes it took me right out of my process.” There are people who are strongly influenced by music and who cannot separate themselves from its influence in their process of breathing and feeling; there are people who are not aware of the music most of the time; and there are people who are either with the music or with the breathing, but not with both at the same time.

Jahrsetz tries to solve this problem by resorting to an explanation on the transpersonal level. He writes: “When music is perceived within an altered state of consciousness it gets ‘remodelled’ according to the needs of person having the experience: someone who is intensively loving will discover the music of love in most sounds.” (Jahrsetz p. 160) This may indeed happen—and it is equally likely that opposite will happen, i.e. that someone in love may suddenly be put into a completely different mood through a piece of music that reminds him of a broken love or even of his own death. The circular form of the argument seems so obviously to contradict the observed experience. Why contort what we know from so much empirical experience? Do holotropic practitioners feel that this kind of problem puts the basic fundamental tool of their method in question?

The assertion that the music’s “purpose (is not) to provoke particular emotional content” also has to be analysed. We know very well that music evokes feelings whether we want it to or not. Music can effect on our emotional state in a very specific and powerful way, both explicitly—as every visit to the cinema proves, and subliminally—every time we go to a supermarket.

This effect admittedly is dependent on a variety of components. Harrer and Harrer write in *Music, Emotion and Autonomic Function*”:

The automatic/physiological (autonomic) response to music depends on (1) individual constitutional factors such as age, gender, lifestyle, physical fitness, health, and temporary states of arousal such as those induced by coffee; (2) prevailing emotional factors; (3) attitudes toward music and its role in one’s life; and (4) attitude toward the musical selection.

The physiological system most affected by music depends on (1) individual patterns, so that in some persons respiratory changes predominate, while in others it is cardiovascular; and (2) the type of music, such that dance music and marches tend to result in motor responses, while others may induce respiratory or cardiovascular changes.“ (quoted from Fried 1999, p. 188)

How could it be possible to prevent this effect from taking place particularly in a person who is in an altered state of consciousness—a regular occurrence for a breather during an



ordinary breath experience? I usually feel totally defenceless when I hear certain music: some make me want to cry; some to move; some to float away; and this helplessness is a lot stronger when my state of consciousness is influenced when I am in the state of a flowing breath. Indeed, I experience most strongly in holotropic sessions that very often the music is steering the emotional process and not the other way round. Once in a holotropic session for example I felt sadness coming up but I could not give space to that feeling precisely because the mood of the music was merry and dancing and remained like this until my feeling went away by itself, and I returned to a more superficial feeling.

There may also be a benefit and coherence when we allow ourselves be enchanted more by the music than by the breathing process. Giving the music a dominant role (and, when using a certain decibel level, its role cannot be but dominant), however, should be seen for what it is: an external, and, frequently also intense influence on the inner process which leads to different results from what would happen without this influence.

Kylea Taylor talks carefully about the way the process of transformation works: it is caused by faster breathing and *supported* by music in holotropic breathwork. (Taylor, p. 30f). She also refers to the different reactions of participants:

When facilitators are playing music for a group of breathers, they tend to follow the kind of experiences that the majority are having. Some people do not even hear the music when it does not fit with their own internal experience. A few breathers dislike the music and become annoyed. The introductory talk advises breathers in this situation to use their reaction to the music as permission to express anger through movement or sound. (Taylor, p. 31)

The music may nevertheless impede this form of expression, i.e. anger, instead of encouraging it. One person, for example, may manage to become enraged when hearing Debussy's *Claire de la lune* precisely because the music does not harmonise with his experience, while another would find it extremely difficult. One participant in my group could not stand a portion of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* and felt disrupted in his process by it because the rhythm of a previous number was still influencing him. He could not get into his rage against Pergolesi's music and therefore felt pulled out of his process. For a long time afterwards, it was difficult for him to get back into an altered state of consciousness. Of course it can be worthwhile, to ask what the impact of this bad experience with baroque music could be, and this question may also lead to valuable therapeutic insights. However, the fact remains that the music's influence did not merely support the process at this point but dominated and directed it.

It seems to me that the intense interaction between the influence of music and the experience of inner feelings that takes place in HB is widely neglected. To the best of my knowledge, it has not been thoroughly researched anywhere. I assume that the reason for this neglect is to avoid contradicting the concept of the "inner healer:" HB often refers to the "inner healer" as the one and only process "manager" in charge of everything that comes up. Jahrsetz and the other authors on holotropic breathwork attribute a dominant role to this "authority," especially with regard to the therapeutic relationship. Jahrsetz writes about the role of the "Inner Healer" in controlling transference issues:

This intuitive authority of the soul creates a high degree of therapeutic autonomy in experiences of altered consciousness for the person. It chooses, too, which experiences occur in Holotropic breathing at any particular time and the degree of intensity of the experience that is permitted. The “inner healer” chooses the way transference and resistance are handled. In this way, too, a certain independence from the psychotherapeutic and psychiatric interpretations and constructions that we find in the usual diagnostic models is created. (Jahrsetz p. 266)

This is not Jahrsetz’ only perspective on the therapeutic relationship: he has more to say on the issues of transference and counter-transference in HB in other places in his book which puts forward new ideas in this area. Nevertheless, he does not keep the valuable double perspective of both a therapeutic and a transpersonal level with regard to the technically important question of the use of music. Instead he argues in a circularity which is typical for New Age patterns of thought, as we can see in the quotation above about the “inner healer:” Any given music agrees with the feeling process in the breather; even if the subjective experience of the music is that it contradicts the feelings, it is defined to agree nevertheless because in that case it draws attention to resistance in the breather. Put in a simplified way: The music always matches. Even if it doesn’t match, it is nevertheless defined to match fully. Anyone who experiences the music not to match fully, must look at himself (to see in which way he is wrong).

In my opinion, we tend to overlook two things when we argue in this way: both the transference phenomena and the mechanisms of influence. If the transference phenomena are neglected, for example, the possibility that a breather who is irritated by the music might project this problem onto the leader is ruled out. Thus material that could be gained from this projection and used well in therapy is disregarded.

If the mechanisms of influence are neglected, the possibility of controlling the process by means of the choice of music is also disregarded. The change from intense to gentle music, e.g., can lead the inner process of the breather in a completely new direction. Jahrsetz himself gives examples for this:

It is known that certain forms of music (Mozart’s symphonies e.g.) can convert fear to zest for life. In certain contexts such music can give people in ‘psychotic borderline situations’ a ground and contribute to transforming insanity into creativity. (Jahrsetz, p. 160 f)

Jahrsetz, however, does not develop this line of discussion because he would then be forced to diminish the role of the “inner healer” in favour of the leading role of the music, which is indeed no loss but rather a possible advantage. It can be absolutely meaningful in a therapeutic sense to have an external influence on the atmosphere and the feeling process which would thus make way for new experiences. In this case, however, it should be made clear that the music is being used as a therapeutic tool which has causal effect on emotional material, namely that it brings it to consciousness (without giving it a determining causality). In this circumstance music is much more than a “general stimulus of energy”.

There may be a practical reason for the avoidance of these topics. HB is mainly used in groups where a lot of time is allocated for breathing and drawing mandalas, and

only a little for integration on the verbal level. The variety of the influences which appear in a group breathing process hardly bears contemplating. Add to these the effect of the music and especially its emotional influence and the field becomes too complex.

If the method and its way of working is to be presented to practitioners as well as to outsiders there has to be a simplification and a reduction of the factors that play a role. The invention of an authority such as the “inner healer” serves this purpose as does the circular justification for the use of evocative music.

It is also clear that every method for personal growth requires a reductive framework so that the abundance of material that arises can be explained, and thus understood and integrated. We should nevertheless be cautious where such a framework becomes doctrinal for then there can be no further development with the result that possible transformational changes in clients will be prevented. Justifications and circular argumentation impede the further development of a method, its clients and its therapists.

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**KYLEA TAYLOR**

**Breathwork and SoulCollage – the first experiment**

I pattered around the kitchen in the big open area of our home making brunch for the small group of participants in an intimate Breathwork workshop. On the other side of the kitchen counter, our dining room table was extended to its fullest range to accommodate the six people. This morning, after their Breathwork experiences of the day before, they were sitting around our table, piled with magazines, cans of rubber cement, and small stacks of pre-cut mat board cards. Following the simple SoulCollage™ directions, they were moving around fragments of pictures they had cut from magazines, greeting cards, photos, postcards, catalogues, and calendars, fitting them together in surprising new ways and gluing them down on cards.

The deep, meditative mood in the room contrasted with the chaos of magazines, partially cut-out images, half-glued cards. Jai Uttal chanted *Om Namah Shivaya* from my favorite CD, but the mood was due to more than music. These six people and their two facilitators (Jim and I) had spent the whole day yesterday together during two Holotropic Breathwork sessions. Emerging from the sessions, the breathers had begun to look through magazines, photos, cards, and calendars to find images to make their first SoulCollage cards. This Sunday morning they had returned to finish their cards. All six were silent, yet in communion at a deeper level than words, each also in creative connection with his or her center. They focused during these morning hours on this new SoulCollage method as a way to express their experiences from Breathwork. As I prepared brunch for these engaged and contented artists, I free-associated my own mental collage to represent the moment. Images flashed through my mind of quilting bees, community gardening, and visits to large, ancient cathedrals and generated emotional flavors of community, music, mood, spirit, growing things, and art.

I had made several dozen SoulCollage cards myself. The SoulCollage process had been so satisfying to me as a way to express the inexpressible that I decided to make it available to others. As a one-person publisher I had been spending the last three years working on producing the book, *SoulCollage: An Intuitive Collage Process for Individuals and Groups* by Seena B. Frost. I believed the process could be a way for people to do self-exploration in an easy, non-threatening, and fulfilling way. I also had suspected that Breathwork and SoulCollage were meant for each other — that the deep experiences of Breathwork could be well-expressed through SoulCollage and that SoulCollage in turn could help amplify and integrate those experiences. I watched that interlacing that first morning and was relieved and happy to see others finding SoulCollage card-making as compelling and valuable as I had found it.

After that first SoulCollage success, I introduced it at two other Holotropic Breathwork events this year (2001). One was the *Trauma and Transformation* six-day training module of the Grof Transpersonal Training (GTT) in Sedona, AZ, USA. The other was the two-week *Certification Intensive*, which concludes GTT's nine-week, resi-

dential training requirements, and this year was held in Taos Ski Valley, NM, USA. Some of the personal quotes that follow in this article are from participants who attended those two Holotropic Breathwork trainings.

### **Holotropic Breathwork has always included art**

Holotropic Breathwork has always included an art component to its technique. The Grofs, developers of Holotropic Breathwork, both brought art to the technique. Christina Grof had worked as an art teacher. Her own art had facilitated and illustrated her personal spiritual emergence and recovery from post-traumatic stress. Stan Grof had used Joan Kellogg's technique of "mandala" drawing effectively as part of the research protocol for the therapeutic use of LSD in his early work at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Institute in Baltimore, Maryland. From these separate streams, the Grofs had incorporated their own synthesis of "mandala" art into Holotropic Breathwork.

### **The mandala art of Holotropic Breathwork**

At the end of a Holotropic Breathwork session, participants usually are presented with a large circle penciled onto a sheet of drawing paper. Breathers are encouraged to take the opportunity to express themselves in this non-verbal, but concrete way even before the verbal sharing. It is a step towards integrating the intangible, non-ordinary experience of Breathwork back into tangible, ordinary life. Often participants draw something that will remind them of the experiential events of their session. Sometimes what they draw is mysterious. Its meaning, immediately after the session, is as yet unclear. These "mandalas," as we call them are usually descriptive of the process just experienced, but occasionally seem to be predictive of an unfolding process through which more will be revealed at a later time. Sometimes the mandala tells a story. Sometimes it simply expresses emotion by the placement and intensity of colors.

### **What is SoulCollage?**

SoulCollage is an expressive art process — the process of making a deck of cards, one card at a time, using collage to depict one experience or one kind of energy per card. Many pieces of collage art are rather large and have a multiplicity of messages and images. SoulCollage cards often are more simple. Each 5 inch by 8 inch card in one's growing deck of cards represents a facet of oneself (*e.g.*, a sub-personality, an energy, or an archetype), which one finds relevant to and operant in one's life. Or, a card can depict an experience (dream or journey) such as a Breathwork journey. Author of *SoulCollage* and developer of the process, Seena B. Frost, says that, "the whole deck reflects the panorama which is 'you' — your SoulCollage."

### **SoulCollage and the therapeutic objectives of Breathwork**

High on the list of therapeutic benefits of Breathwork are connection to self and others and increased trust in one's own creativity and self-expression. Breathwork induces a non-ordinary state of consciousness, which enables one to reconnect with parts of oneself from which one has become disconnected. Because Holotropic Breathwork is done mainly in groups, there is also a benefit of reconnection, even sometimes reconciliation,

between people and groups. Participants connect to strangers and see the common thread of humanity through entering the deep well of spirit together. People who know each other deepen their relationships by doing the work together. People who come from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds often find that greater respect and understanding replaces their preconceived and alienating beliefs about differences.

SoulCollage also facilitates connection with self, connection with others, and artistic self-expression, which is a way to make both internal and external connection. SoulCollage provides a means for connection and self-expression immediately following the session. The connection continues as people go on to make, reflect on and use, and share their cards.

Maria Santos-Elgart feels that Breathwork and SoulCollage “complement each other as techniques of self-discovery.”

After a Breathwork session, doing a artwork such as SoulCollage helps to center oneself, to ground and have more clarity over the experience, have a better sense of one’s feelings — something about our hands bringing form out of the inner to the outer world. SoulCollage helps in the integration of a Holotropic Breathwork session.

### **Connection with one’s own experience and self**

Arnold theorizes that the Inner Healer<sup>29</sup> might more easily use collage as an art process in healing work:

SoulCollage is immediately rewarding because one can select/work with pictures that one is not able to draw. This opens up new inner material and relationships to be expressed. I feel that the “resonance” one experiences when tearing out and working with a picture is an important healing signal from one’s Inner Healer. This contrasts the confusion and uncertainty that a wounded person normally feels.

Jeff was surprised to find images, in a synchronistic way, which perfectly expressed his process:

I had a session that involved raging against the unjust use of force, especially by uniformed people against unarmed folks (especially minorities). I was amazed as I ran through a couple magazines how many pictures seemed relevant. This tended to intensify and somehow affirm that the archetype I encountered is really present. Then arranging the images around a central figure that I drew added to this feeling of having touched on a “real” issue. I’ve not done any sandbox<sup>30</sup> work, but there was a “concrete” quality to even the use of the images that added power to the artwork part

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<sup>29</sup> “The Inner Healer” is a term used in Holotropic Breathwork and could be understood as “Higher Power,” “Spirit,” “Inner Wisdom,” or “Creative Force”.

<sup>30</sup> This is a reference to Dora Kalff’s sandplay therapy which is based on Jungian concepts.

of my integration. Also I find that the collage "locks in" the energy and feeling of the session in a way that my other art hasn't, when I later want to review it.

### **Images bypass the mind to select you**

Unlike existent decks of cards (Tarot and others) that one can buy ready-made, the SoulCollage cards contain the personal images *you* select — or the images that select *you* — coming straight through your Soul, bypassing the mind. Author Frost says that the process is a somewhat mysterious one:

You may or may not know what the image you select means at first. You may not know how you will use it and even if you will. What you feel is a power in this particular one. As you leaf through magazines, something stops and holds you, calls to you in a mysterious way. Something goes straight into your soul, bypassing the mind. Something vital in the image stirs you, and your imagination becomes engaged. You tear it out and save it!

### **SoulCollage cards assist in amplification of Breathwork experiences**

Holotropic Breathwork facilitators are trained never to analyze someone's experience, but to assist in amplifying that experience by increasing awareness, or suggesting resources through which a participant may discover more facets of the experience and find personal meaning from them. For example, Arnold reports:

SoulCollage has amplified my Breathwork process. For example, I start with a picture of myself as a young child who I experience often in my breathing sessions. As the collage develops, I find myself including pictures of trains, which I loved as a child; and also pictures of other favorite activities such as playing in the sand and swimming. The resulting collage consists of my happy childhood interests that I had forgotten about, but were elicited by the SoulCollage process after a breathing session.

Jeff Bassett, who was certified at the two-week intensive in Taos in July found that,

*SoulCollage is as (or more) effective as mandala drawing, for me. I find that selecting images (and just going through a lot of them to pick what has charge) is a very evocative process in itself. It definitely helps "draw out" the core feelings from my session.*

### **SoulCollage cards may help integrate Breathwork experiences**

During the *Trauma and Transformation* module, participants depicted both trauma and transformation on their SoulCollage cards. Arnold describes

the ability of the SoulCollage to express and help integrate opposites within my psyche. A collage can show pictures of strong animals versus weak animals; or loving people versus killing people. The collage provides a safe container for the expression of conflicting, conscious/unconscious energies within myself. The collage is like a snapshot of a whole gestalt or of a COEX<sup>31</sup> in one's Unconscious. Looking at a collage over time helps me assimilate and gives me a new perspective on previously separated parts of myself.

In the final session of a group, the cards provide a focus for individual closure and give a tangible art piece for each to take home from the sessions' experiences. The non-ordinary experience is validated and honored by a creation, which can even be used again and again to contact that personality part or archetypal energy. The final sharing group of the *Trauma and Transformation* module was quite moving as participants passed their stunning cards around the group. Parrish wrote about that final sharing,

I saw the power of the cards when everyone shared their mandalas or SoulCollage cards. The expressiveness and creativity I saw on the cards made me realize just how powerful SoulCollage is and especially after a Breathwork.

### **Using the SoulCollage Cards in an on-going way**

Claire Parrish described her enjoyment in having the SoulCollage cards as an on-going project during the module:

*The way it was set up in the module I attended was perfect because I could go back and work on my cards at different times of the day and on different days. I did not feel pressured to finish. This would be more difficult in a one-day workshop setting due to the time constraints. I would still want to offer it and perhaps let people take cards home to work on.*

The process can continue in an on-going way after a workshop as well. The mat board collage cards are easy to make, keep, transport, and use. They can be easily ordered as pre-cut blank cards [<http://www.hanfordmead.com/orderform.asp>]. Many who make the cards cherish them and delight in sharing them with family, friends, or in groups. They are a lovely and tangible reminder of an important experience.

For some the cards become allies on their own Paths. In drawing the SoulCollage cards from their "deck" in a ceremonial way, they find the cards "speaking" to them about the on-going questions of life. This is one way to remember to listen to guidance

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<sup>31</sup> COEX is Grof's theory of Condensed System of Experiences. These are experiences which are related by emotion and/or body sensation and grouped together, even though they may be a grouping that includes biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal types of experiences. More can be found about this in Grof's book, *Beyond the Brain* (1985), published by SUNY Press.



from different parts of themselves at crucial times. The book gives examples of how to use SoulCollage cards in this divinatory or therapeutic way, both in groups and individually.

Claire Parrish, who is enrolled in the GTT training, suggests that the SoulCollage process may continue the integration process well after a Breathwork session is finished. Integration is the process of bringing more of one's unconscious material to consciousness and into skillful use in ordinary life and relationship. "Reclaiming" a memory, a disowned emotion, or finding new personal meaning from fitting together things that had formerly been kept separately.

Two days after one of my recent Breathwork sessions, I took a magazine I had and saw some pictures that perfectly illustrated what I was feeling around the Breathwork. I felt driven and made three cards out of those pictures. They express so well what I had been feeling inside for years and could not put into words.

Author Frost describes the divinatory process with SoulCollage thus:

When we draw SoulCollage cards from our deck and lay them out to consult, it is like singing over our own dry bones. The cards represent all the many parts of ourselves, the happy and the sad, the wise and the foolish, the large and the small. When we lay them out and sing over them they come to life and reveal to us the wisdom for which we yearn.

### **Communion in doing collage work side by side**

Although a mandala drawing room is usually quiet after Holotropic Breathwork, there seems to be a different quality of mood in a room when people are engaged in the SoulCollage process. Arnold, who was present at both residential modules when we used the process, noted that same quality as I had when we did the first SoulCollage/ Breathwork experiment at my private home-based workshop. He says:

The conscious intent of Breathwork participants making their SoulCollages affected me. Everyone seemed to be present and deeply focused in the work. A deep, meditative field seemed to be encompassing everyone, yet everyone was having fun. I felt welcomed and I wanted to join in.

Peggy Wallace has a touching story about bonding with another participant in the "mandala room" while doing her SoulCollage work:

I sat across the table from a man who was diligently working (upside down from my vantage point) on a mandala collage into the early hours of the morning. We said nothing. We were two of only three people in the room for hours on end. The only interaction we had was to pass the paper cement back and forth. I watched as he constructed his strikingly graphic

image — a cross, filled with diverse people's faces on the background of a blue sky filled with clouds in a mandala circle.

Early on, I hated what I was doing, but having been in this same place many times before, I continued trying to hold the words that came to me while doing the body work after the Breathwork session: "Love me, kill me." I was envious of the man across the table from me. His image was better than mine! Old stuff coming up again. Watching, watching - listening to the inner voices of criticism — continuing to meticulously cut out images that drew me to them. Then the pasting... That's when it all started to come together for me. The background that I had done with vivid primary colors: red, black, yellow, blue was the perfect receptacle for the images I had cut out. Finally, the man got up without saying anything and walked toward the door. I hadn't seen what he had ended up with. I ran after him. "May I see what you've done?" These were the first words we had said to each other. He proudly showed me his finished mandala. "It's incredible. How wonderful." I could see in his face that he was not only pleased with his own work, but pleased that I appreciated it as well. I no longer felt any envy, just pride in what he had done — I felt as if I had somehow participated in his work. He asked to see what I was still in process on and commented on the intensity of the work I had done earlier on when I was laying down the pastel crayon color and blending it into the paper. I hadn't noticed, but I knew he was right. I felt as if I was doing something that had great force and energy in it. No woosy pastels or color with the paper showing through for this image! And I also realized when I started to like what I was doing, I also felt no envy of the image work he was doing.

We said "Goodnight" and from then on, we who had not spoken to each other up to that point, greeted each other daily, danced together on the night before closing and said "Goodbye" as intimates. I felt our collage work "together" bonded us to each other in a way that didn't happen for me with anyone else other than my sitting/breathing partner.

### **Nonverbal people can communicate deep personal meaning to others.**

Many nonverbal people or people who have something very difficult to say, such as those who have just had a Breathwork experience, find that the cards enable them to communicate in an authentic, satisfying way — first with images, the language of symbols, dreams, and archetypes, and then after that opening, with words.

### **Even “non” artists can create satisfying art**

Self-exploration is usually a lonely process with not many ways of connecting with others. Art or poetry have been traditionally ways in which a few skilled people have been able to bridge that isolation and share at levels below the reach of ordinary conversation. SoulCollage seems to help achieve a communication with others that is not possible for

most of us to do using other artistic media. Even if people find words adequate to describe their non-ordinary state experiences, the art done by others can help in understanding them. KiP Walker said, "Seeing the work of others was inspiring as is the sharing of the mandalas. The visual always seems to add another dimension to the words people use to try to describe their work."

The special advantage of SoulCollage is that it requires no skill in art, yet allows those people with ordinary abilities to express their deepest personal meaning in a way that others can appreciate. By choosing and merging images which resonate at the deepest level, the ordinary person can create an artistic expression which also connects him or her to others who are conscious at that level.

Maria Santos-Elgart's describes her experience overcoming frustration at not being able to represent by drawing alone what she felt during her Breathwork experience:

It helped me to gather my psychic energy after the Holotropic Breathwork session; to recognize and accept the depth of the process experienced, and to represent the highlights of the session through the images chosen. I always enjoy Stan Grof's suggestion of drawing mandalas after Holotropic Breathwork sessions, yet I sometimes feel frustrated for being unable to draw what I envision. The SoulCollage is a good option for those moments, at times easier, it is fun how I pick the images, cut and glue and am surprised by what shows up on the card afterwards.

### **Seeing the SoulCollage cards of others deepens own experiences**

The cards are filled with images that resonate with people's most inner experiences and so it is common that the cards of other breathers can affect one at the deepest level. Maria Santos-Elgart said, "I felt affected by other people's SoulCollage [cards] through the effect of Oneness; One Soul, many collages." Jeff found that his experiences of viewing another participant's cards before his own breathing session triggered emotions that had been deeply buried and thus contributed to his Breathwork experience.

*I was definitely affected [by her cards] It was very surprising and suddenly overwhelming to see many of her images spread out in the center of our space, and move amongst them.... My breathing session the day after I encountered [her] SoulCollage cards was filled with rage.... So it definitely facilitated my process!*

### **Would Holotropic Breathwork trainees and participants use SoulCollage in their own groups?**

Many participants in the *Trauma and Transformation* module felt SoulCollage was an important part of that module. Patricia Meadows subsequently wrote about the process in *The Inner Door*<sup>32</sup> [ <http://www.breathwork.com/>],

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<sup>32</sup> *The Inner Door*. (2001). Santa Cruz, CA: Association for Holotropic Breathwork. 13:3:9

Many participants seemed deeply immersed in the SoulCollage process throughout the week (not only after their Breathwork sessions.) And highly praised this creative process. One participant expressed: “I was absorbed in the collage technique. I would like to suggest that... this collage technique be offered as part of all modules ...”

Others in the GTT Certification Intensive agreed that SoulCollage is a great addition to Breathwork. Jeff will “definitely make it an option in workshops I conduct in the future.” He says that he wants to work with the process, however, without having a set agenda of trying to collect images that seem to fit.

I find those [images] that have charge and stay open to maybe, or not necessarily, completing the collage during the course of the day (or weekend, *etc.*) But to stay open to the collage letting me know when it is ready to be finished.

Arnold writes also that the collage sets its own pace:

I would include SoulCollage as an optional integration tool in any Breathwork workshop I give because it can appeal to people who cannot draw well. I would state to the group that the process may be time-consuming. There may not be enough time during the workshop to complete one. I definitely would provide magazines, and I would give the general background and instructions for constructing a collage. I would emphasize that no one is under pressure to complete a collage at the workshop. If one makes a collage, it should be done at one's own pace.

The consensus seems to be that SoulCollage should be offered as an option, but that nothing should be forced. One common suggestion was that there be plenty of time allowed for work on SoulCollage projects. Parrish said, “[SoulCollage] seemed to bring out things from the Breathwork that were there, but not well defined. The only difficulty is that there generally is not enough time in a one-day Breathwork setting to do the cards.” Some suggested that one should offer the opportunity to make either cards or large collages. Peggy Wallace and KiP Walker both suggested that participants be encouraged to use mixed media, such as collage and drawing to represent the inner landscape in the best possible way at the time. Wallace wrote, “I was able to create something of great value to me by the combination of the two techniques.” KiP Walker envisions that SoulCollage “could be of use in other experiential workshops that would incorporate movement, meditation, and such.”

### **About the Author**

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[work Experience](#) and [The Ethics of Caring](#). She is the President of Hanford Mead Publishers, Inc. which has just published the new book, [SoulCollage](#) by Seena B. Frost Kylea has a private practice in Santa Cruz, California.

# HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK: DISPELLING THE MYTHS:

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN  
KYLEA TAYLOR AND JOY MANNÉ

WITH  
CARRIE CALLAHAN AND JIM SCHOFIELD.

## INTRODUCTION

**Joy** Kylea, my approach to Holotropic Breathwork (HB) was influenced by myth rather than fact until I had the experience recently with you (June, 2001). I am going to confess that I had many prejudices against it, as well as a great longing to try. I think you knew about my feelings. I certainly was very careful when I decided to have my first experience. And I chose to have it with you. We have been friends for a long time now, and you have my full confidence.

**Kylea** I am glad you had the opportunity to experience Holotropic Breathwork and am honoured that you felt most comfortable in trying it while I was facilitating. I think there are many prejudices against deep work of any kind. Sometimes people think deep work needs to be modulated by an external element or it may be too dangerous. I think that is sometimes true. In Holotropic Breathwork the external element is mostly the context in which the work is done. The skill of the Holotropic Breathwork facilitator is in “non-doing” rather than skill in “doing” or “knowing.” The shamanic process in Holotropic Breathwork depends on the inner healer or inner shaman and the ritual of the predictable set and setting of the technique, rather than on a therapist or a guru.

**Joy** I think that HB (and perhaps Rebirthing too, now I come to think of it) is surrounded by myths and prejudices. What I’m going to do in this dialogue is to put some of these before you, and thus to give you a chance to explain what really goes on in HB and to discuss these issues.

## GENERAL PREPARATION

**Joy** There is a myth that HB is ‘wild stuff.’ Before I tried HB with you and participated in my first HB workshop, I laid down my conditions very clearly. I explained to you that I did not want to be pushed at all, and indeed that for me the boundary between conscious and unconscious was always “in construction.” I’ve experienced in the past that pushing could result in too much coming up: meaning too much more than what I could integrate. The result of that was that I felt incapacitated for several days, or even long periods while I did a “repair job” on my psyche. I had that experience on occasions

in my breathwork training, and some years ago again when I participated in an advanced past life training, and the trainers went too fast. They did this with everyone, and I was often the person who helped others in the group to put their pieces together. Now I've learned to be clear about my boundaries. After all, I know myself well enough now. I want to thank you publicly for being so responsive and respectful.

Perhaps I have to explain in more detail what I mean: I think there is a boundary between what is conscious, and the vast treasures of what access to the unconscious has to offer us, including access to altered, or non-ordinary – as HB practitioners tend to say – states of consciousness. Some people need to keep working on grounding and maintaining that boundary while others have such a strong and defensive boundary that they have to work hard to get through it.

Here are two precise examples of what I mean. Clairvoyance comes through having a flexible boundary. To make that example personal, when I was six, just before my father died, I knew he was going to die. I did not have the words to say this to anyone. It made my capacity for clairvoyance terrifying for me and caused me largely to shut down until I had taken my training in Spiritual Therapy, many years later, and begun to learn to have some control on this boundary. Another example is access to shamanic states, such as voyaging. I do this very often. You know my shamanic animal is the rhinoceros, and I go “riding rhino” through time and space quite regularly. I also use journeying to solve problems or to seek advice, etc., and I have worked in this way with students and clients for a long time now.

**Kylea** People do tend to self-select what they need. Usually the people that come to Holotropic Breathwork are the ones who need to open up, who feel sort of stuck in ordinary states of consciousness and want more contact with other possibilities. We focus more on delineating the boundaries between the states pre- and post-session, than on trying to balance that within the session. We leave the depth of work during the session to the Inner Healer.

**Joy** You know that in my own way of working with the breath, Conscious Breathing Techniques, I take the time to prepare people before starting work with the connected breath, as this is the breathing technique that is likely to induce altered states of consciousness or non-ordinary states. I think of the preparation as a form of ‘unloading,’ giving the client time to become conscious of and integrate suppressed painful experiences before moving towards altered states.

**Kylea** Holotropic Breathwork principles include three parts to the ritual of Breathwork: preparation, the Breathwork journey itself, and integration of whatever comes up on the journey. Preparation is important to give, in a phrase I have coined, “protection, permission, and connection.” It includes information that gives people an idea of what to expect the experience to be like, both from the inside as an experiencer, and from the outside – what it might look like to the sitters. I think most people who are working successfully for some time with nonordinary states of consciousness include these three elements of Preparation, Ritual and Integration somehow in their ritual process. Ritual, or “ceremony”, for those who have a negative imprint from the word “ritual”, allows the conscious mind to be content that all will proceed according to a pre-set form in the ordinary

world and the psyche can head off into nonordinary experiences with complete freedom to explore whatever is appropriate for that person in that particular time and context. The introductory talk is the preparation time in which the Facilitators can connect with participants, give information for informed consent for the technique, and convey their own trust in the Inner Healer and their willingness to assist what is arising rather than directing in the process. The introductory talk covers a bit of history about the method, an overview of the Grof Maps of Consciousness, some examples of specific experiences participants have had in nonordinary states of consciousness, what the process can look like from the outside to an observer, and an overview of the workshop day. The components of the technique are described: the Sitter/Breather relationship dyad, the music, the art, the sharing group, and the Holotropic body work that is used to help amplify body tensions and energies at the end of a session, if necessary. In other words, there is as much clarity as possible about how the experience “looks” from the outside and some examples of what may come up from the inside. The idea is to give permission for whatever *does* arise so that the person can cooperate with that experience rather than fight it because it seems unduly strange. We also talk about the contraindications for doing Breathwork.

**Joy** I noticed with deep appreciation how carefully the group was prepared for the coming experience. I think it’s important for people to know about the care given to this. What impressed me particularly were the rules given to the sitters, especially about non-interference unless asked. I’ve had several Rebirthing sessions where I felt that my process was interfered with and I wasn’t given enough time and space to have my experience.

**Kylea** The rules for Sitters are the same as for Facilitators. We don’t interfere with someone’s process unless they ask or unless they are hurting themselves or others, or are needing to be contained so they don’t bump into the wall or another breather. The principle is that breathers are in charge of their own sessions. Even if they do ask for some connection (body work, hand-holding or other), they also have the right at any time to say “STOP” and all touch stops until it is clear what is needed next. Other tasks for Sitters include helping a Breather to the bathroom door in case they are unsteady on their feet, getting water or handing them a tissue. The main task, though is to pay close attention, to feel into and witness what the Breather is experiencing and be ready to connect if that is what the Breather wishes.

**Joy** I remember with gratitude the patient and detailed preparation. It convinced me that my process would be well contained.

I’ll just mention that you have written an article devoted to Sitting that is published in this number of THB.

## **MUSIC AND INDUCTIONS, INCLUDING THEIR EFFECT ON BREATHING RHYTHMS**

**Joy** There is the myth of the music. I thought it would be very influential. I discovered that it wasn’t.



You told me when we had our dialogue on hyperventilation<sup>33</sup> that many people did not even notice the music. I believed you because I know you, but inside it seemed unbelievable and I continued to wonder. And it is exactly what I experienced. During my session I was oblivious to the music most of the time. I was completely in another world. That amazes me. Sometimes while sitting for Carrie it seemed intrusive to me, as the Sitter – too loud, too energetic, too fast, etc. I know the second session had calmer music because we discussed this in the period of integration, and I understand that. In Conscious Breathing Techniques or Rebirthing in group work where sessions are exchanged, the first session is always more emotional than the second. It is as if for both sitter and breather, it cleanses the larger emotions. However, I have no idea whether other people experienced the larger emotions during my session, as I had no awareness of anything except what was happening to me, and what I needed Carrie to do to support me.

**Kylea** The music serves several purposes. It acts as a backdrop, providing an aesthetic soundtrack to the journey of each participant and masking any ordinary sounds, such as necessary whispering between participant and facilitator, room or outside noises and other distractions. It can also act initially to entrain the body pulses and breath, to evoke emotion in a non-specific way, and to provide a meditative mood at the end of a session. The music is designed in a generic way to support a session but not to evoke any particular experience or emotion. As you illustrate by your own experience, sometimes people do not even hear the music. Sometimes a particular piece of music is annoying or even angering to a participant. We try to encourage people to use any emotion that comes up as grist for the mill. In other words, to own the fact that the anger is coming from within them in response to a piece of music and to focus on the inner anger rather than the outer music. The same advice holds true for any energy that can arise about one's sitter or facilitator or other breathers' sounds, etc. The experience of using one's own arising process for one's own benefit, rather than projecting it as "belonging" intrinsically to something or someone else can be very healing.

## HANDLING THE LARGER EMOTIONS

**Joy** There is a myth that HB sessions are wild and noisy and tending to hysteria and this was not at all my experience in the group, neither in what I heard or in what I observed. When you explained in preparation how you would handle the larger emotions I expected much more acting out. Instead these were handled with extraordinary awareness, without being denied. I was very impressed.

Most of the time when I was sitting for Carrie I was totally unaware of what was going on in the room, but when she was resting after her experience, and when Jim was doing the special bodywork HB practices and which I don't know how to do, I had a chance to look around the room. My professional self wanted to appraise the situation and see what was going on, and as Carrie had Jim working with her, I could do this in good conscience. What I saw was that the larger emotions were carefully contained through very precise and appropriate work, and again, with extraordinary awareness. I really admired that.

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<sup>33</sup> The Healing Breath, Vol 1, No. 2, [www.i-breathe.com/thb12/index.htm](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb12/index.htm)

**Kylea** There was some emotional expression at this session, probably an average amount of it for Holotropic Breathwork. The bodywork and the containment and the tender holding can happen safely in a group setting with skilled facilitators who are following what is already happening or needed by a participant. The body contact can be a really healing part of Holotropic Breathwork. Touch and holding also provides a level of safety and acceptance which is crucial for people who are journeying into places that bring up deep fear or anger.

## BODYWORK AT THE END OF THE SESSION

**Joy** Sometimes in Rebirthing we think HB practitioners mythologise, i.e. exaggerate the importance of, the work needed to complete the experience. In general Rebirthers are inclined let the work integrate of itself during the period following the session. I would not like that to be taken to mean clients leave sessions unfinished. Some Rebirthers use touch and massage to help deal with what the session brings up. One might argue that there is less to complete after a Rebirthing session, but I don't believe this now, after my experience of HB. Both Carrie's and my sessions could have happened through traditional Rebirthing.<sup>34</sup> Mine did not need any bodywork. Carrie certainly enjoyed the bodywork, being a bodyworker herself.

In any case, the body work that Jim did following Carrie's was really different from any work I've seen in a Rebirthing or Breathwork session. Please say something about bodywork in HB.

**Kylea** The bodywork requires some skill and training, but is less about technique, than about skilfully helping to amplify (providing permission, protection, and connection) energies which are already present and needing to be expressed. There are many ways to provide assistance for this amplification without interfering with, directing, or disrespecting a person's process. The tender holding is just as important as the ways of containing deep rage so that it can be expressed completely, but safely. In our culture there is very little permission for either tender non-sexual holding (beyond infancy) or really expressive rage or terror. The need for tenderness is usually seen as weakness and the need to express rage or terror is seen as psychotic.

**Jim:** I really just do what the Breather asks for. Before doing any body work, we always ask for permission from the Breather. Not everybody wants or needs it. It is really just something to try when the Breather requests it or when there is an unfinished quality to the energy at the end. Perhaps there is still tension, or a cramp, or pain in some part of the body. It is the body itself that tells the Breather and the Sitter or Facilitator what to do.

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<sup>34</sup> See Joy Manné, *Soul Therapy*, p.167 for a discussion.

## SHARING AFTER THE SESSIONS

**Joy** It's in the sharing after a session that the work is integrated in a Rebirthing or Conscious Breathing session.

The HB workshop had two kinds of sharing: after the individual sessions, and in small groups at the end of the day. The first involved simply listening to one's partner and the rule was not to comment or evaluate, or anything like that.

**Kylea** Yes, we feel it is important to listen, rather than talk or interject "counselling" type comments in the time immediately following a session. The emphasis in Holotropic Breathwork is going "vertically" (deep inside for insights) rather than "horizontally" (interpersonally). Even in the sharing group, we instruct group members to treat the sharing group as sacred space where a person's experience is honoured and not judged. When people are "coming out" of nonordinary states they are still in that deep internal place, are learning from within, are highly suggestible, and need to be protected from external judgements.

**Joy** The other sharing happened after all the work had finished.

After my session, all I wanted was to go somewhere private to integrate the experience. It was so present and so precious. It was hard to participate in the closing group. I could not really listen to anyone else's sharing, and I was completely unable to talk about my own experience. Actually it is truer to say that I was completely unwilling to talk about it. That would have felt like sacrilege at the time.

**Kylea** Most people feel it is helpful to have a sacred space to share what has happened with people who have had similar experiences and who will honour what is shared with them. If people are not ready to share, that is respected as well. But over time, I have heard from many people that they felt the sharing group was an important part of the process for them, even if they were not ready to share themselves. They could see that various different things had happened for other people. For the facilitators, it is part of providing safety, in that they get a chance to connect with participants and see if they need more care or integration before they go back out into ordinary life.

**Joy** Yes, I can appreciate that. Nonordinary states are very much part of my ordinary life and have always been so. Similarly they are a normal part of my work as a therapist. Therefore I have no problem with them. They are so normal. When this is not the case, I agree that sharing is essential.

## A PERSONAL NOTE

**Joy** In setting my limits, being a professional, I asked myself whether I was holding out on myself – repressing would be the technical term. It was a relief to me when after the session you said that my breathing had been good. I felt that it was good. It was full, and flowing, with full inhales and complete exhales. Perhaps this is a good time for you

to say something about how you look at and evaluate the breath. You know I've written a paper 'Breath is a language.'<sup>35</sup> This is a topic I'm passionate about.

**Kylea** Our general rule of thumb is that we suggest to new breathers to breathe for about 45 minutes in a deeper way, connecting the breaths and not pausing between them. But we feel that some people need very little breathing because the material is so close to the surface and others (perhaps marathon runners, for example) may need to breathe a longer period of time. We do not direct, but merely suggest the kind of breathing. We have noted that different people breathe in different ways that are spontaneously appropriate for their process at different times. You and I had a long dialogue about this for *The Healing Breath* on "Hyperventilation." Basically, I agree that different types of breath seem related to different types of experiences, but my own experience and opinion at this time is that the Inner Healer does a very good job of directing the breath and the experience from the inside and that it is not necessary to evaluate or assess or change the breath from the conscious mind, either as a facilitator or as a breather.

**Joy** This is very clear, and I take the same view in individual sessions. The Breath is the Path.

## THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK AND REBIRTHING OR CONSCIOUS CONNECTED BREATHWORK

**Joy** Now perhaps you will laugh at me a little. I expected something really different. I don't know what precisely. I had no picture of it, only the expectation that it would be really different from anything I had experienced before or seen in a client. In neither session was that the case.

Having expected something *really* different, I find that the differences between HB and Rebirthing or Conscious Breathing Techniques are really minor. What I or Carrie went through could have happened in any Conscious Breathing session. The music helps with the energy if offered, and many Rebirthers use music during sessions, but it was not at all essential. For me the main difference is the bodywork that comes after and is used for integration.

**Kylea** I don't really know about Conscious Breathing, but it is a pretty important principle in HB that no one directs the breath or the inner process, but instead trusts the breath and the inner healer to bring forward what is appropriate for that person in that particular time.

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<sup>35</sup> The Healing Breath: Journal of Breathwork Practice, Psychology and Spirituality, Vol 1, No 3, 1999, available through [www.i-breathe.com](http://www.i-breathe.com)

## TRAINING FOR HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK

**Joy** The ratio of HB professionals to participants was very generous. I think it was two breathworkers to about eight participants. I was very impressed with the professional standards. In Breathwork we are still working to create standards. The Breathwork Alliance which will co-ordinate standards was only formed after the last International Breathwork Foundation conference.

**Kylea** We were particularly fortunate at that session to have a 1-4 ratio of facilitators to breathers. A general rule of thumb I use is to have at least a 1-7 ratio for public workshops. In the Grof Transpersonal Training, which is residential and allows more permission and protection for going deeply into material, sometimes we need a 1-3 ratio to have real safety for deep processes involving trauma or birth. Of course, everyone has one-on-one care at all times because of the breather/sitter dyad.

## CONCLUSIONS

**Joy** You may laugh at this, but in a way I'm disappointed it was not 'worse.' It's like expecting to see a horror film and ending up sharing a beautiful uplifting spiritual experience!

I've had really horrible breathwork sessions. Once I felt as if I was going to die and had to sit up and 'pull myself together.' It happened three times in the session and then I stopped it. I could not work with that. I feared it would come up again. I don't know why this came up on that occasion only. Some people say that certain breathing rhythms bring up certain fears and I wonder about this. I was being asked to breathe in a particular way, but not in a way that made me unhappy, uncomfortable or mistrustful. And I knew my sitter well and trusted him fully. He is a very experienced breathworker.

During this present conference I was enjoying learning a new method of using the breath, and important insights were coming up. I wanted to work with them at that time and not to go for more until I felt I had integrated them. Meanwhile a young and very enthusiastic assistant was trying to push me to go on with the breathing method. I told him not to push. I had enough to integrate.

There was absolutely no pushing during the Holotropic Breathwork session. At all times my own authority, boundaries and wisdom were respected. I'm now confidently encouraging people to do this work—but I still say that it should be with you, or someone in the team at the conference, or with someone who you personally recommend. I still think the group leader should be very carefully chosen!

**Kylea** I would recommend most Holotropic Breathwork facilitators. They have had rigorous training for at least two years, about thirty to sixty three-to-four hour Breathwork sessions, and nine weeks of residential training. They have all done a lot of personal work. The Association for Holotropic Breathwork has a website with a facilitator database. What you say here about your unfinished sessions really emphasizes the need for integration and closure of the material that arises in a Breathwork session. An important part of the training in HB is about how to work with a person to assist with that integra-

tion and closure. One of our other rules of thumb is that five more minutes on the mat (or an hour or whatever it takes for real closure) can prevent hours and days and weeks of difficulty because of incompleteness of the material in a session. I would hope that on a deep unconscious level you might feel more comfortable at this point with the safety of the technique, and therefore you might get your wish that your next session might be “worse”. ☺ Of course, one never knows what will answer when the breath knocks on the door of the psyche. And “worse” sessions are often the “best” ones after all.

## ACCOUNT OF CARRIE’S HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK SESSION

**Carrie:** My Holotropic Breathwork Session was approached with a sense of curiosity and desire for the experience. I was there because I had been asked rather than because I had chosen consciously to attend. I had surprising little intellectual interest in the process. I felt gifted to be there to have the experience, whatever it might be.

The foundation of my breathwork experience was with Joy as I participated in her “Ecole d’Evolution Personnelle et Spirituelle”. Her approach to healing is about acceptance, respect and attention. My additional experiences working with the breath have always been grounded in these qualities so I didn’t come to the HB with the same concerns as Joy. The experiences I’ve had where material was brought forth “too much too fast” were in the realm of bodywork not breathwork. I wonder if this experience of needing to surpass our boundaries to define them and make self-honouring choices as a result isn’t a universal growth experience. (That, however, is the topic of a different paper isn’t it?) For me, the breathwork experience is always approached with some anxiety by my intellect. My intellect knowing it has no choice but to surrender to the other parts of myself that wish to be expressed—parts of myself that are held well in check by my intellect. This “breathe” came in the middle of the Global Inspiration Conference. After several days of intellectual analysis and only bits of experiential breathing, I was primed for an opportunity to work in-depth from a non-ordinary state. I came to the day knowing that I was able to self-contain to a fairly high degree. I had trust in Joy and the preparatory work facilitated by the HB folks even further reinforced my belief that I would be safe, accepted and respected. I was especially pleased to be facilitated by a couple so both the feminine and masculine energies were available to call upon. The container provided by the Holotropic folks was everything I could have hoped for. I had all the elements in place to an important piece of work.

The morning of the “breathe” I woke with my emotions just barely below the surface. Joy and I had previously agreed that I would go first so much of my preparation was done in my sleep. Joy and I prepared our nest for the day—we created our little corner inside the big pink balloon of the process. For me, the most important instruction given was that the breather would be left to their process unless they asked the sitter for something. The space and permission to take control of my own process was very empowering. The music began and off I went. Shortly into the breathe I became increasingly clear that I needed masculine energy to be a part of what was to happen. She signalled for Jim to join us. With the masculine energy present, I dropped into a new level. Joy had facilitated my birth two other times—each time allowing me to integrate a different piece. Again, the experience of my birth came forward for review. This time, however, it was to

be witnessed by a loving, attentive male figure as well. Living the experience of my birth (and the birth of many of my life laws) from within a safe, well-supported and balanced energy gave me the opportunity to recreate the experience the way I always thought it should have been. I was assisted and supported through the birth process, witnessed and received with love and seen for who I truly am. I was also given a glimpse of how the masculine and feminine energies are meant to compliment each other. In the newborn energy, I was held close by the archetypal mother protector as we were watched over and protected in our vulnerability by the archetypal father protector. What an incredible experience!

As we reached a resting place and what I thought was completion I was asked by Jim if there were any places in my body that were holding any residual energy from the process. I found that I had a fair amount of discomfort and tension still present in my neck. Jim then began what actually became a second session. The tension moved its way around my body. With each movement, Jim changed positions to place pressure on the area that was “talking”. Jim was patient, calm, solid—always allowing me to control the amount of pressure that was needed to bring forward the emotion held in that area. I have no idea how long this took place but I knew he would be there for as long as it took. I allowed myself this gift. In reflection, I was able to see my adolescent self using Jim as a strong male energy to push against. I was able to feel the emotions stored by that adolescent girl and then to use his constant presence to more clearly define the edges of my self. He allowed me to push as hard as I need to but always kept me safe and contained in his unconditional regard. I was allowed to express my truth and have it accepted and mirrored back to me. This allowed me to experience another aspect of the father/masculine energy that had previously been missing from my life experiences.

The three hour time frame for each breather and the clear communication by the facilitators that we would be given as much time as we needed to complete our process provided the space I needed to take my experience to a deeper level. My process began quickly and the continuing music gave me the encouragement I needed to follow the energy into the second section of my session.

The group sharing was of particular importance for me. I had an opportunity to talk to Joy personally but the first opportunity I had to talk about my experience with and express my gratitude for Jim’s participation was in the group sharing at the end of the day. The witnessing of this by the larger community was personally important. It also brought closure to the day and experience. It was a ceremony to open the sacred circle in which we had been embraced throughout the day.

As a sitter for Joy, I was much more aware of the music than as a breather. It provided me with a support and a connection to the larger group. After the emotional and profound personal experience of the morning, I was grateful that Joy’s session demanded little of me except being present and loving which was easy for me as a result of the work I had done in the morning. I could tell Joy was having an incredible journey, some of which I was privileged to share as she asked me to write down the guidance she was receiving. Although much different than mine, her experience had an impact that was evident by her inability to fully express it. I felt honoured to witness and support her in her work.

**Jim:** Often the Breather's inner experience is very rich, while on the outside I, as a Facilitator, am just providing support for what the body seems to need to do. So, when Carrie seemed to need to push, I offered resistance. If she pushed in a slightly different direction or with a different level of pressure, I adjusted to provide the appropriate level of resistance. When I work I feel very respectful of the person's integrity. I felt Carrie searching for just the right way to move and support her inner impulse to healing and I tried to be in tune with and present with that.

## ACCOUNT OF JOY'S HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK SESSION

First I sat for Carrie. She was happy with this plan, and I certainly felt safer to accompany to start with rather than to experience. I really was very frightened before the session that the feeling of being about to die would come up again. I chose Carrie because years ago she was my student, so I know her qualities, and over the years she has really taken her independence and become my friend. I feel very safe with her.

As soon as I took up my position on the mat, lying down and getting comfortable, and before ever the music started, I was already 'there' – so to speak. I was already in a breathwork trance and feelings were coming up while you and your team were still starting the proceedings. Immediately I had deep and beautiful emotions. I had lived five years in the previous eighteen months, and had had no time to release the tension or to get as close to myself as I'm used to being.

The music started, which was a sign to me that the session had started, and so that I could let go and surrender to what was coming up.

I immediately started hearing a voice giving me advice. I realised that I was being given guidance, and asked Carrie to write down what was said. There was some practical guidance, and then a Black Bear came, and took me voyaging and among the Indians. I thought I would be able to describe and share the experience here, but I find I can still not talk about it. It felt too sacred to talk about at the time, and it still feels like that. It was a wonderful voyage. [Five months later I am able to share it, see below.]

**Kylea:** I am glad you had such a sacred and wonderful journey.

### Joy's Postscript:

Five months later it is easier to share what happened. I journeyed, and had a very visual and kinaesthetic experience, as if what was happening took place in real life. At the same time heard poetic expressions describing what was happening and asked Carrie to write them down. They needed no editing. Here is what I heard.

Circle of Friends has come.  
Circle of Friends has closed.

A Black Bear covers me.  
In his arms I lie.  
A White Bear sees me too.

Now the White Bear covers me



And takes me to Indian territory  
Welcome to our continent  
We have a place for you here  
And it is a good place  
You will sit with the Indians  
And you will share their peace pipe  
In your own way.

Be not afraid of all the changes  
No harm will come.  
Circle of Friends is closed  
And you are in it.

Beren<sup>36</sup> has come  
And you will bear her snake  
In your own way.  
You are sitting with the Elders  
And we welcome you  
On your head a feather  
On your hands and feet our paint  
Among the elders you are chieftain  
A head-dress of feathers on your head  
Upright you sit among us  
Your feet are stable on the ground

Upright you sit among us  
Back straight, feet crossed  
Smoking the peace pipe  
On the exhale are your words  
We have given you the words  
We surround and are around you  
The period of trial is over

Yes! They tried and tested you  
Yes! We drove you  
to the limits of your endurance  
Yes! We did that.

And now the great chief comes before you  
Old, he is, old in centuries  
Yes! An old chief comes before you  
His feather head-dress touching the ground  
On both sides.

Now you look in his face  
Now it is permitted  
In his eyes you see Black Bear White Bear  
Silent, you are  
Oh! You are silent  
But we –  
We speak one word  
One sound  
That growl so vast it splits the Universe  
For a moment it strips everything of everything

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<sup>36</sup> A character in my shamanovel *The Way of the Breath*, freely available from [www.i-breathe.com/wayofbreath](http://www.i-breathe.com/wayofbreath).

And when that sound comes back it brings all back

And when the sound comes back  
It enters your belly  
Now you are the One Great Chief  
And have the sound  
And this is our Guidance  
They will talk to you more  
And you will do more listening  
And we will be there all the time  
Now we are your ancestors  
For all the generations  
And when you call us  
We will come.

This guidance has been very useful and pertinent the last months and I am very grateful for the experience.

## About the Authors

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[Kylea Taylor, M.S., M.F.T.](#) is a Marriage and Family Therapist. She wrote [The Breathwork Experience](#) (Hanford Mead, 1994) and [The Ethics of Caring](#) (Hanford Mead, 1995,) and *The Holotropic Breathwork Workshop: A Manual for Trained Facilitators* (Hanford Mead, 1991.) She has been Editor of *The Inner Door*, the quarterly publication of the [Association for Holotropic Breathwork International](#) since 1991 and has been a staff trainer for the [Grof Transpersonal Training](#) since 1993. She has been working in addictions and trauma recovery for thirty years and has a private practice in Santa Cruz, California. [www.hanfordmead.com](http://www.hanfordmead.com).

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Joy has a degree in Psychology and a PhD in Buddhist Psychology. She has practised Vipassana meditation since 1965. She was trained in Spiritual Therapy by Hans Mensink and Tilke Platteel-Deur in Holland, 1986-1988. She had her own school of personal and spiritual development in Switzerland between 1989-1995. She is a founder member of the International Breathwork Foundation ([www.ibfnetwork.org](http://www.ibfnetwork.org)) and was its Newsletter Editor between 1997-2001. She is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the peer-review internet journal *The Healing Breath: a Journal of Breathwork Practice, Psychology and Spirituality* available through [www.i-breathe.com](http://www.i-breathe.com). She has written numerous articles, on Buddhist Psychology, Breathwork and the relationship between them, as well as textual studies on the Theravada Buddhist literature in Pali. She is the author of *Soul Therapy* (North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, 1997) which has been translated into Spanish and German.

### **Carrie Callahan**

Carrie Callahan has a B.S. in Art specializing in Interior design. She worked for 10 years doing commercial work before she was guided into other areas. She is a Basic Practitioner of Ortho-Bionomy™, studying in the United States and Switzerland with the creator of Ortho-Bionomy™, Arthur Lincoln Pauls, 1989-1994. She was trained in Conscious Breathwork by Joy Manné at her Ecole d'Evolution Personnelle et Spirituelle in Lausanne Switzerland 1992-

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**SOME CRITICAL ISSUES IN STAN & CHRISTINA GROF'S  
HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK:  
A DISCUSSION BETWEEN  
WILFRIED EHRMANN, PH.D. & STAN GROF M.D., PH.D.**

**1. INTEGRATION**

**Wilfried's question:** The issue of integration with regard to the material that comes up is not dealt with thoroughly in Holotropic Breathwork (henceforth HB) theory and practice. While it is understandable that interpretative work is omitted in respect of the client's experience, nevertheless there are many more questions that are left open. One concerns the destabilising experiences which forced breathing can easily bring up. How can these be brought into harmony and connected into a structure?

**Stan's answer:** I agree with you that in HB, as well as in any other work with non-ordinary states of consciousness, integration of the experience is a critical issue. Where I would not agree is that the question of integration has not been adequately addressed in HB literature or in our training. The fact that we avoid conventional interpretation because of its arbitrariness and dependence on the school of the facilitator does not mean that we are not aware of the need to facilitate integration of powerful experiences. You would certainly find passages dedicated to this important problem in my earlier writings on psychedelic therapy, as well as later ones on HB, most recently in my book *Psychology of the Future*.

I will, at this point, try to briefly summarize the most important principles involved as I see them. I will first address this issue in relation to HB workshops (where HB is used in a group setting) and later make some additional comments on the clinical use of HB in therapy of serious emotional and psychosomatic disorders. The factors facilitating integration begin to operate before the HB session; thorough theoretical preparation, establishing good contact with the facilitators, and developing trust in the group are of critical importance. During the HB session, keeping the experience internalized, sense of safety, paying focused attention to the emerging unconscious material, and willingness to express fully the emerging emotions and physical energies are prerequisites for good integration.

To aid the best possible integration of the experience, the facilitators and sitters have to stay with the breather as long as he or she is in process and has unusual experiences. For the terminal stage of the session, we have specifically developed a certain kind of focused bodywork that can greatly help successful completion of the session. It is designed to release emotions and physical energies that were activated, but not resolved by the breathwork alone. Intimate contact with nature can also have a very calming and grounding effect and help the integration of the session. Particularly effective in this regard is exposure to water, such as a stay in a hot tub or swim in a pool, a lake, or in the ocean. Later, the work with the mandalas and the group sharing can be invaluable. We stay away from interpretations, but the facilitators often use other methods – depathologi-

zation and validation of experiences, encouraging and supportive comments, nourishing group support, expressive dancing, etc.

On the days following intense sessions that involved a major emotional breakthrough or opening, a wide variety of complementary approaches can facilitate integration. Among them are discussions about the session with an experienced facilitator, writing down the content of the experience, or drawing more mandalas. Good bodywork with a practitioner who allows emotional expression, jogging, swimming, and other forms of physical exercise, or expressive dancing can be very useful, if the holotropic experience freed excess of previously pent-up physical energy. A session of Gestalt therapy or Dora Kalff's Jungian sandplay can be of great help in refining insights into the holotropic experience and understanding its content.

When the sessions are used for therapy in a clinical context, the group approach can be used only in clients whose emotional problems allow them to alternate in the role of sitters. Otherwise, it is necessary to conduct private individual sessions. In clinical work, whether individual or group, the therapist would spend additional time with the clients. Experiential sessions would be complemented by therapeutic interviews helping the clients to integrate the experiences from the sessions into their everyday life and chart the strategy for the next HB session. However, even this work would be informed by the principles and strategy of holotropic therapy (as I described it in *Psychology of the Future*) and would not involve the use of interpretations. Again, the reason for this is, on the one hand, the absolute arbitrariness of "interpretations," reflecting the specific biases of the schools (the same content interpreted in very different ways depending on the training of the therapist) and, on the other, the fact that there exists no proof that there is a correlation between the content of the interpretations and clinical results. The therapeutic results seem to be distributed relatively evenly among schools, depending more on personal qualities of therapists than on the "correctness of their theoretical tenets reflected in their interpretations).

## 2. THE INDUCTION OF "SPECTACULAR" EXPERIENCES

**Wilfried's question:** If introductory discussion for a HB breathwork experience covers extensively the likelihood of occurrence of transpersonal or "spectacular" experiences, as Stan Grof describes them in his numerous publications, it is likely to bias the experience in that direction. It can therefore happen that these unusual experiences (or subjective interpretations of experiences) are produced in the highly loaded atmosphere of a holotropic breathing group while there is lack of proof whether or not these experiences have therapeutic value.

**Stan's answer:** Referring to perinatal and transpersonal experiences as "spectacular," as you just did, reflects a strong professional and cultural bias. I have a wonderful friend, Jane Middleton-Moz, who is half Native American; she criticizes me for using the term "non-ordinary states of consciousness." She feels even stronger about the term "altered states," which I actually hate. It has a pejorative flavor and involves a negative judgment about the ontological value and relevance of these experiences (I always have to think about the use of the word "altered" in veterinary medicine when I hear it). It suggests that there is a "normal way" of experiencing ourselves and the world and that what is outside

of that range is a product of mental disease, caused by some unknown pathological processes in the brain, yet to be identified by monistic materialistic science. Jane keeps telling me: “Stan, I don’t understand why you use the term “non-ordinary states?” For my people, these experiences are part of the normal spectrum of human experience!” So, as you see, I get criticized from both sides – on the one hand to be eccentric and exotic and, from the other, to be too conservative.

Forty-five years of work with “non-ordinary states” (as I described in *Psychology of the Future*, I am actually using for these states the term “holotropic”) have convinced me that the truth in this case is on the side of native Americans (and, for that matter all the ancient and pre-industrial cultures) and not on the side of mainstream Western psychology and psychiatry. I have seen numerous examples of the extraordinary healing power of perinatal and transpersonal experiences, and so did people in our training and in the workshops. Traditional psychiatry will have to vastly expand its horizons and accept the existence of these “anomalous” phenomena. And, as to the other part of your question, the possibility of directing experiences of participants by a “pep-talk” to the realm of the “spectacular” is actually minimal. We have repeatedly seen people who wish to reach those realms, to experience psychospiritual death-rebirth, karmic memories, or encounters with archetypal beings, because they read about them, and they are unable to do it. The experience takes them to physical armoring, confrontation with anger, or death of their mother. In holotropic states, one gets what one needs, not what one wants.

### **3. DISADVANTAGES OF HB BEING LIMITED TO A GROUP SETTING**

**Wilfried’s question:** HB is, for the most part, limited to the group process where, as we all know, mood and atmosphere are easily communicated among members and are highly influential. The format of HB does not easily adapt to individual sessions, i.e. sessions with only one person and the facilitator. Therefore there is a danger that HB becomes part of a workshop culture where people live from one, isolated, high level experience to the next, and that these experiences lose their effect rather rapidly after the group is over.

**Stan’s answer:** It is really not true that the format of HB does not easily adapt to individual sessions. As I mentioned earlier, HB can and has been used on a number of occasions in individual sessions. However, except in a clinical context, where there are good reasons for it, it is not the most effective way of using it. The group context offers many very significant advantages. The most obvious is the question of economy. While you would have to plan three hours of your time for an individual session of HB, Christina and I used to work in the early days at Esalen and other places with up to 36 workshop participants. Later, in large international groups (the largest ones in Santa Rosa and in Prague had over 300 participants), we have used one trained facilitator for every five couples. Our experience has been that untrained sitters can generally effectively support the process of the breathers for most of the time. Trained facilitators are needed only when the situations during the sessions require special skills, or in the termination period of the sessions when the bodywork is conducted.

An individual session that would last two hours longer than average (which can happen) would completely throw off the schedule of an individual therapist, unless the

client was the last one of the day, or even then. This situation would present no problems in a large group, considering the number of breathers involved; a provision for it happening would be built into the format of the workshop. The atmosphere of group sessions has a very strong catalytic effect and seems to be conducive to much more intensive experiences than individual sessions. In this respect, these group events are very similar to aboriginal rituals. The use of powerful music systems, the exciting atmosphere, and the contagious effect of the emotional process of others make this setting particularly effective. When so much is happening, it is easier to join in, while in an individual session, the breather is much more self-conscious.

One aspect of working in a group setting that deserves special notice is the experience of the “sitters” (I put this term in quotes, since it really does not adequately capture the function of the partners; but we have not yet found a better one). Participants told us repeatedly that the experience of being a sitter was very meaningful and profound for them. They indicate that they had learned a lot from it that helped them significantly in their own process. This is reflected in the fact that an impressive proportion of those who attend the HB workshops are so moved by their experience of sitting that they actually decide to enroll in the training to become facilitators.

Another advantage is the group sharing of experiences. If the therapist does not judge or reject the individual breathers for experiences that they themselves consider highly objectionable (e.g. violent episodes, explicitly sexual content, etc.), it is often attributed to the therapist’s special professional training. The material itself continues to be considered offensive and loathsome. If lay participants don’t show judgement and continue being loving and supportive, this can provide a powerful corrective experience. In turn, it allows the peers to be more open and honest concerning their own deepest secrets. It helps to create an atmosphere in the group, which makes it obvious that participants share problems that are common to the human species. This can then have a very liberating effect. In addition, in many instances social contact among participants continues after the session and leads to national and international networking providing important emotional, philosophical, and spiritual support. The effect of HB experiences thus reaches far beyond the “high” (or “low”) of the session itself and is not conducive to a subculture of isolated individuals who are emotionally dependent on occasional “spectacular” experiences.

#### **4. HB HARDLY USES THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP**

**Wilfried’s question:** HB hardly uses the possibilities of the therapeutic relationship which, according to scientific research on psychotherapy is the main healing factor of any therapy (cf. Moeller, 2000, p. 59). Instead, the role of the therapist is reduced to a minimum in the ideal case: “In the ideal case, a holotropic session requires a minimum of intervention from the therapist. His main task is watching the process and taking care of a rapid and effective breathing.” (Grof 1987, p. 252)

**Stan’s answer:** The passage that you quote is related to the course of the holotropic session itself. The emphasis in HB is unequivocally on internalization of the process and

guidance from within. As I mentioned earlier, that eliminates the arbitrariness of therapeutic intervention reflecting the therapist's training and personal bias. What the literature on verbal therapy emphasizes is the quality of the therapeutic relationship, not the content of the interpretations or specifics of techniques; these vary widely from school to school and cannot thus be a critical factor in healing. In the overall context of HB, relationships play a very important role in healing – the relationships with the facilitators, with the sitters, and with other members of the group. Rapid development of strong bonding is one of the most impressive features of the work with holotropic states. American anthropologist Victor Turner wrote that sharing time in ritual events of this kind facilitates powerfully the forming of what he called “*communitas*,” deep emotional connection, the sense of community. And that is a very powerful healing factor. We should also not forget another important element in HB – the use of supportive physical contact aimed at providing satisfaction of anaklitic needs and corrective interpersonal experience on a very deep preverbal level. This is a topic that would require special discussion.

## 5. REFRAINING FROM INTERPRETATION

**Wilfried's question:** With regard to refraining from interpretation, the rule is that facilitators should not interpret the experiences during the group sharing after the breathing experience is over. The explanation is that doing this might inhibit the breather's process of mentally filtering—the experience for him/herself, and that the transformative power of the experience would then be removed. This idea is important and should be considered in any deep process of self-exploration. Nevertheless, it can be important in many cases to offer the client support with regard to integration especially when the experience was intense and spectacular because experiences like that can have confusing effects to different degrees. When the client and therapist share a common search for meaning, an important support is provided for the transfer of the experience into ordinary reality.

**Stan's answer:** I think I have said enough about the problem of psychological interpretation and its capricious nature. I agree with you generally that it is important to offer the clients support with regard to integration and help them with the transfer of the experience into ordinary reality. I also believe that the client and therapist should share a common search for meaning. But I am convinced that there are much better means to achieve these goals than interpreting.

This is particularly true, if the therapist has a narrow conceptual framework limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian individual unconscious, which currently dominates mainstream psychotherapeutic practice. In that case, the interpretations could be actually seriously misleading, because they do not acknowledge perinatal and transpersonal experiences as phenomena *sui generis*. The therapist would tend to see them as events that can be understood in biographical terms, or even mistake them for products of a psychotic process for which there is no psychological interpretation and that should be avoided.

This takes us back to our previous discussion about “spectacular experiences.” If breathwork uses a large cartography of the psyche, participants have a priori a conceptual framework, within which most experiences that would be otherwise considered “spec-



tacular” are seen as normal constituents of the human psyche. This perspective is also shared by the facilitators and the rest of the group members, which is the situation similar to that of participants in native rituals. Under those circumstances, “spectacular experiences” produce a sense of awe and numinosity, rather than causing emotional turmoil, conceptual upset, and confusion.

## 6. HB HAS AN UNCRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CONCEPT OF THE “INNER HEALER”

**Wilfried’s question:** HB seems to me to have an uncritical attitude towards the concept of the “inner healer.” It says that we carry an internal authority which controls the pace and the issues with regard to the growth of our soul. In a breathing session this hypothetical authority is responsible that only material that can be integrated comes up. The benefit of this idea *as a suggestion* is unquestionable as it is likely to inspire in the breather feelings of safety and trust, and thus to reduce the probability of experiences which cannot be integrated coming up. Nevertheless, this concept can be misused when the responsibility of the group trainer is mirrored back to the participants with regard to their inner healer. If there is an experience which is difficult to integrate, the idea that “this was what the inner healer wanted” is all too easily available.

**Stan’s answer:** When we talk about the fact that holotropic states of various kinds (the initiatory crisis of shamans, psychedelic experiences, holotropic breathwork, spiritual emergencies, etc) mobilize the “inner healer,” an intrinsic intelligence of the psyche that guides the process, it does not mean that there is absolute guarantee of safety and success of the process under all circumstances. Although the process has a strong healing potential and general direction toward health, the final outcome is still codetermined by a number of internal and external variables – the subject’s ability to surrender to it or, conversely, resistance to it, the set and setting, the quality of the support system, cultural determinants, etc.

For example, in native cultures it is understood that the shamanic crisis reflects higher calling and is in its nature healing and benevolent. The same is true about Kundalini awakening, as it is described in yogic literature. At the same time, it is well known that these processes can under certain circumstance cause considerable problems for the experiencers. Both the shamanic lore and the yogic literature emphasizes that it can be very dangerous to resist the process. It is not uncommon, that serious problems including psychotic episodes occur during intense spiritual practice, with or without breathing exercises, for example in Zen sesshins, Vipassana retreats, Christian prayer, Sufi zikers, etc. As far as psychotherapeutic practice is concerned, there have been instances where emotional breakdown occurred in contexts that did not involve any breathing exercises – during traditional psychoanalysis, in Gestalt workshops, in the course of EST training, etc.

In any kind of human activity, there is a certain element of risk and this is true for psychotherapy, as well as spiritual practice. We can try our best to reduce this risk to a minimum, but we can never offer a promise of absolute safety. There will always be factors that are beyond our control. The problems with integration of a particular session

thus should not be blamed solely on the inner healer or, conversely, be seen as the fault of the facilitators. As far as the latter are concerned, we should examine if they did the best they could under the circumstances. Neither the inner healer, nor the best facilitator can guarantee that no problems will ever arise.

## **7. THE FORMAT WITHIN HB IS RELATIVELY INFLEXIBLE WHILE ITS INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS HAVE BEEN USED FLEXIBLY IN OTHER CONTEXTS**

**Wilfried's question:** The format of HB is relatively inflexible. The breathing process lasts for at least three hours and after it there is time for mandala painting. This means that half a day is required for one HB session. After two sessions have been exchanged, there is a sharing circle. So one usually needs a three to four day seminar for two breathing sessions. This format may be justified by the intensity of the experiences which need a lot of time for integration. Nevertheless, it is not understandable why a shorter time for breathing cannot also be appropriate. We know from practical work, that the main elements of HB can be used in other formats with success, e.g. in one to one and a half hour sessions. This fact is not reflected in publications on HB.

**Stan's answer:** Before I answer this question, I would like to address what you said about the time necessary for HB experiences. It is important to make a distinction between an introductory seminar that involves many people who are new to the procedure and require thorough theoretical and practical preparation. For this purpose, we need minimally two-days (usually Friday evening, Saturday, and Sunday morning). People who are familiar with the breathwork meet just for the HB sessions and the sharing, which takes considerably less time; two sessions and sharing can easily be done in one day.

And now to your question. I am aware that there are some approaches using breathing in the context of sessions that are considerably shorter than those of HB. However, they are generally using strategies that are more conservative, for example, combining this work with therapeutic dialogue and guidance, monitoring the process and controlling the intensity and form of breathing, etc. This is often associated with a tendency to avoid the areas of experiences that appear too intense and dangerous. However, the existence of such material in the unconscious (e.g. the trauma of birth, memories of near-drowning, demonic archetype, etc.) actually tends to be the major source of many clients' emotional and psychosomatic problems. They cannot be worked through by small instalments of more superficial and less intense experiences.

Once we allow the experiences to develop fully, we have to continue this work as long as it takes to complete it; we cannot set limits on the duration of the experience. I think, my ideas and strategy in this regard have been strongly influenced by the years of working with psychedelics, where one cannot determine and control how deep the experience should go and what it should be like. And this is where I repeatedly observed that the experiences that at first sight seem very disturbing and dangerous are those that are followed by most profound healing when they are properly supported and integrated (e.g. reliving a difficult birth). Avoiding to confront them and focus on "safe" areas in the un-

conscious would then be counterproductive and set limits to the degree and depth of healing that can be achieved.

## 8. THE BREATH HAS AN INSIGNIFICANT ROLE IN HB

**Wilfried's question:** The breath has an insignificant role in HB. It is mainly used as an initial ignition or catalyst to the experience, its role being to induce a trance-like altered state of consciousness which will permit the relevant experiences. Once the trance is induced, the breath is given no further importance. HB, therefore, is only teaching how to deepen and accelerating the breath. Other therapeutic possibilities related to the power and variability of the breath, and especially its refinement, are neglected. We are thus entitled to ask whether Holotropic Breathwork is breathwork at all.

**Stan's answer:** The situation in relation to the theory and practice of breathing is similar to the situation in the world of psychotherapy that we discussed earlier. There are many schools using breath for healing, therapeutic, and spiritual purposes and each of them teaches something different. Behind each of them is usually an implicit conviction that their particular technique is the right way or the best one. The fact is that you can do many different things with your breathing and it will change your consciousness.

It has been known for centuries that it is possible to influence consciousness by techniques that involve breathing. The procedures that have been used for this purpose by various ancient and non-Western cultures cover a very wide range from drastic interferences with breathing to subtle and sophisticated exercises of various spiritual traditions. Thus the original form of baptism practiced by the Essenes involved forced submersion of the initiate under water for an extended period of time. This resulted in a powerful experience of death and rebirth. In some other groups, the neophytes were half-choked by smoke, by strangulation, or compression of the carotid arteries.

Profound changes in consciousness can be induced by both extremes in the breathing rate, hyperventilation and prolonged withholding of breath, as well as by using them in an alternating fashion. Very sophisticated and advanced methods of this kind can be found in the ancient Indian science of breath, or *pranayama*. Specific techniques involving intense breathing or withholding of breath are also part of various exercises in Kundalini Yoga, Siddha Yoga, the Tibetan Vajrayana, Sufi practice, Burmese Buddhist and Taoist meditation, and many others.

More subtle techniques which emphasize special awareness in relation to breathing rather than changes of the respiratory dynamics have a prominent place in Soto Zen Buddhism (*shikan taza*) and certain Taoist and Christian practices. Indirectly, the depth and rhythm of breathing gets profoundly influenced by such ritual artistic performances, as the Balinese monkey chant or Ketjak, the Inuit Eskimo throat music, and singing of kirtans, bhajans, or Sufi chants.

In the last few decades, Western therapists rediscovered the healing potential of breath and developed techniques that utilize it. We have ourselves experimented in the context of our monthlong seminars at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, with various approaches involving breathing. These included both breathing exercises from ancient spiritual traditions under the guidance of Indian and Tibetan teachers and techniques developed by Western therapists. Each of these approaches has a specific empha-

sis and uses breath in a different way. In our own search for an effective method of using the healing potential of breath, we tried to simplify this process as much as possible.

We came to the conclusion that it is sufficient to breathe faster and more effectively than usual and with full concentration on the inner process. Instead of emphasizing a specific technique of breathing, we follow even in this area the general strategy of holotropic work, to trust the intrinsic wisdom of the body and follow the inner clues. In Holotropic Breathwork, we encourage people to begin the session with faster and somewhat deeper breathing, tying inhalation and exhalation into a continuous circle of breath. Once in the process, they find their own rhythm and way of breathing. Each of the participants in HB sessions uses breath in a different way, but it would be a mistake to believe that, therefore, breathing is irrelevant for this approach.

Helen Bonny, who was the music therapist for our psychedelic research program in Maryland. In the following years, she showed that evocative music can, in and of itself, induce powerful experiences and she developed what she calls guided imagery with music (GIM). Many types of breathwork, including classical rebirthing, work with breath and use no music. Vipassana meditation works solely with a certain quality of attention. In HB, these three elements are combined and they seem to potentiate each other.

## BOOK & CASSETTE REVIEWS

[Shakti Gawain \(2000\), \*Developing Intuition: Practical Guidance for Daily Life\*. New World Library: Novato, California.](#)

[The International Breathwork Foundation's collection of lectures, \*The Spirit of Breathwork\*. Gunnel Minett \(ed\)](#)

[Tania Clifton Smith, \*Breathe to Succeed: In ALL aspects of your life\*. New Zealand: Penguin Books, 1999.](#)

[Seena B. Frost, \*SoulCollage™: An Intuitive Collage Process for Individuals and Groups\*. Santa Cruz, CA; Hanford Mead Publishers, 2001. \[www.soulcollage.com\]\(http://www.soulcollage.com\)](#)

[Denis Lewis, \*Boundless Breathing: Meditative Practices for Health and Self-Transformation\*](#)

[Sheng Keng Yun, \*Walking Kung: Breathing for Health\*. Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc. 1997](#)

[Ken Cohen's guide to \*Healthy Breathing\*, a cassette, published by Sounds True, PO Box 8010, Boulder, CO 80306-8010. ISBN 1-56455-469-4](#)

**Shakti Gawain (2000), *Developing Intuition: Practical Guidance for Daily Life*. New World Library: Novato, California.**

This is a wonderful simple introduction to using one's intuition. All the necessary topics are covered. In Chapter One intuition is defined, differentiated from instinct, and related to psychic ability. Chapter Two teaches becoming aware as a prerequisite for the development of intuition. There is an exercise to help. Chapter Three is about developing self-trust. There is a good warning against dependency on gurus, and encouragement to trust one's own inner teacher. (p. 43) Chapter Four teaches relaxation as a preparation. Chapter Five begins the process of accessing intuition. There is an exercise, many case histories, and very good guidance on how to treat the messages received. Chapter Six deals with whether we can safely act on our intuition, and what the limits are: "start practising by taking small steps until you build trust and skill." (p. 71) Chapter Seven teaches how to interpret intuitive messages sensibly: "Intuition is seldom dramatic, grandiose, or particularly mystical. It is generally a very natural and normal feeling. It may be as simple as feeling 'I want to do this, or 'I don't want to do that.'" (p. 78) "When you follow your intuitive energy you feel like you are 'in the flow' of life." (p. 79) Gawain points out that we feel more alive when we are following our intuition, and depressed when we do not.

Chapter Eight explains how to distinguish our intuition from other internal messages. Here Gawain introduces Hal and Sidra Stone's Voice Dialogue technique which I always say is to mental health what brushing our teeth is to physical health – essential! Chapter Nine deals with the relationship between intuition and emotions. Chapter Ten draws attention to the importance of a good relationship with our body in order to develop intuition. Chapter Eleven considers the place of intuition in our work and includes topics such as money, finding our Higher Purpose, and discovering our passion.

Finally in Chapter Twelve, there are a few words about, and good exercises to teach the art of following our intuition.

This is an excellent book in every way. Its contents are extraordinary and expressed with the utmost simplicity. There are good exercises throughout that are well pre-

sented and easy to follow. As well as that, it looks really beautiful and has a lovely print and a lovely cover, thus respecting its reader and being congruent in both message and appearance. It is small and easy to hold in the hand. Give it to yourself, your friends and, if you work professionally, encourage your clients to read it.

Please, Shakti Gawain, write more books for us.

Joy Manné, PhD

**Gunnel Minett (ed), *The Spirit of Breathwork: Lectures from Global Inspiration 1949-1999*. Cambridge, UK: International Breathwork Foundation**

This is a selection of lectures given at International Breathwork Foundation (IBF) conferences between **1994-1999** and not between 1949-1999 as on the cover. The secretarial work, including transcribing from tapes and some rendering into more-or-less understandable English, was done by Gunnel Minett, herself not a native English speaker.

Minett was the spark that, in 1994, brought together the breathworkers who lit the glowing, inspirational fire that is the IBF today: a very successful organisation in every way. Most unfortunately the same cannot be said for this book. From the beginning Minett had the laudable vision of publishing the conference lectures. She wanted almost all of them included in the collection. Judee Gee, then president of the IBF contributed her intelligence and some editing skills by removing some of them, and later Vivienne Silver-Leigh contributed similarly by doing the same. Silver-Leigh also did the proof-reading. From the mistake in the date on the cover through the innumerable printing errors (that remained in despite Silver-Leigh's hard work), the botched cover (the original cover artist will not have her name associated with it), and the ugly and insensitive layout of text on page, the result is bereft of professional pride.

This is the first collection of articles on breathwork in print. It was a golden opportunity to show the world the professional face of breathwork, and it has been lost. The lack of professional pride which this book shows betrays and offends the professionalism and high standards that I and others have worked hard to create in the IBF. It is an insult to the authors of the articles and a disgrace to its editor. Minett was the IBF's General Secretary for five years and nursed it through from birth to success. How disappointing that she did not give herself and the world something to celebrate.

That being said, let me turn to the contents:

Lectures are collected into chapters by year. While the Table of Content gives the theme for each conference, it does not put in the year.

There is an Introduction by the editor. This book is so replete with printing errors that even her four pages do not escape and we read the word "psychoanalysisissimply." (p.14) Minett emphasises the potential of "breath-oriented therapies" to access the birth trauma and intrauterine experiences. She claims "The only way to 'remember' this period is through memories stored in the body rather than in the brain." There is no reference for this assertion. For her, breathwork "rather than being a new form of psychotherapy, is ... a versatile tool that can be used for a variety of purposes," among these to improve physical health. She is apparently unaware of the important distinction Mike Grant White ([www.breathing.com](http://www.breathing.com)), has made between "breathing work" which deals with physiologi-

cal breathing problems, and “breathwork” which deals with psychological problems and promotes spiritual development. It is a useful distinction which enables clear discussion about the purposes of different ways of working with the breath. Minnett also draws attention to the traditions that use the breath as a means for bringing life energy into the body.

Chapter One contains the first conference lectures (1994). ‘The Tree of Life, A system approach to the transformation of consciousness’ by Sergei Gorky makes many claims about the nature of consciousness and contains no references. There is no way of discovering where the writer got the information that allows him to speak so confidently of this complex and interesting field which he seems completely unaware is at the centre of scientific discussion today.

Ingrid Wallin, a clinical psychologist from Sweden writes a useful paper on ‘How I use Breathwork with clients in my work as a psychologist.’ The writer had her training in breathwork paid for by her county council’s work development funding. Here Sweden leads the way and I hope other countries will follow. Wallin sees Breathwork as just one among her many therapeutic skills and chooses carefully the clients with whom she uses it. She gives good explanations for her choices, including an occasion when she has chosen to work with the client sitting rather than lying to protect her boundaries and avoid misunderstandings.

Michael Scherbakov’s paper is called ‘Cluster Theory Of Integration.’ Scherbakov has an MA in Physics and a PhD in Psychology, and his paper has references all of which give the name of the author and title of the work, some of which give the date of publication, and none of which give the publisher. This does not inspire confidence. The editor should have insisted on full information.

Finally in this section there is my paper, ‘What is Rebirthing?’ One colleague said to me very gently, “This is not one of your best papers, Joy. Why did you publish it.” The colleague is right.

Chapter Two, ‘Celebrate the Synergy,’ contains the conference papers from the 1995 conference which was held in Poland. Wojciech Eichelberger’s paper, ‘The Concept of an Integral Therapeutic Approach,’ argues that there are three main kinds of therapies: mind-centred (e.g. psychoanalysis); body centred (e.g. Rolfing) and substance-centred (e.g. macrobiotics). In a diagram, he places these along the sides of a triangle. In a circle in the centre he puts Energy, meaning core interventions because they effect all of the others. Here he includes breathwork techniques and acupuncture. Spirituality encompasses all of these. He makes the useful criticism of people involved in Rebirthing, “they had a lot of energy going but the energy was not really flowing nicely and evenly and not in an open and gentle way. The energy was also used as a compensation for shortcomings that were present in all the other aspects. So we must be really careful when we use Breathwork. It is so easy to get carried away with energy and get ideas about ourselves that we are free, wise and able to do anything we want. But I will say we are not, unless there is some harmony in the three basic aspects.” (p. 87)

My own paper, ‘Rebirthing – an Orphan Therapy or a Part of the Family of Psychotherapies’ was previously published in the *International Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine*, Vol.6 (1994), No. 4, 503-517. Here again the format of the article has become garbled: quotes are not indented, some are in italics for some reason unknown to myself, headings are not in bold type, “:” are separated from text with

a space on both sides, capitals are lost at the beginning of a sentence, a heading is at the bottom of a page (p. 102), etc. In this paper I argue that Rebirthing is profoundly connected to the major psychotherapies, including Freud's repetition compulsion. This article will be published in the next number of *The Healing Breath* (Vol.4, No. 1, January 2002). It can meanwhile be downloaded here in the format I intended.

The chapter ends with Sergei Gorsky's paper, 'The Role of Carbon Dioxide in a Rebirthing Session.' The paper makes claims about the effect of Rebirthing on carbon dioxide levels, and then argues that because of that Rebirthing is good on many levels. It does not compare Rebirthing with other non-breathwork therapies which may have similar results.

Chapter Three, the 1996 conference papers, has as its theme 'Breathwork and Spirituality.' It begins with 'Transference and Counter-Transference in Spiritual and Transpersonal Work' an excellent article by Kylea Taylor on the client-therapist relationship. She points out that "when working with nonordinary states, the ethical pitfalls are much more subtle, confusing and complicated." She explains a chakra-based model for examining "Caregiver Vulnerabilities to Ethical Misconduct." Taylor's books are required reading for anyone with an interest in breathwork and indeed for all professional therapists.

Sergei Gorky's poetic article 'Breathland' – a lovely expression – gives a good picture of the ideal breathwork session. He traces breathwork's development towards attracting more "normal" people. As previously he makes claims about the role of the breath without any supporting references.

In 'Music Therapy and Breathwork: a Path to Self-Realisation,' Arturo de Luca, a Jungian psychologist, explains the use of music in breathwork: for relaxation, to evoke "memories and feelings of longing or nostalgia," to provoke catharsis and for expanding consciousness. (p. 140) His method is "based on the progressive evocation of seven fundamental archetypes linked to the seven chakras: the Inner Child, the Wanderer, the Seeker, the Warrior, the Winner, the Magician and the Sage." (p. 142) He does not say which archetype relates to which chakra, and for me it is not obvious. It is also not obvious why he has chosen these archetypes among the many available: e.g. in her book *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By*, (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) Carol Pearson works with the archetypes of the Orphan, Innocent, Magician, Wanderer, Warrior and Altruist.

In the last article in this section 'Simplicity and Immortality,' Nemi Nath takes up the issue of physical immortality, a credo in Traditional Rebirthing.

Chapter Four, the 1997 conference papers, 'Breathwork and Psychology' starts with my article 'Breath is a language' which has been published previously in the *Lectures and Transcripts* of the Fourth Global Inspiration Conference of the International Breathwork Foundation, 'Breathwork and Psychotherapy,' Kirchberg/Pielach, Austria, June 6 - 13, 1997 and in *The Healing Breath: A Journal of Breathwork Practice, Psychology and Spirituality*, Vol. 1, No 3, 1999 ([www.i-breathe.com/thb13/index.htm](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb13/index.htm), pp. 3-34). The page layout is garbled as in my other articles. I consider 'Breath is a language' to be one of my most important contributions towards the understanding of Breathwork. I start with expressions about the breath in language and then go on to present the evidence of the important role breath plays in illness and health; psychotherapy including emotion, body language, relationships; in nose vs mouth-breathing; in sex and in spirit, including



energy, love and prayer. In a section ‘Psychotherapists understanding breath language’ (which should be a main heading and isn’t, and is quite lost in the middle of page 168) I give a review of the history of breathwork in psychotherapy including Winnicott, Reich, Boadella, the Jungian Magda Proskauer, Rebirthing, and Conscious Breathing Techniques. A section ‘Dialects of Breath Language’ deals with laughter, singing, speaking, smoking and farting. There are four pages of references.

In ‘Pranayama – A Key to Atman: the four types of breathing’ Reinhard Scholze describes the four phases of breathing: exhale, inhale, full and empty lung retention and their function. He describes diaphragmatic or abdominal, intercostal, upper chest and full breathing in yoga.

Gerhard Stumm contributes ‘Basic Elements of Psychotherapy.’ Stumm has been very active in establishing psychotherapy as a profession in Austria. This useful article deserves better editing as many of its expressions are incomprehensible. Stumm defines five necessities for psychotherapy and seven elements that require consideration, including a philosophy of the nature of man; theories that explain reality, personality, motivation and development; a concept of illness and health and its aetiology, and a practical theory: “A concept of how you should act as therapist so that the misconceived development can be re-conceptualised.”

Other articles in this chapter are Wilfried Ehrmann’s ‘Breath is your companion,’ Jim Morningstar’s ‘Breathwork – therapy of choice for whom?’ Eirik Balavoine’s ‘From therapy to spirituality – stages of the path,’ and Alfred Pritz ‘What does Breathwork have to do with psychotherapy? The excellent quality of the articles in this chapter are the result of the hard work of this particular conference organiser, Wilfried Ehrmann, a leading breathwork theorist.

Chapter Five has the theme ‘Body, Breath and Bliss,’ and contains most of the lectures of the 1998 conference. Bo Wahlström’s paper ‘Social Integration’ is full of charm. In a whimsical and gently teasing tone he discusses breathwork’s potential to “save the world” and his own wish to do so. Within this he discusses different approaches to the Rebirthing dictum “Thought is creative.” He discusses different therapeutic schools’ approach to transformation, gives credit to all of them, and emphasises the importance of changing thoughts and behaviour. The light tone of this article is deceptively simple; don’t be taken in: it contains a lot of useful information and informed discussion. Wahlström says, “Your way of thinking and behaving creates psychological and physiological tensions. If you release this tension in one breathing session but then go back to think and behave in the same limiting way you will eventually re-create the tension.” (p. 253) “People in therapy sometimes over-emphasise the identity factor. If you have a problem at home you go to get more therapy. I once said to a client, ‘You cannot breath away your husband. Go home and talk to him and get clear on what you will do with your relationship.’ It worked better than my breathing sessions.” (p. 256) Wahlström is a very experienced breathworker. I hope he will write many more articles to share his knowledge and experience, and because he is so delightful to read.

The other articles in this chapter are all interesting and include ‘Beyond bliss’ by Eirik Balavoine, ‘How breathwork blends with emotional therapy’ by Jacques de Panafieu, and ‘Inner qualities of a professional breathworker’ by Tilke Platteel-Deur. The last article is published in *The Healing Breath* Vol 1 No 2, pp. 3-10, available through

[www.i-breathe.com/thb12/index.htm](http://www.i-breathe.com/thb12/index.htm)

Chapter Six, 'Breathing into Society,' contains the 1999 conference papers. Particularly noteworthy here is Wilfried Ehrmann's paper 'Sharing the Breath.' Ehrmann points out through comparisons with Freud and Reich that twenty-five years is a significant "age" for a psychotherapy. He argues that breathwork and the world of psychotherapy have a lot to offer each other. He does not shirk the controversial: "Breathing is simple – the message is simple (free your breath). Truth is simple, so we may conclude that breathing is the truth. We may also ask if there is an illusion of simplicity around breathing. Is there a fear of complexity involved in the concepts of Breathwork?" (p. 311) "The knowledge and scientific background for breathwork is still weak. It can also be the case that some of us want to escape knowledge or avoid order because they adore the spirit of love and beauty as supreme value." (p. 317)

Also in this section Jim Morningstar, in a paper called 'Spiral Dynamics: Breathwork and Social Evolution' explains this theory. In her paper on Hal and Sidra Stone's Voice Dialogue technique, Tilke Platteel-Deur responds to the theme of the conference: "The moment we want to bring Breathwork into society and give it the place it deserves, we have to know how to carry the energies that are required in, and by our society. We can't hope to be received on a management level if we are not really befriended with the kind of energy that is called for on that level." (p. 348) The section closes with an article by Steve Minett, 'Beyond the coercive organisation.' This article has nothing to do with breathwork as far as I can see.

There are many excellent papers in this collection and it ought to be a cause for celebration. Care in its production in proportion to its importance for the world of breathwork as well as for the world of therapy should have been taken. Publishing a volume in this condition does the IBF no credit and betrays the professional pride of its members. For me as a founder member this is specially disappointing. The IBF is now a very successful organisation with an annual conference that attracts well over 200 participants from all over the world, and it is still growing. It sends out a quarterly newsletter and is building an impressive website. [www.ibfnetwork.org](http://www.ibfnetwork.org). At its most recent conference (2001), inspired by Jim Morningstar, it produced the Breathwork Alliance, an international group of Breathwork teachers dedicated to establish standards. The IBF has really let itself down with this book.

Joy Manné, PhD

**Tania Clifton Smith, *Breathe to Succeed: In ALL aspects of your life*. New Zealand: Penguin Books, 1999.**

Tania Clifton-Smith is described as "a(n) ... authority on the assessment and treatment of breathing disorders, hyperventilation syndrome, physical stress management and pain syndromes." This truly excellent book confirms this claim.

In Chapter One, 'The Body's Best Kept Secret,' she says,

"...there is so much more to breathing than 'in and out'. It is the first and the last thing we do in life. It affects our whole being – the way we feel,

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the way we look, the way we move, the way we function, the way we live, the way we present ourselves, and the way we speak.

Breathing affects our sleep, emotions, energy levels, performance, temperature levels and our ability to relax and handle stress. It influences our mind, body and spirit.”

A good breathing technique can assist people with asthma, poor circulation, chronic airways disease, allergies, sinusitis, headaches, high blood pressure, fatigue, and panic attacks. It can also be a great help during pregnancy and labour, lovemaking, times of stress at work or home, recovery from jet lag, substance withdrawal and pain programmes. (p. 10)

Clifton-Smith points out that parents naturally listen to an infant’s breathing as a barometer of the infant’s health. (p. 11) As the focus turns from illness to maintaining health, breathing “has not been emphasised enough as part of this healthy lifestyle package.””(p. 14).

Chapter Two explains what a breath is, and especially how to breathe using the diaphragm. It claims that the normal breathing rate is 10-14 per minute, without giving a reference. (p. 16) At an ISARP (.....) conference a few years back I was told it was around 8. So I am now confused. How can I find out when there is no reference? Similarly she says, “Evidence suggests that breathing connects the mind and the body.” (p. 17) Well, I know very well where the references for this are as this connection is my specialisation. (See THB, Vol. 3, No. 2, ‘An Annotated Booklist for a Breathwork Training’ by Catherine Dowling and Joy Manné for any number of good books on this subject.) This chapter teaches us how to check our breath and how to find our breathing rhythm. It includes a description of the organs which are used in breathing, illustrated with good diagrams, and how breathing is controlled.

Chapter Three explains the role of the nose, including the importance of nose breathing. It contains some interesting suggestions about the difference between using the left or right nostril when we want to go to sleep. It explains and encourages nasal washes. It has good recommendations, supported by clear diagrams, for head positioning for nasal drainage, traction when suffering from sinus, and pressure points to use to decrease nasal obstruction and assist with lymphatic movement.

Chapter Four is called Understanding Your Body and explains the relationship between breathing rate and energy consumption, including readable and comprehensible accounts of the chemistry of breathing. “If low levels of carbon dioxide are maintained a breathing disorder known as hyperventilation syndrome may develop. This is a breathing disorder characterised by over-breathing at rest.” (p. 44) There is a list of etiological factors in breathing pattern disorders including lung disease; drugs such as caffeine, nicotine and ecstasy; posture; and psychiatric, metabolic, endocrine – pregnancy is included in the last category! – and other disorders. In explaining the work of the autonomic nervous system Clifton-Smith points out, “One of the first things we do in response to a stressful feeling is to alter our breathing. ... The (‘fight or flight’) response normally occurs when we get excited or nervous ... If no physical activity occurs or the situation is prolonged and the body is not allowed to recover, the sympathetic branch can remain switched on causing breathing patterns to alter and, over time, exhaustion and ill health to occur.” (p. 48f)

Chapter Five teaches us how to breathe and includes visualisations, exercises for longer relaxation breathing, meditation, posture, effective breathing, “a quick fix for ‘instant’ calm,” stimulatory breathing, and energising breathing stretches. It is recommended that exhaling should take longer than inhaling and there is this about breathing pauses: “The pause after exhaling is also important. The pause phase stills the mind. You may feel that you are doing nothing but air is actually still being exhaled. Most of us don’t exhale for long enough; this is a common problem with people who suffer from asthma. The longer the pause, the more relaxed you will feel. When practising allow the pause to be as long as you want. Play with it – don’t worry if you extend it for a long time as the breath in will come again.” (P. 54) There is also the good advice: “It is important to realise that it is unhealthy to focus on your breathing all the time as this can also lead to problems,” (p. 67) and the caution that during practice: “Strong emotions (may arise) – this can happen if you have been very tense because of a past trauma or experience and then begin to let go. Allow yourself to relax gradually and the sensation will pass.” (p. 68) There is an analysis of disordered breathing patterns.

Chapter Six challenge the reader: “Are You Overdrawn at the Body Bank?” and concerns the relationship between breathing and energy. It offers a breathing bank statement and a list of symptoms associated with a bad breathing pattern. Chapter Seven presents the warning signs in the form of a quiz. Chapter eight teaches “Breathing To Increase Your Performance and Recovery” and has advice for various sports, as well as for pain control, post sport and sleep. Chapter Nine brings advice about “Breathing And the Workspace” and includes techniques like how to prepare for and sit during a business meeting to avoid stress; breathing for presentation skills, conflict situations; sharpening perception, etc. There are exercises for sedentary workers and computer users. There are chapters on the relationship between breathing and speaking, breathing to beat stress, women’s health, asthma, and the book ends with a detailed case history.

There are excellent diagrams throughout so that all the exercises are clear, as well as good case histories.

There is only one thing missing in this excellent book, and this illustrates the divide among people who do breathing work – like Tania Clifton-Smith, and people who do breathwork: i.e. who work with *what the breath brings up*: from the emotions that underlie the symptoms of the bad breathing that this book is teaching us not to do to the altered states of conscious that particular breathing techniques (rebirthing, conscious breathing techniques, Holotropic Breathwork, etc.) evoke. Each group needs a basic knowledge of the other’s work and a basic understanding of its value. Neither group can solve all breathing problems on its own. Developing a system of referrals between the groups is an essential next step for both.

This book is essential reading for every Breathworker for the practical information it provides. If you enjoy exploring your breath, or playing with your breath, or if you need to improve your breathing, this book is for you too. If you are interested in yourself as a developing person on a spiritual path, this book is not for you, because it ignores so completely the relationship between breath and spirit.

Joy Manné, PhD

**Seena B. Frost, *SoulCollage™: An Intuitive Collage Process for Individuals and Groups*. Santa Cruz, CA; Hanford Mead Publishers, 2001. [www.soulcollage.com](http://www.soulcollage.com)**

“Let’s make a collage! Mix imagination and intuition with a group of powerful, “cut-out” images, and you can make a SoulCollage card.” (p. xi) That is how this book begins, and immediately I thought, “of course.” Before I had read another word, many ways of using this method flooded my imagination: with Hal and Sidra Stone’s Voice Dialogue, with Dina Glouberman’s imagework, with any method teaching intuition, as way of integrating after working in Bert Hellingers’ Family Constellation workshop, after breathwork sessions or whatever kind, of course (See Kylea Taylor’s article in this THB) ... absolutely anywhere that integration was important. This technique is of unlimited application for the most profound inner work. How amazing, I thought, that no-one had thought of it before.

Frost says, “This book gives a structure for creating your SoulCollage deck. There are suggestions about the actual construction of cards, but more importantly, the book presents a model for psychological and spiritual work. You will learn how to reflect on your images and, in doing so, how to access your own deep wisdom.” (p. xi) “The SoulCollage process is a way to tend soul and explore psyche at the same time.” (xii) This book amply fulfils its promises. In fact, I am so very enthusiastic about it that I find it hard to review. There is so much insight to quote, and anyway, why not, right now, go out or online, buy it, enter the process and start creating your cards. I nearly did so immediately after reading the introduction, but it is such an interesting and inspiring book that I could not put it down!

The first chapter, ‘Images and Imagination,’ describes the process of searching through the material available: old magazines, greetings cards, catalogues, etc., taking the image that feels important, often without knowing why: “something goes straight to your soul.” Chapter Two, ‘The “Neter” Presence in a SoulCollage’ relates the strong energy of each card to archetypes. “Neter comes from ancient Egyptian texts ... it is a subjective, unformed Source out of which all that exists is born.” (p. 3) With a word play on “net”, Frost reminds us too of the shadow which is explored in chapter nine. Chapter Three explains the SoulCollage deck of cards with its four suits with further chapters devoted to the making, naming and meaning of the Source Card and the suits. Chapter 10 describes clearly both the technique of collage and of physically making the cards. Chapter 11 teaches how to tap into one’s inner wisdom, and Chapter 12 how to consult the cards or use them for divination. There are chapters on imaging dreams and using the SoulCollage process with health issues. There chapters full of inspiring ideas for using the cards alone and in groups with all kinds of purposes: psychotherapy, with adults or children; art; church, religious and spiritual; education, to inspire writing, and so forth. There are abundant illustrations, mostly in black and white, and some colour plates. How I longed to see all the example cards in colour. I was rewarded when I went to the SoulCollage website.

SoulCollage reminds me of my first painting lessons, in the Anthroposophic method where one starts with colour and waits for something to come out, and it always does. This is Soul Painting. Images that appear to paint themselves. All the SoulCollage techniques could be used here too, to work in depth with the images.

So much of what appears here reminds me of Hal and Sidra Stone's technique Voice Dialogue that I was surprised not to find it in the Bibliography. Is this an example of synchronicity, that what I think of as their unique and insightful perception of the way subpersonalities work is so fundamental and essential in our times that it is surging into consciousness in many places?

Seena Frost brings her education in theology, psychotherapy and Marriage and Family therapy into this book in a wise, compassionate and insightful way. She has produced a truly love-ly book that is useful to everyone who wants to grow and develop in whichever way they choose to do so.

Joy Manné, PhD

**Denis Lewis, *Boundless Breathing: Meditative Practices for Health and Self-Transformation*.** The registration fee for *Boundless Breathing* is \$8.95 on [www.authentic-breathing.com](http://www.authentic-breathing.com) website. This includes e-mail communication with Dennis Lewis regarding any of these practices and meditations. *Boundless Breathing* consists of approximately 20 pages of printable text and includes hyperlinks to relevant articles, as well as a detailed illustration of the internal organs of the body.

This is a book of six breathing exercises: Conscious Breathing, which “is the first step in discovering your natural, authentic breath”; the Six Healing Exhalations “based on Taoist principles (and which) help you to regulate and heal your internal organs and balance your emotions”; the Smiling Breath, “a powerful practice for relaxation, health, healing and wholeness”; Expanding Time which “will help you expand your sense of the present moment”; the Breath of the Heart, which “will help you to open up your breathing and experience a heart-felt appreciation for the miracle of your life”; and the Unconditioned Breath which “will support you to go beyond the confines of your habitual self-image and begin to experience your own underlying, boundless nature.”

This is an e-book which one pays for, downloads, and then may or may not print out depending on one's choice. I printed it out. The pagination is not sequential, each exercise being printed on page 1 of its section. A list of contents on the left side of a page, as on a web page, helps to keep the exercises in order, if you want to. The separation makes it easy to take the instructions around with you, if you want to do the exercises away from home. The exercises are very interesting and well-explained, including the sounds that go with the Six Healing Exhalations. I do wonder, however, how many people with no breathwork experience will really be able to do them? I think they are a great set for trained and competent breathworkers to do with their clients, or to use as a six-session group breathwork experience. Practitioners who do this should be sure they can make the right noises, and so teach them to others, where required.

These days for \$8.95 one can buy a nicely presented book. I'd rather have a book for that money than a few downloaded pages that I have to print out myself, even if that means foregoing the e-mail consultation with Dennis Lewis. Loose pages means I have to find a way of keeping them together, then I have to find a way of putting them into the Breathwork section of my library – and at A4 size printed on my printer they are much larger

than the average book and so are inconvenient. Finally, without a solid cover, they are sure to fall about and get lost and forgotten among my soft and hard cover books. This is going to be pity as this good collection of exercises offers an excellent breathwork adventure. Please, Dennis, next time a book!

Joy Manné, Ph.D.

**Sheng Keng Yun, *Walking Kung: Breathing for Health*. Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc.1997**

This book explains the underlying philosophy and the techniques of Ch'i Kung (Qigung) – the workings of air or breath at beginners level. It begins with the history of the writer, and is a typical wounded healer story. Sheng Keng Yun was ill and healed her illness through Ch'i Kung. Now she teaches it.

Part One is the introduction and contains several short chapters. Ch'i Kung means “the workings of air or breath” and this includes “the working of the invisible vital energy in the human body.” (p. 3) As breathworkers we work with chi, vital energy, and recognise chi-related phenomena, but have not formulated in our own words exactly what it is. Chi Kung “is the natural function of conscious thought which is the highest stages of activity in the cerebral cortex.” “Kung means the time and quality of the practice of working with Chi. ... the process of learning the methodology and the attainment of the skill necessary for successfully practising Chi Kung.” (p. 4) Chi Kung increases life force and so prevents disease. It may also be an active way of treating disease. Before you begin to practice it you need to develop “confidence, determination and perseverance” and you must believe in it. (p. 5)

The Functions and Effects of Walking Kung are explained and then Chi Kung Breathing is then introduced with illustrations of various ways of breathing. There follows the introductory exercises for combining breathing and walking. The importance of breathing is explained, “The breathing movement is the key link in any breathing exercise. By training consciously, you can change your breathing from shallow to deep breathing. As a result of this your vital capacity is increased, the gas metabolism and blood circulation are improved, digestion and absorption are improved. All these changes ensure the achievement of good health, the effectiveness of the treatment, disease prevention and an strong body. The pictures of the author that illustrate this book bear witness to this.” (p. 33f) Walking Kung is then described and exercises are given. Part Two takes these exercises further. The book ends with a story.

There is a glossary and two Appendices, one on Acupuncture Point and Energy Channels, and the other containing Testimonials. The quality of the description of the illustrations and the pictures of the author demonstrating the exercises are testimonial enough. If one can learn Ch'i Kung from a book, this is the book.

Joy Manné, PhD

**Ken Cohen's guide to *Healthy Breathing*, a cassette, published by Sounds True, PO Box 8010, Boulder, CO 80306-8010. ISBN 1-56455-469-4**

This is an excellent guide to healthy breathing. It is completely at beginner level, clearly explained, and in a pleasant voice, and there is nice music too.

The cassette starts with some very good questions that teach breath-awareness. We are encouraged to count our breaths per minute and are told that 15- 17 per minute is average, and that Qigong slows that to about five. Now some years back in a workshop at an International Society for the Advancement of Respiratory Psychophysiology (ISARP) conference I was told the ideal was around eight. Perhaps the ideal number of breaths per minute depends on who is counting!

Once we have learned how to become aware of our breathing, the exercises begin. The first exercise teaches us abdominal breathing, the next how to open the lower back at the same time. Here we are encouraged to use visualisation if we cannot feel our lower back. I must say I found that it took a high level of body awareness to feel that part of the anatomy moving with the breath, and the visualisation certainly helped to reach this.

The third exercise was Embryonic Breathing. Here we are given hints to just let the breathing happen, and to stop interfering with the breath. The breath was to be long and diaphragmatic. We were to observe the four phases of the breath: inhale, the turning point between in- and exhale, exhale, and the slight pause between out and inhale. Cohen suggests that through this exercise we can come to feel, "You may feel as if the whole world has become breath, that you have become chi."

The fourth exercise is Reversed Breathing, and here one learns to move the chi. I've often wondered what Reversed Breathing was, and have been unable to achieve it when I tried. Through this tape I managed it, and was very interested in the result, and in moving the chi.

Finally, Cohen suggests experimenting with the breath through creating one's own spontaneous breathing exercises including 'wrong' ways to breath (e.g. upper chest: "On the psychological level, chest breathing makes the mind unsettled and anxious."), to discover our body's unconscious habits. Some of his ideas include breathing with the toes, fingers, scalp, etc.

If we are doing the breathing exercises well when using the tape, we will cause increased chi or energy flow in our body. The signs that we are succeeding are that the body may feel warm, or the hands and feet may feel warm. We may feel very grounded and rooted, and like a tree. Our hands may vibrate and tingle pleasantly, indicating energy flow.

Cohen suggests a good way to calm the mind is through paying attention to the body.

What struck me was that as breathworkers, we get all of this for free! The benefits of *Healthy Breathing*, will come naturally in a Conscious Connected Breathing session. I agree with Cohen's provisos regarding upper chest breathing and think it should never be forced or demanded, but on a psychological level, sometimes in a breathwork session the body wants to breath in this way, and will, without encouragement or forcing, to bring something to consciousness to get integrated. Yes, the mind may be unsettled as this happens and anxiety may occur, but there will be peace when what wants to be integrated is.



It was easy to do the exercises, and I did really love moving chi. This is an excellent tape. It is good for beginners who want to learn how to breathe well in full abdominal breathing. It is good for breathworkers who want to learn more about the breath, especially about abdominal breathing and moving chi consciously. It is good for clients as something they can do at home to improve their breathing. It is good for people with breathing problems who need to do breathing work to heal their breathing.

And what fascinates me is how “breathing is breathing,” so to speak. One may call one’s form of breathwork by different names, but the overlap of methods and results is great, and so is the potential for mutual enrichment between methods.

Joy Manné, PhD