

# **Transpersonal psychology and holotropic breathwork**

by  
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**Lecture at the MA Program in Peace Studies  
University of Innsbruck  
Summer Term 2006**

## **1 Introduction**

I would like to thank you for inviting me to lecture on „International Peace Studies“. I am glad that transpersonal psychology and especially holotropic breathwork - working with altered states of consciousness - is seen as a possibility for peacemaking. Transpersonal psychology initially affects peacemaking on the individual level, as the idea is that everything a human being does or thinks, has implications on herself and on her surroundings. How could we contribute to peace in the world if we cannot feel peace in our hearts?

Consciousness is, in the school of transpersonal psychology, not limited to, but goes beyond the individual. For instance, as many people confer about peace and making peace, here on this course, this will have implications on the world as a whole, as the atmosphere that is created here will diffuse into the world. Inner peace leads to outer peace, as separation can be overcome more easily, when you are at inner peace. If we create harmony within ourselves, the world will come in order as well. This is vividly exemplified by the story of a rainmaker in a small community:

“A village had been hit by weeks of drought. Prayers and processions did not help; no clouds would appear on the sky. The small community desperately asked the great rainmaker for help. He came to the village and asked for a hut on the edge of the village, as well as bread and water for five days. Then he sent the inhabitants back to their daily work. On the fourth day, clouds appeared on the sky and it started to rain. The people ran, deeply grateful, from the fields and their work to the rainmaker’s hut, celebrating and cheering. As they asked him for the secret of making it rain, he replied: “I cannot make it rain”. “But look, it is raining after five weeks of drought” the people objected. Then the rainmaker explained: “When I came to your village, I saw that your community was neither in order on the inside nor on the outside. I went into my hut and took care of my inner self, I put it in order. When I was at peace with myself, you people came to peace with yourselves as well. And when you came to your inner peace that had a positive effect on nature, which came back into order as well. And when nature came back into order, it started to rain.” (Jäger, Williges, 1991, p.54)

Transpersonal psychology suggests that consciousness is not discreet or limited to individuals, but that it is open and wide. Thus transpersonal work on consciousness is work on peace, because it not only supports integration but also opens the heart, improves attentiveness, transforms arrogance and helps us to understand human nature more deeply as well as to put things in order.

Holotropic breathwork constitutes practical work of transpersonal psychology – an intense process work with altered states of consciousness. On the one hand it puts the individual soul into order, in the sense of deep and profound psychotherapy and works on the other hand beyond usual and individual boundaries. It reaches deeply into the collective field and changes it in line with individual alterations. Thus, shadows, aggressions, destruction and

violence can be healed on an individual level, which in turn exerts positive externalities on the community beyond individuals.

In the following I will touch upon several topics. In the first part, I will give you a short introduction into the field of transpersonal psychology, in order to put the topic of holotropic breathwork onto firm foundations and to make it more understandable. Thereafter, I will explain the concept of inner wisdom more extensively. Then I will show you a little exercise. In the last part I am going to discuss the spectrum of experience associated with holotropic breathwork.

## 2 Transpersonal Psychology and Holotropic Breathwork

The “Tao Te King” says: “If we truthfully are, where we are, we will make peace.”

About twenty years ago, I attended a breathing session that was led by Stanislav Grof. This session had a very powerful impact on me, as one member of our group had an extreme experience. Her body was trembling and shaking for hours, she was screaming terribly over and over again. It seemed like she was being shaken by energy waves. At about one o'clock at night, after all other participants had long left the room, I was sitting next to her along with Stan. The woman was calming down, her rapid movements slowed down, her body started to relax and suddenly she seemed like she was experiencing a feeling of deep peace. Stan brought her a cup of tea. She drank, smiled and said: „Thank you for staying with me. I am happy and full of love!”

In the “Tao Te King” it says: ”If we truthfully are, where we are, we will make peace.”

As we were discussing healing mechanisms the next morning, Stan emphasised:

**“Holotropic breathwork is all about trusting your inner process and your inner wisdom without being caught up in concepts.”**

What a challenge that is for a studied psychotherapist. After the experience on the prior evening I understood.

Stanislav Grof, my honoured teacher, contributed greatly to the high status that holotropic breathwork has achieved within transpersonal psychology and psychotherapy, because it uses the transpersonal field of consciousness for healing, development and spiritual orientation more than usual methods. Stan was president of the international transpersonal society for years.

Transpersonal psychology has found out that insights of human beings, that have gone beyond everyday consciousness are extraordinarily significant for the understanding of being and becoming.

Altered states of consciousness can be achieved through several breathing techniques, trance inductions, shamanic rituals or intensive meditation exercises. However, there also exist so called spontaneous openings of the consciousness. They can for instance be found in overwhelming experiences of nature, peak experiences as well as states of flow. Even severe crises can result in sudden inner openings. Especially interesting examples are provided by near death experiences.

### 2.1 Near Death Experiences

Interviews with people that have returned to life from being clinically dead have shown astonishing similarities (as reported by Ring, 1986, Moody, 1977 and Kübler Ross, 1990):

- a. They saw a tunnel or a dark passage through which they had to go.
- b. At the end of the tunnel they had visions of light and experienced love.
- c. They were greeted by dead relatives.
- d. Their whole lives were replayed very quickly and they came to different conclusions about their actions than they had done when still alive. This replay of their lives was colourful, three dimensional and the people felt like they were witnessing their own lives from the perspective of a third person. In some situations they felt what the

person they were interacting with must have felt; for instance sadness or incomprehension.

- e. Out of body experiences (these people often saw themselves at the scene of accident from above)
- f. Suicidal people whose attempts to commit suicide had failed, never try to kill themselves again
- g. Often people don't want to return to life

Experts in this field of research have suggested that these people's lives often change immensely after their near death experience. They usually become a lot less egoistic.

Research of near death experiences is an important area of transpersonal psychology. It shows the necessity to deal with the spiritual side of the human being – at the latest when we actually die.

Transpersonal psychology also uses experiences made in altered states of consciousness when it addresses the big questions of being, which are usually avoided by conventional psychology as it could be accused of being non-scientific:

Where do we come from and where are we going? Do we exist in any form after we die? What is the meaning of crises, severe illnesses or catastrophes? Why do we live and what is it that makes life enjoyable?

Transpersonal psychology usually deals with consciousness, development, illness, death, fate, sense, spirituality and healing.

It is based on traditional and ancient schools of wisdom, western psychology, parapsychology as well as modern research of consciousness. One work that has to be mentioned in this respect is Ken Wilber's book "Integral Psychology".

## **2.2 Transpersonal psychology: Definitions**

The term "transpersonal", derived from transhumanistic, appeared for the first time in Abraham Maslow's famous article "The farther reaches of human nature".

Abraham Maslow, a cofounder of humanistic psychology, suggests that "The fully developed human tends to be motivated by values that transcend his (personal) self."

Francis Vaughan points out that „Who and what we are is not limited to personality and that if we only identify with the body, the Ego, the personality or roles, we will have a limited, too narrow perception of ourselves.“

Transpersonal psychology is mainly concerned with states, in which the feeling of identity is taken beyond the usual boundaries of ego and personality. The Latin prefix "trans" means "across", "through", "beyond". Grof (1987, S.64) interprets "transpersonal" as "experienced expansion or extension of the consciousness beyond the usual boundaries of the body-Ego as well as beyond the limitation of space and time."

Wilber defines "transpersonal...", as a process of some kind that reaches beyond the individual. The simplest case is extra sensory perception. Telepathy, clairvoyance, prophecy... We can add to this list: Out of body experiences, experiencing a transpersonal self or witness-consciousness, peak experiences and so forth. What all these events have in common is an extension of the limits between self and non-self, which goes beyond the skin border of the organism." (Wilber, 1984, p.19f)

Telepathy can be defined as the transfer of a conscious or unconscious mental state, thoughts, feelings, perceptions or images to another psyche without using any known form of communication via known sense organs.

It has to be emphasised that paranormal information exchange not only applies to conscious but also unconscious material.

Clairvoyance is characterised by the direct experience of the outside world reality, without using known information channels.

Precognition is a multi-layered phenomenon. It means to predict. It is what was called prophesy in Christianity. Precognition suggests the possibility of transcending the linear time axis forwards. In the case of shifting the time axis backwards one would speak of retro-cognition. Thus future and past events and experiences of a human being can be perceived without analysis and help of current information.

Precognition, clairvoyance and telepathy are not strictly distinguished from each other. Hence there may be different applications. Hans Bender explains the difference between the terms. He uses the example of the famous vision of the Swedish intellectual and spirit-seer Swedenborg (see Immanuel Kant: "Dreams of a spirit-seer").

"In 1756 Swedenborg saw a fire that hit the city of Stockholm, while he was in Göteborg. Now, if the spirit-seer had been in contact with a human in Stockholm, this would have been a case of telepathy. If the vision had not just been the reflection of another psyche, but if the seer had perceived the fire in a direct way himself (while still being in Göteborg), this act would be called clairvoyance. And, as revolutionising that may seem, there have been many reports of situations of that kind, if Swedenborg had known that there would be a fire in Stockholm beforehand that would have been called precognition.

Psychokinesis (also called parapsychophysics) is the psychic or mental influence of a physical system, which is not explicable by known science. The most widely known phenomena are bending spoons, rolling balls, materialisations or spiritual healing.

The transpersonal approach opens the boundaries between "yours and mine", the limits of "linear time", the "three-dimensional space", "logic" as well as "individual biography".

The difference between transpersonal and prepersonal is that prepersonal describes the state when unstable and labile people regress to a mental state of early childhood, due to the lack of inner structure. Thereby, they lose the ability to distinguish between the inside and outside world.

In order to avoid a common misunderstanding, let me emphasise:

Transpersonal does not imply the negligence of personal, but the expansion and exceedance of it. Containing the personal and surpassing it. Personal is a necessary condition for "transpersonal".

### **2.3 Core ideas of transpersonal psychology**

The core ideas of transpersonal psychology are shown below:

- a) The source of wisdom is to be found inside - Mystics say that the longest way is the way inside. Well, we have to walk it to find out who we really are. The term "esoteric" is to be understood in the same way. It is derived from the Greek word "esoterikos" and means "turning to the inside" or "only accessible through personal experience".
- b) Consciousness is able to transcend person, space and time. We will go into more detail later on in our exercise.
- c) The Self is characterised by personal, collective and universal structures. We will discuss this more carefully in the next section.
- d) The human being is part of something greater and will develop beyond his ego in the course of his development. Dürckheim suggests that it is important to clarify things like "I am, I have and I can" in the first half of your life. Whereas in the second part of life one should go deeper and explore the spiritual and the religious aspects.

- e) By slowly reducing your ego the spiritual power is accessible to love. A kind of love that is not limited to a person or situations.
- f) Spiritual growth is originated in an ancient esoteric saying: “Let go, die, and be” or “Be, who you are”.
- g) The whole is contained in every part. This adds to the phrase in gestalt- psychology: the whole is more than the sum of its parts.
- h) There is a creating and self-updating force of development in all living organisms.
- i) Everything is connected to everything else

Given this context, holotropic breathwork is based on the fundamental insight that altered states of consciousness are not generally negative but provide a possibility of deep healing- and transformation processes. James (1982, p.366) points out that the usual state of consciousness, the rationally empirical consciousness (1982, p.366) “...is only a special type of consciousness, whereas there are many possible states of consciousness, that are completely different and go way beyond the usual state of consciousness although they are only separated by a thin membrane. Those can deeply enrich our being.”

## **2.4 Description of Holotropic Breathwork**

Holotropic breathwork (holotropic means directed at the whole, holotropic shares the same stem “hol” that is found in “healing”) leads beyond that membrane.

It is usually carried out in groups, as group energy allows a better installation of a collective holotropic field. Using accelerated breathing (hyperventilation) in connection with evocative music and process-oriented body work, the boundaries of empirical consciousness are opened as psychodynamic barriers are reduced in order to release important mental material.

Thus, according to Dittrich, psychological methods are used to cause intentionally induced altered states of consciousness.

How can intentionally altered states of consciousness be evoked?

- a) psychoactive substances or plants

This category contains hallucinogens such as LSD, mescaline and MDMA. These are often used in western subcultures as well as psycholytic therapy according to Leuner. In Siberia the fungus *amanita muscaria* has been the most common substance. In shamanic cultures of Latin America *Ayahuasca* are the strongest and most widely known psychedelic substances. The effect normally lasts for a few hours and can usually only be interrupted by tranquilisers or neuroleptika.

- b) psychological stimulation

This area is to be understood in a more general sense as the influence on the consciousness is achieved through physical, psychological, social and mental effects. As Psychosomatic shows, any mental influence can result in physical alterations and vice versa (see above). Furthermore, psychologically evoked altered states of consciousness are distinguished from states achieved with psychoactive substances, by being part of the general system in a more organic way. Additionally the duration is dependent on attitude and inner readiness.

The effect can be gradually less intense depending on the inner trigger. Furthermore longer training is required in order to achieve the desired effect. This obstacle is caused by inner defence mechanisms that work better against unpleasant material. The deepness of stimulation is easier to control and a return to the normal state of consciousness is possible more quickly. The intensity, duration and effect are also controlled by inner wisdom. The observing Ego is

clearer cut and there is a greater ability to communicate with the outer world in case of emergencies.

The following interventions and techniques are most common:

There are two possible ways: Under-stimulation and over-stimulation. Under-stimulation is the reduction of intensity and variability of the field of perception. It suggests that monotony, isolation and the inner focus on few objects of perceptions evoke visions and contribute to the inner relation to a higher form of being.

Examples are: Meditation techniques, deepening prayers, slow breathing, pranayama exercises and certain postures in yoga, chanting of mantras, hypnotic and suggestive methods, fasting, the concentration on certain objects (meditation pictures, objects of power) and similar things.

Over-stimulation aims at achieving a state of trance through the opening of the boundaries of the normal state of consciousness and the elimination of the defence of the ego by stimulus satiation.

The following methods can be used to achieve over-stimulation: rhythmic stimulations as they are ritually performed by African tribes (drums, rattling, dancing and singing), deprivation of sleep, sweating cures, and accelerated breathing (hyperventilation, holotropic breathwork, rebirthing) as well as evocative music. Experiments, using brain-machines (flash lights, acoustic stimuli etc) lead to similar results.

It is of fundamental importance that any journey to an altered state of consciousness should be performed with in a safe, caring and appreciative environment. Careful preparation as well as attentive performance is as important as extensive after-care. During the process disturbances from outside should be avoided and a permanent attendance of helpers should be guaranteed.

“A state of consciousness can be described as altered if its basic functions and elements diverge significantly from the normal state” (Metzner, 1989, p.331)

For the benefit of all of you that are not familiar with this kind of work, I will quickly describe the procedure of holotropic breathwork in a group setting.

The room is darkened and prepared with cushions, mattresses and blankets. All participants, between 16 and 30 people, work in pairs, one experiencing person and one helper. Roles are then switched in the next session. The helper, called sitter, has to make sure that the experiencing person, who is lying on her back with her eyes closed and is in a state of trance, can feel safe, especially when she is experiencing intense emotional stress, rapid and strong movements and other heavy physical expressions. The sitter also supports the experiencing person by providing resistance, or assistance, depending on what is needed. It may also be the case that he will just sit next to the experiencing person - quietly and attentively. Sitters often report that by assisting another person, their own process of development is actively complemented. In the beginning of the session, the experiencing people are lying on their backs with their eyes closed, a relaxation exercise helps people to open up and let go more easily. At the end of this relaxation exercise, the participants are asked to breathe more quickly and dynamically and to allow any feelings, images, sounds and movements.

Why accelerated breathing (hyperventilation)?

The influence of changed breathing rhythm has been practiced in several different schools of mystic for many centuries in order to achieve deeper self-knowledge. In psychological history it has been Wilhelm Reich who has pointed out that barriers against threatening psychic matters are built up through the blockade of breathing. Reversely, accelerated breathing can reduce barriers and expand the experienced. The EEG mainly shows Theta and Delta waves during hyperventilation. According to Johannes Holler (1991) these waves point to the activation of self-healing powers and visionary abilities. It also seems to be the case that through holotropic breathwork, the stimulation of nerve cells is increased. Furthermore inhibiting factors that are usually used for information processing, are loosened. In the normal

state of consciousness incoming outer and inner information is permanently compared to traces of memory and interpreted through past experiences. Material that doesn't fit is removed in order to reduce complexity. Just imagine that in one second we are on average exposed to 11 million sensations from which only 40 can be processed consciously. In altered states of consciousness this filter is more permeable allowing more sensations to affect the participant.

The process is intensified by evocative music.

In the first part of a breathing session, music with fast rhythms, such as drum music is used to support breathing. Thereafter dramatic pieces from the area of ethnic, classical or movie soundtrack are used to facilitate breakthroughs. In the last third, integrating, slow or spiritual music is played. Music helps movement, dynamics, creativity and calmness. It opens individual as well as collective archives of humans, shows tensions and eliminates inner chaos in a dynamic way resulting in the surfacing of hidden harmony. Music does not suggest content but overcomes barriers and strengthens relevant psychic material.

Slowly, a dynamic field of breathing is built up, a collective space of experience, from which differing experiences and sensations can be processed individually. People react in different ways. Some might breathe loudly, scream or move heavily. Others may go deep inside and seem far away from the outside world. In the holotropic state of consciousness inner wisdom takes control from the cognitive dominance.

The active control and acting is carried out by what is happening inside, whereas the person, the ego's role is reduced to witnessing the experience. Control and censorship are greatly decreased. Thus fluent, associative and spontaneously fluctuating material from deeper layers of the soul is allowed to enter consciousness. This trance is similar to powerful sequences of dreaming, where associations come up in different ways, images appear. The body reacts correspondingly. Engrained tensions and negatively connotated parts of the psyche are so heavily charged by holotropic breathwork that they push through to the consciousness from the periphery. It can happen that people regress very authentically way beyond their earliest stages of life. In the past the general consensus was that traces of memory of adults maximally go back to their third or possibly second year of existence. However, nowadays empirical memory research shows that even pre-birth memories can be found. Those are loose neural connections within the limbic system, which are usually inaccessible. Research suggests that there is an implicit and unconscious memory. Rupert Sheldrake for instance argues that experiences are saved in morphogenetic fields and that the brain structure, the hardware, is only used for the transfer of those.

Morphogenetic fields are immaterial and invisible fields that exist beyond space and time and contain information about species-specific forms.

Sheldrake, who is a Biologist, uses an experiment with animals by McDougall in order to substantiate his claim. In this experiment rats were taught how to escape from a water maze. The first generation learnt very slowly, whereas the second generation was significantly quicker on the uptake. However, this not only happened in America but also in Australia and Europe, although the rats hadn't been trained there.

This collective memory – similar to CG Jung's "collective unconsciousness" – allows us to be connected to the entire pool of information of the history of mankind.

Let's return to our breathing session.

For experiencing people, the awareness of time changes, thinking processes are more vivid and holistic, less decomposing. Emotions flow more easily, rounder and make more sense. They are less blocked. Physical perceptions are more direct and quicker at triggering fitting imaginations and pictures. It may happen that, when we are in states of altered consciousness, we suddenly experience ourselves outside our bodies, foresee future events, or meet deceased relatives. One may also reach deep into the area of collective myth, have experiences in different moments in time as well as in different cultures or even identify with animals.

Possibly we don't experience ourselves as clearly defined, discreet individual beings. Rather we are permeable and transparent, connected to all our surroundings. Although these experiences may seem very strange and dramatic to you, let me emphasise: The worst that can happen is that we face ourselves, when we lie down on the floor and follow the motto: let go, let it happen and allow anything.

Grof's advice that it is not the things we experience that cause problems, but problems are rather caused by the things we do not experience, is to be understood in that way. From what we have learnt especially from working with attendees of our workshops, who have been in this process for years, holotropic breathwork has effects on several layers.

**Self-healing powers are activated.**

**Deeply hidden, secluded and repressed matters of the soul can be experienced extensively. This helps with the solution of persistent emotional problems.**

**Remainders of negative drug experiences, spiritual crises and spontaneous states of altered consciousness can be integrated in a beneficial way.**

**Questions about the meaning of life may be answered and the scope of existential decisions is increased.**

**Trust in your own development increases.**

**The essential awareness of feelings and sensations is refined**

**Mystic and spiritual dimensions are closer to you.**

**Therapists that have gone through these processes themselves, experience themselves as calmer and more capable when they lead others through intensive psychodynamic processes.**

What is the role of the group leaders, who are – and I would like to stress that – experienced and fully as well as professionally trained. They attentively walk around the room and support the entire atmosphere, above all through their inner attitude, as they understand themselves as part of a greater element, as assistants of inner wisdom.

Therapy is originated from therapeia which means to serve or to heal as well as to do the gods' service. The group-leader has a controlling as well as protecting function in the outer reality; furthermore he helps through centering, resonance as well as intuition and spontaneity.

According to Stan Grof (1993, p.284) the group leader is mainly oriented by what is shown. Thereby he relativises his own healing processes by working on self-regulating forces.

Grof expands:

**“The Therapist is not an active agent, who causes the changes in his clients through certain interventions. He is rather somebody who cooperates with the inner healing powers of his client in an intelligent way.”**

The group leader will intervene when he is called by a sitter, when there is any form of aggression that needs resistance or when nurturing support is needed.

Body work leads the inner process beyond all sorts of blockades; it directs the experience and enables the expression of retracted impulses. Chronic tensions that often result in stagnation and the feeling of being stuck in life can be eliminated and integrated.

A breathing session usually lasts between two and three hours. At the end, when the experiencing person returns and feels ok, she will process her experiences by intuitively

drawing whatever comes to mind. This intuitive drawing mirrors inner images and contributes to further integration of the experienced on a symbolic layer.

The attendees then separately leave the room whenever their process is absolutely completed for them. This means, and this is also highlighted by Stan Grof, that there is no time limit to a breathing session. The experiencing person could be left with damages when her process is interrupted. Whatever is begun should have a natural ending. The experiences made in breathing sessions are later discussed in the group so that those experiences can be usefully applied in every-day life. The after care, integration as well as the deepening is very important to us. The most significant aspect is the intuitive inner understanding rather than explanations or interpretations. What is experience telling me at the moment? With which actually experienced or inexperienced aspects could there be a connection? What is my attitude towards my experience? Which symbols on the picture attract me and which ones am I possibly repelled by? What could they mean for me? And so forth... The sense of these experiences may become more concrete through events, dreams, outer events and conversations. Another helpful device is the use of therapeutic techniques of intervention as we know them from the area of humanistic psychology. It is especially important to be patient when something unclear or incomprehensible remains. It often lasts months until an experience is truly revealed. The sharing, analysis and understanding of experiences is like a collective "creative puzzle" in which multifaceted sense-horizons are opened and a deep awareness of what life is, appears.

Frequent meditations and rituals densify the work on the process and round it of. You may already imagine that holotropic breathwork relies on trust in what is happening, i.e. the fundamental sense of the inner process. We only get as far as our devotion and courage to listen to inner wisdom, reach.

## **2.5 Inner Wisdom**

Let me tell you a personal story: A while ago, I was driving on the autobahn from Salzburg to Munich, returning from a seminar. I was tired and felt unsettled inside at the same time. I had been travelling a lot in that period. Seminars, speeches and supervisions in different parts of the country had taken their toll. My state of inner stress had been building up subliminally for quite a long time. Suddenly I felt how I had become a stranger to myself. I felt uneasy; I had no motivation to think and desired a very simple life, in order to have more time for myself. A shadow was hanging over me. Then I went through my diary and returned to a familiar pattern, which had often been helpful to me: Don't think about it, just do it and don't give up. At the same time I was listening to a radio program about authors with inspiration crises that often cannot write down a single word for months. I thought I felt pretty similar. Blocked, drained and burned out, without access to my inner source. I lost trust in my resources and asked myself: How much power do I still have? How long am I going to live? I had also stopped doing my spiritual exercises a while ago due to a lack of energy and motivation. I seemed to have lost the most precious thing in my life, inner wisdom, although I kept on telling my seminar participants: "The self, the inner wisdom, is always with you, in good times and in bad times." I was captured by a great desire, but I wasn't able to go my way any further, until I attended a Siddha Yoga Intensive seminar. Gurumayi, the current master was present. So, everything was prepared. But then on the first day I had severe toothache and was feeling really down. That evening I fell asleep early, the toothache was fading and I felt pretty well in the morning. Something had happened inside me. I went into the meditation room, sat down and listened to the mantra "Om Namah Shivaya" (I bow to my inner self). We were encouraged to follow our breath and breathe more freely and deeply.

I followed the instructions and I was able, with the help of controlled breathing, to escape usual thinking patterns, roles, every-day stress and identifications, for a short period of time. I

went deeper into an open field. Soul, body and spirit converged to the same rhythm. I felt safe and refreshed. I experienced a state, *Isutzu*, which a Japanese phenomenologist described as something like that: "All things are entirely free. They are open for one another, infinitely transparent."

Here, underneath the usual movements of mind, body, soul, spirit and self merged into one in a space of nonduality. It was a long and cumbersome way, but at the same times only a very small step: pause, breathe a little deeper and follow the opening. This is exactly what I had forgotten and I had to drive a long way until I remembered.

Despite the fundamental experience of "being thrown into the world" as a life condition, as described by Jean-Paul Sartre and despite the unpredictable ways of fate, there is something humans can trust, that gives them a sense of belonging: The inner Being. It is also called higher self, transpersonal self or inner wisdom. When every-day noise is getting quieter, the ear of the heart opens.

The idea of inner wisdom is of central importance to holotropic breathwork. Hence I would like to clarify the fundamental concept of self, in which I try to connect personal and transpersonal ideas. A more extensive self as well as Ego conception can be found in my book ("*Dimensionen der menschlichen Seele*"), as this is often an area of misunderstanding.

For personal psychology the self refers to the whole entirety of a person, i.e. everything that belongs to me, the sum of the self representatives, and on the other hand to the essential core, i.e. what keeps me together.

It depicts a central inner instance of the individual that provides the feeling of certainty that I am identical with myself and a coherent whole through all changes today, yesterday and tomorrow. This happens through permanent integration.

Jacobson (1999, p.34) views the self as:

"...a differentiated and organic whole, which is separated and distinguished from its surroundings, a whole, which provides continuity as well as direction, and the ability to stay the same within changes around."

Horney (1975, p.176) suggests that the self assures

"...the pulsating inner life; it causes spontaneity of all feelings no matter if they are happiness, desire, love, anger, anxiety, or desperation. It is also a source of spontaneous interests and energies [...] the ability to wish and to want, it is the part in us that wants to expand, grow and fulfil itself." For her it is "...the original power, that encourages our personal development and with which we can achieve full identification."

On the other hand we know from research in the area of Psychotherapy that mental problems are often grounded in a hurt or deformed self. A fundamental disturbance of the self due to early traumatic experiences, basic deficits of safety and chronic conflicts, that cannot be compensated for by usual coping strategies, leads to the vanish of this essential power to integrate. A damaged self cannot provide support, inner orientation is lost and the emotional ground is getting shaky. The openness of thinking and acting is reduced and perspectives for the future are becoming more negative. As we know, healing the personal layer of the self can only be done in small steps.

From the point of view of transpersonal psychology the self not only refers to the personal but goes beyond that.

Metaphorically speaking there is an opening in the most inner core through which shines the transpersonal self. According to Leibniz it has the "spark of the cosmos" in it. C.G Jung calls it the "God within ourselves" (C.G. Jung, 1971, p.134f). He describes as follows

"This something is strange to us, yet so near, it is entirely ourselves, yet unrecognisable, a virtual centre point of mystic constitution, I have called this centre point the self. It could also be described as "God within ourselves" The beginnings of our mental life seem to be sourced from that point and all high and final goals seem to be directed at it."

Wilber (2001, p.125) says

“...deep within the personal, the transpersonal, which goes way beyond the personal: always within and at the same time beyond.”

And Emerson (in: Schoen, Stephen, 1995) points to the simplicity and transcendence of the deep power, in which we exist.

Erich Neumann (in Ludwig-Körner, 1992, p. 434) calls the transpersonal self the „...conducting centre, which initiates, leads, controls and fine-tunes all processes. The self is transcendent for mental and for physical matters.”

Christianity teaches: “the kingdom of god is within yourself” Buddhism says: “Look inside, you are Buddha.” Hinduism: ”Atman (the individual consciousness) and Brahman (the universal consciousness) are one”, Islamic mysticism says: ”Whoever knows themselves knows their lord”

There, within our being, the evolutionary pressure of the universe to optimise persists. It is a force towards the developing whole and realisation. It is a hologram that is intertwined with the cosmos. Everything is contained in the self and that is why we gain more knowledge if we know the self. The personal self is both contained in and exceeded by in the transpersonal. The transpersonal self is like a bridge between existential self-consciousness and the transpersonal collective consciousness. Via this bridge the last secret communicates with us.

Master Eckehart once said: “I want to sit and be silent and listen to what God speaks inside me.”

This inner wisdom – a continuous source of healing and inspiration – assists and forms our lives.

Inner wisdom can be approached by facing inside, to the silence and slowly let go of the identification with who we are and what we possess.

Along comes a gradual transformation of the egoic me.

Along this way we have to learn how to turn destructive personal traits such as envy, greed, jealousy, irreconcilability and others into openness and love, in order to achieve trust, lightness, happiness and humour.

Horst Eberhard Richter argues that the egoic me covers inner sensibility and stops the natural flow of feelings. The consequences are social coldness, lack of humanity and fragmented relationships, in which there cannot develop any lasting and reliable relations.

This results in the growth of a mentality, which forces you to strive for victory at all times. However, this requires there to be a high number of losers.

The egoic me usually leads to constriction, degradation, burdens and heaviness. Above all, however, it leads to mistrust against everything that simply happens. So it creates a barrier against inner wisdom.

Spiritual ways help us to transform our egoic me through discipline and exercise in every day life. New human qualities can develop from the transformed parts. We can recognise the transpersonal self and serve it. We experience non-judgemental love don't hold on to affects but accompany them. Henceforth we can react in process and are able to let go of self produced concepts.

Transforming the egoic me is a life-long process which can only be done gradually, step by step.

The more we reduce our egoic me and are connected to our inner wisdom, the more we realise that everything that happens is for the best. This is not only true for breathing sessions but also has applications in everyday events. In particular I mean so-called coincidences.

For instance, an author missed his train and therefore got to know a publisher on the later train, who was willing to publish his book. In retrospect many carriers were initiated by “coincidental events and encounters”.

In coincidences the inner experience corresponds subliminally, i.e. without our knowledge, to outer events. C.G. Jung calls this synchronicity. Of course it is not determined that we follow

such cues. Our own action is crucial to the realisation. Life creates such situations in which we can grow, over and over again.

We should also not simply reject seemingly uncomfortable outside experiences, as they often bear important messages that should be tapped. Severe and fateful incidences, such as diseases or existential crises can be turning-points in one's development that makes one suddenly know what to do. Thereby familiar connections are interrupted, superficial ways of life are confronted and one's priorities are newly ordered. Learn from everything, any situation is a helping friend, and every obstacle an encouraging teacher. Sri Aurobindo says: "I am a complete student. I learn from everything."

Jean Gebser adds:

"We have gained the insight to which degree everything that happens to us is creating and gives us power. It belongs to our lives and thus to ourselves. Therefore it is perfectly right to say that mistakes and mischances should not be moaned about." (Gebser in: Müller, 1999, p.54)

It is an unfamiliar language that we have to learn if we want to use these insights. Our own spirit will then turn into a radical place of change, because if this is achieved, the circumstances will change as well. If we adopt the attitude "Everything is for the best" in every-day life, fearlessness, calmness and deep peace will bring a magical atmosphere into our lives. Life will then become a daily adventure.

### **2.5.1 Exercises on inner wisdom**

Let's go back to the previous sentence. You approach inner wisdom when you turn to the inside, go into silence and let slowly go of the identifications with who we are and what we possess.

Hence there is a place within ourselves that has more information than we can usually access, especially when our mind steps back and gets calmer.

**At this point I would like to invite you to do a short intuition exercise which you can easily apply in many situations.**

**For this exercise it is helpful that you assume that there is a sort of space within us from which we can gain information that is normally not accessible to us.**

**Step 1: Please pause for a second and perceive what question or topic you are most concerned with in your life at the moment. Maybe you can formulate a specific question.**

**Step 2: Please register what advice, temporary answers and other matters have thus far appeared. Now imagine that you put all that aside when you breathe out, until only the original question remains. It may have changed slightly in the meantime. We take it as it is now and embark on a journey inside.**

**Step 3: Now you may move a little forward on your chair so that your back is straight and your spine is centred on your pelvis. Now open your hands and put them on your lap. You experience yourself in the here and now; you perceive the space next to you, beneath you and above you. You feel connected. Personal space turns into universal space. Now close your eyes and deeply breathe in and out about three to four times.**

**Step 4: Now turn your focus from the outside to the inside. Feel your breath. It will become calmer and deeper. If there are tensions or obstacles breathe towards them and let go of them when you breathe out. Maybe it takes a little time to let go of all superficial noise. But maybe you experience how you're slowly floating to the inside. You can feel how you get deeper inside, step by step. Further inside, until you have the**

**inner feeling: Here is my most inner; this is the deepest ground I could feel at the moment. Now imagine how you settle down and pause in your centre.**

**Step 5: If we ask our inner wisdom the prepared question in a few moments, it is important to absorb everything: phrases, images, symbols, sounds, feelings, sensations, impressions or simply physical states. Answers can appear in many different ways. Just take everything without commenting or interpreting. Now feel to your most inner centre again and trustfully pose the prepared question to the inner wisdom, however you like it. Now register everything that is happening. I leave you in your inner process and exchange with your self for the next minutes. You just have to pose the question to yourself and pay attention to what is happening spontaneously.**

**Step 6: Before we travel back, you can, if you want, thank the inner wisdom or express an inner gesture.**

**Slowly, we will focus our attention back onto the surface. Flowing you will perceive your body, the space and the people around you.**

**Step 7: Now you may open your eyes and come back completely. If you want you can stretch a little bit. In case you'd like to write something down, you can do that in the next two to three minutes or afterwards.**

The space of intuition is, according to Gail Ferguson, also the space between rising and sinking thoughts, the space between breathing in and breathing out, the representation of infinity from where inner wisdom helps us understand our lives more deeply, based on the collective knowledge of mankind which can be accessed there.

## ***2.6 Spectrum of Experience in holotropic breathwork***

Let us return to our work with altered states of consciousness. In order to recap please take a look at this slide again.

Indications to holotropic breathwork can be summed up as normal physical and mental state. There are also special contraindications:

Holotropic breathwork is more than a psychotherapeutic method, as it provides amongst intensive catharsis, the work on mental problems and the integration of shadow aspects, a basis for spiritual openness and mystic experiences. The multi-dimensional spectrum of experience, which I would like to discuss in more detail now, shows how holotropic breathwork brings together therapy and spirituality.

Although I will use different layers of experiences, there are no clear cut boundaries, and more than one layer can be experienced in the course of one session.

When you enter a state of altered consciousness, there can be sensory or physical experiences even before you experience any content. Those could be seeing colours or figures or perceiving sounds of crickets or bells as well as charging and discharging of tensions.

### **2.6.1 Personal and psychodynamic experiences**

This layer of experience that is familiar from personal psychotherapy contains topics and problems that can reach back into early childhood experiences. As opposed to therapy that is only conversation-oriented, holotropic breathwork provides a more authentic, more intense and closer experience of those issues.

For instance, if somebody had been hit by his father in early childhood, he will experience this situation of threat immediately, feel the fear, tremble and may even show signs of injuries. People don't only have the same feelings they experienced at the time such as fear, pain or sadness but also reactions and impulses that were repressed at the time such as anger can be expressed.

Here an experience of a seminar participant:

**“...I saw my father, bent over me, when I was sleeping in my bed, at the age of two, hitting me until I awoke. I felt immense anger and I could express a good part of it by screaming angrily; Exhausted I calmed down and rested for a bit...When I was listening to the drum music I experienced myself as a very talented and extraordinary drummer and I felt powerful and very energetic. Somehow I felt the connection between the breathing and the energy that it had generated...”**

States of altered consciousness mobilise the unconsciousness, thereby charging deep tensions with energy. The following discharge then relieves the entire mental system, although some connections may not have been entirely understood. Thereby sudden shifts can occur from a pathological dynamic to a positive form of healing self-organisation, according to Sheldrake; a shift from fields of diseases to fields of sanity.

We know that emotional learning occurs subcortically in the limbic system, which is a little more sluggish than the associative and cognitive areas in the cerebral cortex. Therefore an inner turmoil is needed to change the unconscious limbic networks and open up emotional connections. Only focusing on cognitions does not work, as unconscious emotional fixation is still there.

As mentioned above, the sitters support the entire experience of dramatic situations. Either by holding or providing resistance, in order to increase tension until the final discharge or through nurturing and emotionally correcting experiences such as warming touch, hugs or else. This way, deep damages can be healed.

We can often find the solution in the middle of hurting experiences, where we can find healing powers of the transpersonal self such as pulsating energies and all-embracing love that are flowing through the cosmic consciousness. Hence the instruction in holotropic breathwork: go deeper into what you feel.

The criticism of a secondary traumatising experience is in my opinion invalid, as the entire experience is based on safety, expression, integration and healing. Holotropic breathwork also opens the store of resources and activates self-healing powers, as mentioned above, so that dissociated debris of the soul is integrated as narrative life scripts. This means that the collection of single, unconnected perceptions, how they are normally fragmentally saved in the trauma memory can become a whole story. This is of extraordinary importance for overcoming a trauma, because it is the only way to put terrible events into the past.

Holotropic breathwork can also balance chronic deficits of warmth, safety and love in the sense of relaxation regressions. Inner structures such as fundamental trust, self-assurance and the certainty that I am being, can be increased. This is exemplified by the re-experience of a traumatic incidence in a hospital by a seminar attendee:

**“I ... feel coldness from outside, my skin gets cold, I see sharp tools: scalpels, saws, drills, freezing light, I am tied, I can feel tight leather belts and a hard buckle, alone, in bright sterile light, coldness and numbness, blunt pain in my stomach, threat and pain, I can hardly breathe, I want to scream but I can't... My body rejects the sewing material, my stomach suppurates and hurts, there are flashes, pain. The sitter puts his hand on my stomach, the resistance feels good, I push to express my pain and try to scream, my stomach hurts, I am so alone, they don't let my mother in and she is accepting it... I**

scream, as I have never done before in my life, suddenly I start to cry loudly and uncontrolled. I cry about what has been and what is, now my feeling is right, I feel sadness on my whole body, I am entirely inside myself now. The sitter is holding and protecting me, I am relieved about the protection, and the crying is threatening and uncontrollable yet healing... I am very grateful that the sitter is here protecting me; strangely I don't feel that I owe him. I can take it and it is not cold anymore. My body feels wounded. At the same time it is vibrating and open.”

## 2.6.2 Perinatal and prenatal experiences

In holotropic breathwork states of consciousness go way beyond usually memorable life, so that scenes around your birth and before that can appear and surface powerfully. One participant describes this phenomenon as follows:

**“It is hot and tight and uncomfortable. I am trapped, inside myself and in general. So hot and narrow. I feel pressure onto my head and my body is reacting automatically. It is grunting and raging and pushing against that pressure. The pressure is increasing and my body is pushing back more forcefully and the force comes and pushes me, I am pushing myself. Pressure and pressing and force and anger and violence and no hold no thinking. I have to get out of here. Outside: anger, smells, slime a lot of slime in mouth and nose, smells, light, anger. The surface is hard, itchy, I am lying on my back and face the light, see a face. I am being weighed, I am still angry, I am being consoled, cleaned, I am not angry anymore, I am tired it is comfortable now, consoling.”**

**Afterwards the participant said: “That was my birth, my God, how realistic... How could that happen? Why me? I have always had control over my body. Why could my body do things I didn't order it to do? How astonishing.”**

The re-experience of unprocessed birth experiences can happen in surprising ways. It can cause sudden feelings of suffocation, fear of dying, fighting for your life as well as visions of darkness or being trapped.

The massive confrontation with death and rebirth processes, especially when perinatal matrices are crossed, can have very positive effects on one's life because deep fears can be eliminated. Birth and death in the form of transforming, developing and channel mechanisms may be better understood and can be integrated into every-day life. If you are interested in perinatal matrices, I would highly recommend the book “Birth, death, transcendence” by Stanislav Grof.

After intense experiences of birth there are often light visions and the feeling of total freedom prevails. Birth phenomena can also be intertwined with death, sexuality and spirituality. Even though Grof overemphasises birth experiences compared to other natural growth crises, we can assume that birth is a powerful point of transformation of human existence that can give valuable hints to life patterns through its physical-sensual and vivid-symbolic drama.

Not only birth, but also individual steps of development within the womb are as special as a miracle. If we imagine that after three weeks the heart starts beating and after eight weeks all inner and outer organs start to develop. This is not only a physiological process, but also a psychological one. One participant experienced the development of his heart in a dramatic way. Afterwards he felt overwhelmed by freely flowing love.

However, also severe negative experiences, such as a kick in the mother's stomach during pregnancy may be remembered and can be positively integrated within a session. Another

participant claimed that he had experienced his conception and could better accept his fate afterwards.

### 2.6.3 Experiences beyond usual boundaries of person, time and space (transpersonal experiences)

By entering the area of transpersonal space a process is initiated that can entirely transform life on the inside and outside. The empirical rational world steps aside to make space for a world that is characterised by enormous impulses.

This way the experiencing person gains amongst others insights into the deeper conditions of individual existence, in creation and development processes, astral regulatory mechanisms and archetypical coherences.

The diversity of experiences is enormous.

1. Transcendence of body, space and time: for example out of body experiences when somebody sees themselves from the perspective of a third person, or flying through space. Additionally, journeys to the past or future. Visits to other continents and cultures, such as the experience of a Native American tribe rite.
2. Clairvoyance: Once somebody saw his father lying inside a CT tube and when he returned home, he found out that his father had had a cerebral apoplexy at exactly that moment. Precognitions, such as the prediction of a new job or a future partner have appeared now and again amongst other paranormal phenomena.
3. Identification and contact with animals or nature, for example:

**“I move and feel like a giant lizard, I am moving slowly through a wide Volcano landscape. The full moon is shining from a dark cloudless sky. I feel connected to everything that surrounds me; I am padding slowly, observing everything. After a while I decide to lie down on the ground to die. It feels very natural and I have no fear. My body is getting heavier and heavier, slowly connecting with the soil. My spirit is moving over millennia to the future into the being that I am now. At the same time I perceive a timeless something that is connecting both beings. I feel deep love for this giant lizard.”**

4. Verbal phenomena such as speaking in foreign languages.

5. The experience of your own death. One participant described her experiences like that:

**“I am being carried on a board by Tibetan munches. My body is very light. The monks are singing. It is like they are saying good-bye. I can see a woman who is crying heavily and I can see myself as a dead Tibetan monk.**

**Then I am being burnt. I feel the fire in my back, it is not uncomfortable. I also feel how my bones bend during the incineration.**

**Everything is widening, my body feels even lighter now. I come into the light. It is a great and snug feeling. The last image of this session is that I am coming back to earth as a being. This being is packed in a light-blue statue.”**

Death is a topic that everybody is concerned with while they're alive. However, it is usually repressed. Representative experience of death can help overcome unconscious fear of death and lead to more peace and calmness in life. Through more conscious handling of death, values in life shift more in the direction of “being instead of having”, as Erich Fromm stresses.

7. Possible experiences of reincarnation

When I am asked again and again after my speeches: “Are there past lives or not”, I usually respond: “They exist and they don't exist, depending on the experiencing person's view after working through it.” Experiences from possible past lives can lead to a dramatic escape from involvements and feelings of guilt, when we unconsciously stage the karmic drama in our drafts of life. This can have to do with passed-on issues and tasks from ancestors or with

individual problems in which we identify ourselves with collective patterns. But it could also be incomplete situations from possible past lives such as presented by the next experience:

**“I feel I have to breathe again, I am breathing heavily. Suddenly I am holding a human head in my hands. It had been separated from its body. Blood is gushing. I have killed, I have power! During this episode I feel like I am in a different life. I can clearly see the detached head in front of me. Black hair, bearded, full of blood. Triumphant I hold the head, while others cheer. The head is so clearly next to me, that I suddenly have a deep sensation of horror. I scream:” No!” I cry as a result of feelings of guilt and deep regret. I feel salvation.**

These insights may lead us to accept fate more readily, because we don't feel completely helpless anymore, but feel that it is an active contribution to our inner development.

8. Journeys to mythological places

9. Cleaning and healing rituals

10. Identification with collective experiences such as the harm done to Jews or identification with all starving people on earth.

11. Encounter with collective archetypes and symbols of transformation. Thereby, so far neglected aspects of personality can be strengthened.

Here is another experience from a participant, in which her liberation of the anima aspect is depicted:

**“I am inside the belly of the earth, I can hear deep sounds. I wish I could get rid of the bonds that constrict me; I want to free my anima. It is difficult, so many obstacles and chains, bans and barriers that I have to leave behind. I am dancing a dance of freedom – it is an ecstatic dance, which is very exhausting. Aside of the exhaustion I feel anger, sadness, but sometimes delight. After a long time of effort I feel free, awoken as woman... I feel connected to all women. It is a great feeling of happiness – an oceanic feeling...”**

Collective rituals that are common in most cultures, such as rites of passage, processes of grieving, shamanic journeys and initiation events, expand their power of transformation to those who come into contact with it in holotropic states. Collective energies are seemingly present in the room and help with processing (working through) personal topics. Through the access to history of humanity and culture, and the innovation dynamics that it offers, enormous power to heal can be found.

#### **2.6.4 Spiritual experiences**

In spiritual awakening, the seeker is found, because he is ready for the revelation of the divine. The cosmic consciousness flows through humans, accompanied by intense feelings of love, happiness, humbleness and commitment. It is felt all around. Prof. Orlinsky mentioned in a lecture in Bad Kissingen last June: “We feel it in our bones and are deeply moved by it” He gets immediate answers to the questions: “Who am I and why do I live?” in the sense of a full experience of evidence. The experiencing person feels like being carried by something greater and connected to everything. She will be aware of the divine and is opened from the inside. This is not only important for spiritual development, rather many significant life decisions are made on a broader inner basis. The experiencing person feels generally more free and balanced. Every-day life is seen from a different perspective. Personal development gains velocity and radicalism under the influence of spiritual experiences. Dürckheim mentions amongst others the curative power of numinous events. Encountering a saint or guru in the holotropic state can even result in spontaneous healing.

This is a sample of spiritual experiences:

1. Existential feeling of being and sense. Joined with universal love, deep compassion and all-embracing calmness.

2. Light appearances and states of flow.
3. Experiences of nonduality, total unity and wholeness.
4. Initiation experiences
5. Inner insights of life coherences and spiritual rules.
6. Confrontation with the egoic me and egoic me death phenomena such as visions of being dismembered or being burnt. This could feel very dramatic at the time, however, it means that old-fashioned personality patterns are eliminated and instead a new broader inner basis develops. Mystic literature such as “The dark night of the soul” by Johannes vom Kreuz is full of such experiences. By the way, we also know these healing crises in psychotherapy.
7. Opening of Chakras
8. Encountering of the transpersonal self and the experience of god

Let's hear another seminar attendee:

**“...Then between the phases of active breathing there is silence. In these breaks the body takes certain positions by itself, however, I don't feel it any more and I quietly slide into other states of consciousness... There is so much light, divine, bright light. Its presence is overwhelming. My arms come up and both hands are put onto my forehead covering the third eye. My hands protect me from the overpowering power and beauty of His light. It is too much for me and tears of happiness overcome me. Then my arms are put above my head while I am lying down. My whole being is spread, towards Him. Peace, happiness, love, beauty immersed in the One, picked up like a blossom, that is wide open, put towards him... Tears are running constantly, crying deeply from the most inside, a high, vibrating sound of crying takes off into the sky. It is not pain about earthly things, It is disruption and salvation, being overwhelmed by His beauty – unbelievable (she is slowly shaking her head), incredible, so much beauty exists, inerasable.”**

## **2.7 Reflections on handling experiences**

Experiences from holotropic breathing sessions, such as the ones I have presented to you have on the one hand a very strong inner impact on the respective person and are on the other hand viewed with a lot of scepticism by outsiders. This is to do with the experiencing meeting an outside world in which the prejudice of world views is not able to comprehend their inner being. We cannot validate and examine experiences from states of altered consciousness with the same criteria as a scientifically oriented theory of knowledge. We need more flexibility, empathy, love and attentiveness as well as an attitude that is free of prejudice and resentments. One has to let the experiences speak for themselves. As Metzger says accurately: **“Take what you find as it is, even if it seems unusual, unexpected, illogical and paradoxical. Even if it contradicts formerly undoubted assumptions or familiar ways of thinking. Let things speak for themselves, without comparing them to known, past experience, seemingly natural, knowledge, logic, prejudice due to use of language and lack of vocabulary. Face matters with love and reverence. Doubts and scepticism should at first be directed at the conditions and terms which one has used to use to describe the given.”**

Experiences are pieces of art that are alive and can only be solved through an inner access to their meaning and message. Problems should not be solved forcefully and prematurely. It is important to let experiences ripe in their inner dynamic until solutions appear naturally. In handling these experiences one often wonders up to what point they are real or made-up fantasies. This is a barrier we cannot overcome. On the one hand there are many experiences that have been validated by the outside world. On the other hand there are other visions that should be understood as images in the sense of day dreams and which cannot be validated.

The question about truthfulness of memories and imaginations is as old as psychotherapy itself. Thinking about Freud, it was the seduction scenes, that he later based the Oedipus complex on, that he thought were real and later changed his opinion and viewed them as fantasies. If you assume that any experience has a psychological reality and handle it that way, it is not important if the content conforms to scientific criteria of objectivity.

## 2.8 Concluding remarks

Holotropic breathwork oscillates between therapeutic and spiritual processes. It heals old wounds, loosens constrictions, expands consciousness and is open to spiritual experiences.

Whatever topic inner wisdom leads us to in the work with altered states of consciousness; it operates on all layers of being in the sense of higher transparency, attentiveness, truthfulness and love towards itself and others. Because.

Quote:

“If you have found your inner peace, outside problems cannot get you off your way. You will stay content, whatever happens to you.” (Dalai Lama)

Spirituality is no privilege of a higher step of consciousness or a spiritual community; it rather belongs to being alive and is accessible at any time and never annoying if we only breathe more deeply and open our hearts.

Holotropic breathing connects therapy and spirituality in the sense of dramatic and entire transformation of consciousness – on the way to wholeness.

It is however important to be patient and attentive with ourselves especially in the context of this promising method.

In this spirit I would like to conclude my speech in the words of Gurumayi Chidvilasananda (1994), the currently living leader of the Siddha Yoga Tradition:

**“Many people always want to take big leaps in their development. That’s okay, but considers that if you do that, you will overlook the beauty of every single step. Every small step has its own inner plan. Wouldn’t you like to get to know it? If you take your inner development carefully, step by step, you will make the experience that you get stronger inside and you will be aware what you have done for the great aim.”**

Many thanks for listening!

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