

Morten Tolboll

A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork

The main problem in connection with the New Age movement is the attempt to integrate the philosophy of the East – and the philosophy of Western mysticism - with Western psychology and psychotherapy (see my articles **Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality** and **Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**). Psychology is after all today a science, which works with empirical proofs, or empirical content. But within the spiritual area you are precisely *not* working with content, but with essence, and this has not anything to do with psychology, but with philosophy.

The psychologizing therefore results in, that you direct yourself towards the contents and forget the essence, exactly what also characterizes a spiritual crisis (see my article **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**). It is for example my opinion, that Stanislav Grof, despite his pioneering work of mapping spiritual crises and nonordinary states of consciousness, as well as his great knowledge of history of philosophy, ends up in such a psychologizing. Here I am especially thinking about his examinations of nonordinary states of consciousness, where the touchstone of authenticity has with essence (realization) to do, and not content (experiences).

Though the descriptions of the mystical experiences of the great saints and mystics, sounds similar to the experiences of people in spiritual crises, or people who have taken LSD, or have been in a Holotropic Breathwork session, then the crucial difference is the discrimination between realization and experience.

Grof was for example seeking - first through LSD-therapy, and later, when that was forbidden, through an experiential oriented, body psychotherapeutic technique (Holotropic Breathwork) - to provoke experiences of the same kind as them you experience in a spiritual crisis – in the belief that such a crisis always has a healing and transformational potential, because he confuses authentic mystical experiences, that are followed by realization, with nonordinary experiences, that not are followed by realization.

The result is that many people, either have been injured – physical and/or psychologically – due to Holotropic Breathwork, or, spiritual seen, have been lead on the wrong track.

Grof's concept of Spiritual Emergence is therefore misleading. At the same time as he is talking about how to support people in a spiritual crisis, his whole concept of Holotropic Breathwork (HB) is about provoking spiritual crises in people. Nowhere in his work you can find the, in the mystical traditions, very known warnings against drugs and one-sided techniques, that can lead to spiritual crises, or the techniques and exercises, that can get people out of a spiritual crisis. And this is no coincidence, because his work is based on wrong cathartic theories, which are based on the notion that if you express your feelings you will purge yourself of your troubles.

Though there certainly is some kind of scientific research in his way of collecting descriptions of nonordinary states of consciousness, then his work, as in other New Age psychotherapies, also is filled with pseudoscientific shipwrecks such as reductionism and testimonials. Critique from scientists is for example often met with the phrase about that they don't understand spirituality. And if the critique comes from spirituality (an example is the critique of Grof from the mystic Kate Thomas), then it is met with the phrase about that she doesn't understand science. I won't go deeper into that, though. Read for example my articles **The pseudoscience of New Age and reductionism** and **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**.

Grof's assertion is in other words, that you through LSD, or a holotropic session, should be able to skip many years of meditation practice and experience the same as the great enlightened masters.

But what he in reality skips are the *philosophical* aspects of the meditation practice (the philosophical questions' self-inquiring practice), and when these are left out, he creates breeding ground for many different types of spiritual self-deceit. The case is namely, that an important part of the opening in towards the Source is the realization of what basically hinders this opening. Unless you know, for example the Ego's, fundamental *nature*, you will not be able to recognize it, and it will deceive you to identify with it again and again. But when you realize the hindrances in yourself (your ignorance), it is the Source itself - the Good, the True and the Beautiful – which makes the realization possible; that is: through an intervention from the divine (God, Christ, the enlightened consciousness). The realization can therefore only come from within, never from outside. I will return to this (also see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

When Grof seeks to open up for collective nonordinary experiences, without having been working with realization of the Ego's nature, he intervenes disruptive in the Ego's self-regulating structures, or, said differently: he intervenes in how peoples' karma is working in thinking and time. Therewith he also intervenes in the balancing and development-specific function of karma. Unknowing he creates heavy energetical swings without understanding, that the karmacially consequences are being equivalent heavy contrabalances and back-swings. Grof seems himself to be in a possession state, a possession of experiences, which is mirrored in the level of fierceness in his methods, which almost seem to be attempts to rape spirituality. His writings are for example characterized by endlessly using the word "experiences".

In my critique of Grof, I will focus on HB. And in HB I will focus on its lack of ability to discriminate between experiences, which not are followed by realization, and experiences that are followed by realization. This lack of discrimination is due to the psychologizing of the philosophical elements in spirituality.

About Holotropic Breathwork (HB)

HB is a form of breathwork - developed by Stanislav Grof, MD, and Christina Grof - that claims, that it allows access to nonordinary states of consciousness. HB has some similarities to Rebirthing-Breathwork, but was developed independtly. HB claims to be an approach to self-exploration and healing that integrates insights from modern consciousness research, anthropology, various depth psychologies, transpersonal psychology, Eastern spiritual practices, and mystical traditions of the world. The name *Holotropic* means "moving toward wholeness" (from the Greek *holos* "whole" and *trepein* "to turn or direct towards a thing").

Alex Walker, a former Trustee of the Findhorn Foundation, states: "Stanislav Grof, the originator of this form of therapy, is adamant that it is a spiritual technique with an ancient shamanistic lineage." Grof is namely an advocate for the use of drugs, or "sacred medicine", used in certain shamanistic traditions with the purpose of healing, and HB is directly developed as a substitute for drugs (especially LSD) that now are illegal. The most precisely is therefore to call HB a form of New Age Shamanism.

The method comprises five elements: group process, intensified breathing (so-called hyperventilation), evocative music, focused body work, and expressive drawing. The method's general effect is said to be a non-specific amplification of a person's psychic process, which facilitates the psyche's natural capacity for healing.

HB is usually done in groups, although individual sessions are done. Within the groups, people work in pairs and alternate in the roles of experiencer ("breather") and

“sitter”. The sitter is available to assist the breather, but not to interfere or interrupt the process. The same is true for trained facilitators, who are available if necessary.

Originally developed as an adjunct to psychedelic psychotherapy, HB is an autonomous psychotherapeutic practice, which, nevertheless, retains many of the clinical precautionary measures that were implemented in the “medical” use of LSD.

As mentioned, then “experiences” is a quite central word in HB. Participants in HB sessions report a wide variety of experiences (Taylor, 1994). From observing many people in nonordinary and expanded states of consciousness, Grof developed what he considers to be a “cartography” of the psyche, which describes four main categories of experience.

Sensory and Somatic: This realm of experience includes various hallucinatory phenomena, such as visualizing images of geometrical patterns. More commonly, participants report a greater awareness of an ability to act out somatic processes and bodily impulses, such as assuming postures, dancing or moving in specific ways, and making sounds. They may also claim to feel where energy is blocked or streaming, consistent with the belief in vitalism.

Biographical and Individual Unconscious: As in more “traditional” therapies, participants may revisit unresolved conflicts, repressed memories, and unintegrated traumas. Compared to talk therapies, the unconscious material is more likely to be re-experienced than merely remembered. Participants report this deeper processing can be more effective at clearing trauma, especially as it relates to subtle ways that trauma is held in the body.

Perinatal: Along with most other HB practitioners, and in disagreement with John Locke’s claim that the infant after birth is a tabula rasa, Grof believes that the birth process is a traumatic event that leaves powerful residue in the psyche. Participants in HB sessions report having images, emotions, physical sensations, and cognitions that convince them that they are remembering aspects of their own birth. Sometimes details can be verified with medical records. Some claim that these experiences help them release the birth trauma, including deeply negative beliefs about themselves or the world.

Transpersonal: Referring to the possibility of accessing information outside the normal boundaries of the ego and body, transpersonal experiences reported in HB sessions include past life memories, experiential identification with other life forms, out-of-body experiences, oneness, encounters with spiritual archetypes, and connection with the collective unconscious.

In HB there is a combination of Regression psychotherapies and Cathartic psychotherapies. In the following I will give a general critique of these two theories; a critique that also shows the problems in HB:

Regression psychotherapies

The cause of suffering is in philosophical counseling (true spiritual counseling – read my article **Philosophical counseling as an alternative to psychotherapy**) due to a separation of the observer and the observed. The investigation is directed towards the observer (the form of consciousness: the one who evaluates, who says yes and no, who accepts and denies, who compares with earlier and hopes/fears something else), and *not* the observed (the contents of consciousness: feelings, thoughts, images, experiences, sense impressions, memories, wishes, hopes, fears, lusts) as in psychotherapy. The main question is therefore in its essence philosophical: *Who am I?*

Regression psychotherapies (e.g.: rebirthing, reparenting, past life regression, alien abduction, recovered memory therapy, satanic ritual abuse, etc.) are based on the notion that if you discover the cause of your troubles you will be cured (the unconscious material in HB, is, in its combination with Cathartic psychotherapies, more likely to be re-experienced than merely remembered). These theories are (like other New Age theories) partially attached to science (they often use a lot of pseudoscientific technical jargon without any meaning at all – most extremely this is seen in NLP – see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**) - partially to spirituality (the therapists often call themselves spiritual counselors). In this confusion they are oblivious to the observer, and are lost in the observed. Therefore they are ignorant about the one who creates the causes. The causes become built into the psychotherapy itself, and are therefore ideological worldviews, or just pure prejudice. It is causes such as birth traumas, inadequate parents, sexual abuse, satanic rituals, cannibalistic orgies, past lives, alien abduction, possession by entities, etc. Take your pick. Often they use a one-size-fits-all explanation of every emotional disorder.

In the best Sophist way the therapists are planting such causes in their patients' minds. They give their patients books to read or videos to watch. They plant them during hypnosis, group sessions, etc., and then these planted causes are “recovered” or “re-experienced”, and offered as validation of their therapeutic techniques and theories. Patient after patient is paraded forth by the therapists as evidence of their good work, yet none of the patients seem better for the therapy and many seem hopelessly ill. The reason is, that it is not that to feel better, which is the cure, but that

to have “discovered” or “re-experienced” the cause. They are ignorant about thought distortions such as *Communal reinforcement*, *Confabulation*, and *Priming effect* (see my article **Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, and the art of self-deception**, and my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

Rather than helping clients to become stronger and more independent, most regression psychotherapies, and in particular the rebirthing-reparenting sort, induce in the client an abdication of responsibility and a state of sickly dependence on the therapists.

Contrary to what they claim, then regression psychotherapies create a philosophical hindrance for the opening into the spiritual source, namely an existence-philosophical, where you in your opinion formation and identity formation strive towards being something else than what you are, where you imitate others, are a slave of others ideas and ideals, and where your actions are characterized by irresoluteness and doubt (also seen in Hypnotherapy, Hypnosis, Personal development, Coaching, NLP, Large Group Awareness Training, Landmark forum – see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

Past life regression is considered “pure quackery” by the American Psychiatric Association. Read more about Regression psychotherapies in my article **Regression psychotherapies**

Cathartic psychotherapies

Cathartic psychotherapies (e.g.: Experiential Psychotherapy, Primal Therapy, Gestalt therapy, Energy breathing, etc.) are based on the notion that if you express your feelings you will purge yourself of your troubles. We have probably all heard this because psychotherapy today have spread far out over its disciplinary limits, and have become a part of an ideology, that think it have to take care of, not just psychological problems, but also philosophical, political and religious problems (see my article **The devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy**). In schools and in workplaces we are for example forced to lay bare our feelings on the slightest occasion.

Psychotherapy is a branch of psychology, and therefore something scientific, which have to be empirical tested. The problem is that there is no proof for the notion that you will purge yourself for your troubles if you express your feelings. On the contrary. The notion seem disproved by experiments with children, which find that rather than sublimate aggression when encouraged to be aggressive, the children become more aggressive. As Stephen J. Castro says: “if you have ever experienced (and it is indeed a quite unforgettable experience) someone go berserk and beat a

cushion in order to express “repressed” anger, edged on by a group of onlookers displaying the fervour of a mindless mob, then you tend to value rationality, and not gestalt.” To Castro it was therefore heartening to read in the *Daily Mail* that there are more than 400 published studies that show quite clearly that when people are focused in this way they just become more angry – not better. Why is that?

The problem is that psychotherapy is neglecting the importance of thoughts. Feelings are the body’s reaction on the mind (the thoughts). Feelings arise where the mind and the body meet. They are reflections of the mind *in* the body. Feelings can also be a reflection of a whole thoughtpattern. A thoughtpattern can create an enlarged and energycharged reflection of itself in the form of a feeling. This means, that the whole of the thought’s past also can create a reflection of itself in the body. And if this past is filled with pain, then it can show itself as a negative energyfield in the body. Eckhart Tolle calls this the emotional painbody. It contains all the pain you have accumulated in the past. It is the sum of the negative feelings which you have ”saved together” through life and which you carry. And it can nearly be seen as an invisible, independent creature. Therefore we also could, as H.C. Andersen does in his fairy tale, call it the Shadow.

The painbody is the inner demon, or the devil in the heart. Some painbody’s are relatively harmless, some are anxietyfilled or angry, others are directly malicious and demonical. They can be passive or active. Some are passive 90% of the time, others are active 100% of the time.

The painbody is activated in the same moment as specific challenges activate the inappropriate basic assumptions, which have been created by bad experiences in the past. And they are being maintained by the vortex of negative automatic thinking, which follows from these basic assumptions. In other words it constitutes a rather particular reaction-pattern, a manuscript, which gets you to play the same role (or the same roles) again and again. That will say, that specific situations will continue to activate it, so that your actions become an eternal repetition of the same. It takes control over you, so to speak.

Therefore you should of course not seek to activate your painbody, as the cathartic psychotherapies believe you should, because they thereby also activate the negative thoughtpattern behind the painbody. The painbody lives of, that you are identified with the negative thoughtpattern behind it. In this way the painbody gets your energy. And for that reason you also give energy to your negative feelings, when you activate your thoughtpattern. Negative feelings will in other words increase if you express them. And the painbody is, through the inner evaluating ego, which the painbody is constructed around, connected with the more dangerous depths of the astral plane’s

collective history. The energies found here are unfathomable, and when you direct them into your painbody, you are really facing problems. You are opening a gate of darkness.

Instead you should relate completely neutral in relation to your painbody, and through critical thinking seek to investigate, restructure and change the inappropriate basic assumptions, which is the thoughtpattern behind the painbody. That is how philosophy and true spirituality works (see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions** is a manual in critical thinking and therefore philosophy).

Read more about Cathartic psychotherapies in my article **Cathartic psychotherapies**. Also read my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it**.

HB and its lack of understanding karma

In Zen it is said about the process of awakening: "In the beginning mountains are mountains, and woods are woods. Then mountains no longer are mountains and woods are no longer woods. Finally mountains are again mountains, woods are again woods."

This refers to the three forms of states the wholeness can be in: sleep, dream, awake. This can also be described as the personal, collective and universal images of time, which form the astral structure under your thinking. The personal and collective images work in sequences in past and future, and therefore in absence of awareness. The universal images work in synchronism with the Now, and therefore with awareness, or consciousness.

The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna said, that the Now's lawfulness around the function of a universal negationpower, is due to, that energy works as streams and dividings within a superior wholeness. And because the wholeness is a reality, each part will always fit into a correspondent part. This means, that each part only can be understood in relation to its negation; that is: what the part *not* is. Firstly this implies, that each part comes to appear as part of a polarization-pair, or a pair of opposites – like in the teaching of Yin and Yang. Secondly it implies, that each part only can be understood in relation to *everything* else; that is: in relation to the wholeness.

So the more you, through the Ego's evaluations, isolate these parts from each other, the more the abandoned parts will work stronger and stronger on their polar partners. Therefore these polar partners in their extremes will finally switch over in the opposite extreme. Another aspect of this lawfulness, or another way to describe this

lawfulness is: energy returns to its starting point. This is also called compensatory karma, and the lawfulness works as wave movements and pendulum movements.

And since everything in this way only work correlative, yes, then Nagarjuna claimed, that we actually can't say anything about the wholeness, only about the parts. Therefore he called the wholeness the Emptiness (*'sûnyatâ*) – a teaching, which had one quite determinate purpose: the neutralization of all the dogmas, theories and viewpoints, which ignorance has created (read more about the philosophy of Nagarjuna in my article **A critique of Ken Wilber and his integral method**).

This leads to the thought about that human beings have two aspects: an energy aspect and a consciousness aspect. Seen from the energy aspect lawfulness rules: your body is subject to the physical laws of nature, your psychic system is subject to the lawfulness of the energy fields and of the energy transformations. The energy aspect is the area of compensatory karma; it is the area of experiences, the area of the personal and collective images of time, which work in sequences in past and future, and therefore in absence of awareness, or absence of consciousness. And that also means that it in itself is without realization.

Seen from the consciousness aspect, then a human being seems to be akin to the wholeness, to be transcendent in relation to these lawfulnesses. The consciousness is the area of progressive karma, spiritual development; it is the area of realization, the area of the universal images of time, which work in synchronism with the Now. The Now seems to be a quality of awareness, and therefore also of consciousness and wholeness. Realization has to do with the three states the wholeness can be in: sleep, dream, awake. So it is only here you can talk about the spiritual insights of the great mystics. It is only here you can talk about genuine mystical experiences; that is: experiences, which are followed by realization.

HB is reducing everything to the energy aspect. As with a lot of other New Age directions it seems ignorant about the consciousness aspect, or the aspect of universal images, though talking a great deal about it. And it is only the consciousness aspect, which can come to insight about karmacial structures.

When you reduce everything to the energy aspect, there can't happen any realization. Whatever you do within this area - therapy, exercises, use of drugs, stimulation of brain cells, Holotropic Breathwork, etc., etc. - then it only will result in experiences without realization. It will also result in absense of awareness, because the consciousness will be distracted by the personal and collective images of time, which work in sequences in past and future, and in fragmentation.

Experiences without realization will therefore be characterized by existential categories such as unreality, division, anxiety, stagnation and meaninglessness, no matter how “divine” or “demonical” they occur to the experiencer. And that is actually in direct opposition to the genuine mystical experience, which are followed by realization. The mystical experience is namely characterized by the opposite existential categories, such as reality, co-operation, safety, movement and meaning.

So in a spiritual practice it is the form of the consciousness it is about (realization), not its content (experiences).

On the plane of the universal images, and therefore on the Now’s plane, the central is the form of the consciousness - the actual consciousness and its clarity and openness. Not the content of the consciousness. In spiritual practice the spiritual, and spiritual active, is the consciousness’ course towards its source (the Now, the Otherness). What the consciousness and the mind and the senses are filled by, is of less crucial importance.

So the Ego’s partial consciousness is part of a greater wholeness, which is the Now, life itself. And life itself is the life in the Now, where you are present and active using the pure awareness, the innermost in you, and using the heartfulness, which is the whole of yourself; what we could call your spiritual essence, because the life itself, which life itself contains is so absolute, so complete, that there herein is something eternal and endless.

The concept of karma has therefore primarily to do with the development process of your spiritual essence - and only secondary and indirectly with the Ego’s process; that is: with your personal time and life situation. Admittedly it is the Ego’s actions out on the scene, which leaves karmacial tracks. Karma is the subconscious consequences of the Ego’s actions. Each time the Ego acts - and thereby changes the balance in the wholeness – then the structures and power lines in your spiritual essence changes, in the subconscious.

When your spiritual essence is sleeping, karma is automatically. The Ego’s pendulum swings in one life out in an extreme. Hereby gathers in the wholeness, in your spiritual essence, momentum to, that the pendulum in a future life will swing out in the opposite compensatory extreme. This is the automatic compensatory karma. In one life ascetic, in the next libertine, then inhibited and expelled, thereupon sybarite etc. with no end, because the Ego has freedom continual to give new momentum and new course - within the karmacial possible; that is to say: heredity and environment - to the Ego’s pendulum.

However when the Ego decides to use its free energy, its existential option to begin to awake, then the karma structures changes. Then you begin to use and work with your spiritual dimension. This dimension is not subject to the karmacially structure, it *is* it, or it is over it. The wholeness is over, is transcendent, in relation to the laws and mechanisms, which regulate the infrastructures of the wholeness. The wholeness is not subject to the laws and energy transformations, which rule between the constitutive parts of the wholeness.

When your spiritual essence begins to dream, when the Ego-consciousness begins to bloom, to open itself, you discover the karmacially lawfulnesses and can therefore relate to them. When your consciousness in extended state begins to sense the karmacially structures, which after all not only rule between the many life's of your spiritual essence, but all the same are known psychological mirrored from the Ego's dreams and the Ego's life - then you can change attitude.

Instead of swinging with the laws you can choose to observe. Instead of identifying yourself with impulses and incentives, emotions and thought tendencies, you can separate yourself, become a witness, become alert. And hereby you can break the karmacially automatism.

As mentioned: Human beings have two aspects: an energy aspect and a consciousness aspect. Seen from the energy aspect lawfulness rules: your body is subject to the physical laws of nature, your psychic system is subject to the lawfulness of the energy fields and of the energy transformations. Seen from the consciousness aspect, then a human being seems to be akin to the wholeness, to be transcendent in relation to these lawfulnesses.

Human beings are in that way, seen from the point of view of the ordinary ego-consciousness, inserted in two dimensions: a continuum, which streams are subject to laws; a discontinuum, for which leaps laws not seem to be effective. The wholeness, your spiritual essence, is normally the discontinuous aspect; normally, because this is of course seen from the point of view of the ego-continuum. Seen from the point of view of your spiritual essence, then the ego-continuum, with its sleep and awake, life and death, is the discontinuous aspect, and the spiritual essence the continuous aspect. But the parts, the Ego and its evaluations, is normally the continuous aspect.

When your spiritual essence begins to dream and the continuum of the Ego-consciousness breaks and expands in a discontinuum (into the superior continuum of the wholeness – or your spiritual essence), then the cosmic structur-pattern changes. Instead of mere compensatory karma, a progressive karma will now be effective.

That, which you through existential achievement have reached of spiritual contact in one life, will form a progressive karma.

The process of your spiritual essence, your process of awakening, will leave progressive karma along through the various incarnations. What you spiritual have reached to realize in one life, will in the spiritual energy be there in the next life, or in the dimension of your spiritual essence.

If your spiritual essence is sleeping, the spiritual energy is quiet. Without traceable activity. A human being can live a whole life, yes, life after life, in absolute sleep.

If you however existentially begin to seek, to seek the spiritual, the divine, to seek love, if you choose to use your energy and your life in that way, then the spiritual energy will begin to vibrate, to become active. Only the images, which have achieved to imprint themselves in the spiritual energy, will be transferred as progressive karma. Your spiritual essence will remember its dreams from life to life. And your spiritual essence will remember and accumulate the glimpses of being awake, it might have experienced. These, the dreams and awake moments of your spiritual essence, are the progressive karma.

This is what is meant with, that people are born with different levels of spiritual development.

Concerning the progressive karma it applies, that each new life, in a quintessence, repeats the crucial stations on the development path of the spiritual essence. The place, where you can find your own progressive karma, if such is available, is therefore in the life, you have lived, in the history of your present life. It is lying as an invisible script underneath the history of your actual life. It is the dream-tracks and songlines in the artwork of your life.

In the inexplicable events in your life, in the rows of moments of spiritual longing, in the fateful incidents and actions - in them are contained the progressive karma. In your spiritual history there is a map. This map shows the dream-tracks and the songlines in your spiritual work of art. This map is a universal image.

There is no doubt about, that Karen Blixen, though not fully conscious, had a sense of this map. All her books are about destiny seen in this way; they are about people who either live in accordance with this map, or in discordance with it. This map, this universal image was, what she referred to as the "ancient", the "original", and which she always was seeking as authenticity, autonomy, possibility, freedom and adventure. And a universal image is of a holographic nature, therefore it contains all

other images, personal, collective and universal, and therefore it contains the dream-tracks and songlines in the artwork of your life. It is the universal history of the astral plane; the Akashic records, or the wholeness, which is awake (read my article **The philosophy of Karen Blixen**).

You can live a whole life with this key lying in your own actual, spiritual biography. It requires work to find it. If you through development, through training, expand your consciousness to the spiritual dimension, then this invisible script will be made visible, the dream-tracks and the songlines in the progressive karma will be found.

Alaya-vijnana is a term used within Yogacara Buddhism to indicate the store-house consciousness, or the great vision, which consists of universal images. It is also called the Akashic Records (see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with spiritual practice**). These universal images are a kind of energetical mandala-structures or yantra-fields. They have a linguistic nature, but it is of a visionary kind. These images are composite by sound and color, symbol and structure. You could also say, that they are what the philosophers call unmoved matter, a worldaspect of sound-colours and symbol-structures, an ocean of vibrant, soundfilled energyfields, which shimmer in symbols and colours. Altogether filled with information about life. Together the great vision, an information-ocean of holographic nature.

It has therefore nothing whatever to do with Grof's version of Jung's theory about the collective unconscious. It doesn't belong to the energy aspect of Man, but to the consciousness aspect of Man. It is not a collective psychological phenomenon constructed by humans, but a metaphysical reality that not is human made. It is the thoughts of God. It is here the wrong turn is happening in the reductionism of transpersonal psychology, and in the whole of New Age's psychologism. Religion is reduced to psychology. God is reduced to a center within the human psyche. Images are confused with reality, the map is confused with the landscape, the subject is confused with the object. The great vision is complete objectivity, a complete otherness in relation to, not only humans, but to the created world as such (again: see my article **Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**).

We have historical records about this vision. For example there within Tibetan Buddhism exists a peculiar doctrine about the so-called Tertöns (tib. Gter-bston - the unearthers of the hidden books), people who are born with a special karmacial connection to a long ago deceased master, and who, because of the connection to this master's oneness-consciousness with the universal vision, now can collect treasures of information in from the vision, or the universal images, which after all work in synchronism with the Now, and which therefore lie in the wholeness, in the continuum of eternity. The master was hiding and storing holy "texts" various places

in the universal images with that purpose, that a future "Tertön" would be able to find this knowledge again, decipher and publish it.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thödol) is in that way one of the Tibetan texts, which is considered for having been hidden in the universal vision by the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, Padma Sambhava, and which was found again by a Tertön with the name Rigzin Karma Ling-pa. Padma Sambhava is considered for having hidden many holy texts, whereafter he gave some of his disciples the yoga ability to become reincarnated in the right time - which were determined astrologically - for here to find the scriptures again.

After an estimated judgment, the spiritual texts, which already have been taken out by Tertöns in the run of the centuries, would form a cyclopedia on around sixtyfive volumes with average around four hundred pages in each volume.

I can see no reason to deny the doctrine of the Tertöns. You can't just deny people's experiences (followed by realization) written down through centuries. This would in itself be unscientific, irrational, and besides, deeply arrogant. It is important though, to remember the philosophical aspects of the spiritual journey; that is: the use of rationality and critical thinking, which actually also is a central part of the training of the Tibetan monks. The problem with the alternative environment within the New Age movement, is namely, that precisely because the above mentioned, normal inaccessible, areas, in principle lie outside the area of the Ego-consciousness, yes, then they are open for all sorts of fantasies.

Within the New Age movement there are countless people today, who work egoistic with karmically experiences – that is to say: they earn money as clairvoyants, regression therapists etc. Some of them live on pure make believe, others are direct frauds, but some of them have actually the ability to see into the collective time and its images, and tell about a past and a future which lies outside the area of the personality. But usually they have no philosophical training, no realization training and ethical practice. Therefore they basically do not know what they are doing. They are lost in the area of time where mountains no longer are mountains, and woods no longer are woods. There is in this area of the collective time and its images, with all its experts and clients, the possibility for a lot of waffle, a lot of imprecisely guesses and imagination, fiction and speculation.

There are therefore some philosophical principles you ought to hold on to, on the whole of this enormous, and growing market. The so-called compensatory karma will by these experts and clients normal be misunderstood and abused as a kind of legitimation of, that we are as we are or do, as we do. He or she becomes obliged to do this or that, in order to equalize old karma. It is for example a central idea in HB,

that in order to access transpersonal states of consciousness a person must necessarily first regress to the perinatal state to resolve the trauma of (and/or around) birth. Other New Age psychotherapies have similar ideas, that makes it necessary to use precisely *their* methods in order to access transpersonal states of consciousness, against a high fee of course. A main idea is, that you should not begin a meditation proces before you have been in psychotherapy.

This is spiritual seen nonsense. Usually the whole thing is about escaping from reality or excuses. It all origin from the collective time, which work in sequences in past and future, and in fragmentation, and therefore, in deeper sense, not karmacial and not in the least spiritual.

If a human being in genuine sense experiences (that is: realizes) compensatory karma, then this will precisely cause a separation, a break in relation to the automatic identification with tendencies and circumstances. A human being, who actual realizes his karmacially conditions, will precisely, by force of realization, break the automatic process. And therefore precisely break out of, for example a spiritual crisis, instead of “having to revisit it.”

A very dangerous tendency in HB, and in cathartic psychotherapies as such, is the thought about that it is necessary to revisit/re-experience suffering, so that they become ignorant about danger signals (again: see my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it**). This is also a part of their suppression of critique. But it is very important to understand the *meaning* of suffering, though. I have investigated this in my article **Suffering as an entrance to the Source**.

When you are in an intense spiritual practice, then you, admittedly, in a short time have to run through a lot of dark existential stuff, which are the cause of suffering. Spiritual practice is a process of awakening. But though you wake up to greater presence and intensity of life, you also wake up to your own, and others (other people, society, nature), realized or unrealized, suffering. That is the proces of realization and compassion. But there is a crucial difference between experiencing suffering without realization, and experiencing it with realization. In the realization you discover the cause of suffering, you discover the nature of suffering, and therewith you will of course break with this cause.

When I had my first experiences with kundalini, I was very influenced by the many books that talked about the “necessary” in combining spiritual practice with psychotherapy. In the first part of the process I experienced all the kinds of rising processes, that are described in connection with awakening of kundalini. But there

was no realization in them, they were just colourful experiences of powerful energies, which made me somehow ego-inflated (see my article **The awakening of kundalini** and **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**). Several times I for example experienced how the kundalini power rised out of my crown chakra, spreading in fountains of light, but I was not becoming enlightened, I actually had no clue about what happened.

These colourful experiences continued and grew in intensity. Then suddenly they changed into something demonical. I experienced the dark night of the soul, heavy anxiety, nightmares, demons and devils attacking me. And the psychotherapists I talked with (who didn't had any experiences of this themselves) gladly told me to continue the proces, because it was "necessary" to go through it (precisely as Grof, and other transpersonal psychotherapists, *wrongly* are instructing people in). In order to make the stress milder, I went into periods with alcohol abuse.

But to my luck I was not dependent of any people or cults. My common sense told me, that this simply couldn't be right. Then I began to study the original wisdomtraditions. And then I found all the explanations and warnings. I also found the focus on philosophy, the important use of critical thinking and rationality. I was simply breaking out of the process. Though the kundalini still was active in me, it was now rather functioning as a kind of energetical teacher. It showed me whenever my thoughts slipped out in extremes, activating my painbody, and it showed me this quite brutally through heavy tensions and pains. As soon as I again was breaking out of the process, and returned to meditation and neutral obervation, the tensions and pains dissappeared.

This also tells something about, that if you have come this far in a spiritual practice, there is no way back – you need to continue the spiritual practice – you can't stop it, or break out of it, without ending in deep suffering. The Tibetan Dzogchen-practice starts for example with that the teacher gives you a glimpse of enlightenment, whereafter the whole spiritual practice begins. In this way Dzogchen, contrary to other spiritual traditions, somehow begins with the goal. The following spiritual practice is then about that you start the hard work of finding the enlightenment again. There is no way back, after the glimpse, you need to continue the spiritual practice, or else you are lost. Therefore it is not all people, that are ready for Dzogchen. But the teachers would know this. They are themselves in a state of enlightenment.

Independent philosopher Kevin Shepherd (1995) precisely argues that the spiritual practices which HB claims as inspiration can only be correctly understood in the context of their original cultures. In particular, he questions the motives and wisdom of facilitators providing Holotropic Breathwork in a commercial context.

In volume 3 of her autobiography, mystic Kate Thomas (1992) quotes extensively from correspondance relating to the controversy at the Findhorn Foundation. In this, and subsequent writing (1998, 2000), she expresses the view that Holotropic Breathwork interferes with the process of spiritual evolution in ways that she claims facilitators are unqualified to recognize or deal with. Grof himself was for example able to boast that he could convert a Jewish rabbi into a Zen Buddhist using his LSD dosages; but in reality he had no concept of how Zen monks live and think, and himself was incapable of the traditional ideal.

After my own experiences with kundalini, I have often been talking about the incompetence of New Age teachers. Traditional a spiritual teacher must be a person, who is one with what he teaches; that is: he must have experienced, and realized, what he teaches. This requirement is removed in New Age. Here everyone can take a homemade weekend-education as spiritual teacher, shaman, clairvoyant, etc.

Another aspect of this incompetence is the unqualified talk about science, which these people often are promoting. They can be directly breathtaking in their combination of self-confidence and absurdity, where they with no hesitation are bullying highly qualified experts if they are critical, no matter whether they are scientists or mystics. Ego-inflation must, because of the magical thinking New Age is promoting, be seen as a collective spiritual crisis within the environment (again: see my article **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**).

Kevin Sheperd and Kate Thomas have caught something important. Grof has admittedly an idea about that there in a human being exists some kind of resistance, an invincible inertia that reacts and protests against entering into transpersonal states of consciousness. But from here everything goes in the wrong direction.

Let me explain. I often advice my guests in my philosophical counseling sessions, and in my philosophical cafés, to find a religion that suits them; a religion that can work as a frame of reference in their spiritual practice; a religion, that has a spiritual tradition for different kinds of supporting exercises, as for example meditation and prayer. When spirituality namely requires a non-evaluating, defocused, open, surrendered consciousness, then there is an instinctive survival-preparedness in us, that reacts and protests. Man has survived on willfullness and a consciousness-structure, which mental and psychic sign is egocentredness: the work of the inner calculator. The bigger ego, the bigger survival chance.

Seen from a spiritual perspective, this instinctive survival strategy (the ego) appears as a resistance, and invincible inertia. The traditional wisdomtraditions have some

very precise concepts about this. In the West it is called original sin. In the East it is called negative karma.

If a human being for real should have hopes for re-encoding this instinct-anchored (animal-like) behaviour-pattern, then this demands a radical reorganization of the mind and the thoughts. The consciousness have to train the use of its higher functions (relaxfullness, awareness, heartfullness, asking philosophical questions in a meditative-existential way, silence) by de-teaching the, for the Ego, necessary, and by the evolution, approved functions (evaluation, focusing, action, language-creating). And this is not practical possible without a long-term pedagogy, which uses religion and supporting exercises.

In order to convert or purify the evolutionary inertia, religion and supporting exercises are used. You can't, by psychotherapeutic strategies, free the consciousness for its attachment to this inertia. You can therefore not dissolve or dilute or convert the original sin through psychotherapy. The reason is, that it is only the intervention of the Source (God, Christ, the enlightened consciousness) that basically can help Man with a transcendence of the negative karma of the original sin. But in order to, that a human being should be able to receive this help from the Source (gift of grace), then this requires an eminently precise and profound preparation. And as part of this preparation religion and supporting exercises serve.

The crucial difference between psychotherapy and religion and supporting exercises is namely, as already said, that psychotherapy is turning the awareness towards the content (experiences) of consciousness, while religion and supporting exercises are turning the awareness towards the essence, or the form of consciousness (realization). (See my article **The value of having a religion in a spiritual practice**, and my article **The Value of Religion and Supporting Exercises** in my book **Dream Yoga**).

It is therefore important that you, in your fascination of the contents of consciousness, and the possibilities that lies in the astral plane's collective history, don't begin to use drugs or one-sided developmental techniques, which promise you great experiences concerning so-called "transpersonal" states of consciousness. One of the reasons why the true spiritual traditions lead people around the collective time, or shorten the passage through it, is because that discarnate entities from these areas are using people or cults (collective energy processes in mass phenomena: religious, spiritual, psychotherapeutic, political, sports or other type) as psychic channels, working interdimensionally to create all sorts of "experiences" in people, experiences that seems dazzling and/or extraordinary – but with the purpose of using their energy as food. That is: a kind of vampires, or even worse.

The spiritual process is a slow and organical growth-proces that requires your own realization-work through religion and its continual supporting exercises. When the source eventually intervenes, then the religion and supporting exercises fall away. They are only a frame of reference. You can't receive realization from any outer source, whether it is through organizations, faith, dogmas, priests, rituals, drugs, therapy, theories of dream interpretation, philosophical knowledge or psychological methods. You must remember that all such systems are build on the thought-constructions of man, and they will make you into a slave if you are identified with them. Only your own realizationwork can, step by step, year after year, clean the consciousness, increase the energy level in the consciousness, and gradually expand it out into the fascinating areas of life. And the intervention from the source is one with this expansion.

You have to have patience. Even for people with a regular and well-ordered practice (2-3 hours every day) there can pass weeks, months or years between the spiritual reflections into your life. You can concretely say, that a person, who really wants to experience an existential transformation process, shall reckon in, during a number of years to practise supporting exercises about 2 hours a day. However if practice is appropriate, the spiritual consciousness will with time automatically penetrate your life.

Another philosophical principle is to examine, whether the karmacially talk and experiences of the "experts" and clients remove their energy-investments in the actual reality. If focus is displaced backwards, then the collective time has taken over and spiritual seen there therefore happens an escape. Such an escape is seen both in Freud, Rank, Grof, Janov, rebirthing, regression. None of these people and theories can therefore be said to work spiritual. And if they use the karma idea in that way, it is no longer a spiritual help, it is a collective displacement of the focus backwards in time and therewith out of reality and into the unreality of the collective time.

And this area is inexhaustible. Regardless whether you make use of psychotherapy, Holotropic Breathwork, clairvoyance, healing, body therapy, regression, dreaminterpretation, chakras, then there will always be more. You can continue and continue, you almost become dependent of it like drugs or sex, because the actual magnet, which attract the whole of this area with its energy – the Ego - has not been realized. The Ego will with its evaluations create new problems, new content, new longings, new dreams - which again is in need of therapy, consultation etc., indefinitely. The spiritual development stops, it leaves the rails and ends up blind.

The genuine karmacially structures do not lie in the collective time, but in the universal time, which work in synchronism with the Now. If the karma idea is used

spiritual seen correctly, then the focus, instead of being projected out in something afar (past lives, a guru, birth, the future), will be present in something very near, namely only in the most intensive experiences of this actual life, and after that: in this actual Now with its possibility of realizing your innermost.

So the universal images lie as a kind of dream-tracks and song-lines in your actual life here and now. Only here and now they can be discovered. They can manifest themselves in symbols, which contain informations about the development process of your spiritual essence. Informations from the universal images are, contrary to informations from the collective images, not contradiction-filled and split, but healing and synthesizing. They are the map, which shows the path from the Ego to your spiritual essence. When they have been discovered, the Ego knows the way to the pure awareness and love of its spiritual essence – the home of the spiritual essence (see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with mystical experiences**).

Only Man himself can find the progressive karma. The consciousness has the key in its life. Only awareness can find the progressive karma, and awareness must of course be your own awareness, and therefore your own presence in the Now. It helps nothing, what people through HB may be able to experience in the collective time, or fantasize about karmacially experiences. Many of these experiences (for example about past lives) – and which have a certain reality for the client – are collective fantasies.

Collective fantasies have two aspects. The one aspect of the fantasies is a kind of archetypical, mythologically symbolizings of more personally, unclarified matter. The second aspect of the fantasies is relatively valid information about incidents, for example in other centuries. The misguiding happens because the two aspects are blended together. The client can remember, that he has lived in a past incarnation (often very romantic, for example as a pharaoh), and he can even travel to the places, where he had been incarnated and find things which "proves" his assertion. There has been made many examinations of things of that kind. But regardless how fascinating it is, then it proves nothing about past lives. And therefore it is deceptive and dangerous to occupy oneself with. There is for example the danger of discarnate entities using you as a channel (see my articles **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with clairvoyance** and **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with channeling**).

Nobody can tell you about your karmacially structures. All people or techniques - clairvoyants, regression therapists, shamans, HB facilitators, etc. etc. - who are

claiming they can help you karmacial, are cognitional and ethical delusional and deceptive.

Only your own realization opens. If you think that you, through HB, are able to experience your karmacially course, it would not help you. On the contrary it would harm. Only your own inner realization can open the spiritual dimension. Karma in other ways is nonsense. And by the way, that's the same with all spiritual.

In all briefness you can say, that genuine spiritual practice tries to guide people, who wish to learn, to go round the states, which have to do with the collective time, or at least, to shorten the passage through these areas. And if you are lost in them, to lead you back on the right track.

Appendix

In July 2011, Chantal Lavigne of Quebec died as a result of a personal development seminar. Some month later a coroner's report confirmed that Lavigne was accidentally "cooked to death" during a class called "Dying in Consciousness." Participants were wrapped in mud and plastic, covered with blankets, and left immobilized for about nine hours. Cardboard boxes were placed over their heads and they were encouraged to hyperventilate. Lavigne died of hyperthermia when her body was unable to dissipate heat properly.

The seminar was held at a spa called Ferme Reine de la Paix and organized by Gabriella "Seréna" Fréchette. In her work as a holistic healer, Fréchette channels "Melchizedek," a mysterious king and priest that appears in the book of Genesis (see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with channeling**). Lavigne had already completed 85 personal development seminars at the spa, for which she paid more than \$18,900.

This seminar may be related to the conscious dying movement, which explores ceremonies from world traditions such as Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism that emphasize both preparing for death and gaining spiritual insight through near-death experiences. In audio recordings of the session, Fréchette allegedly states, "The time has come for this body of death that you believe is yours...Death is freedom...death is the truth."

This is not the first time tragedy has resulted from holistic therapies that involve heat and confined spaces. In 2000, ten-year-old Candace Newmaker was accidentally smothered to death during "rebirthing therapy" that involved wrapping her in

blankets and sitting on her to simulate the experience of birth. The therapists received prison sentences of 16 years.

In 2009, three people died in a poorly constructed homemade sweat lodge during a five-day “Spiritual warrior” retreat organized by James Arthur Ray, a self-help expert who appeared on Oprah and in the film *The Secret* (see my articles **James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy**, and **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**). The dead were among 56 participants who paid nearly \$10,000 each to take part in the retreat. Participants were crammed into a four-foot tall sweat lodge, packed with superheated rocks, in a ceremony that was supposed to induce a “rebirthing” experience.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation consulted Dianne Casoni, a criminologist from the University of Montreal who studies “cultic groups” including self-help groups. Casoni expressed concern both about the influence holistic health providers gain over their clients and the lack of oversight over such seminars. Holistic healers have, in fact, been framed as sinister and manipulative charlatans at least since nineteenth century.

The problems of traditions such as New Thought, water cure, and mesmerism (see my article **Hypnosis, hypnotherapy, and the art of self-deceit**) foreshadowed later concerns over cults. One blog has already labeled Fréchette, “a deranged New Ager.” A Quebecois commenter called her “un garou de seet” (a cult guru).

The problem is shortly told the tendency, within New Age and the self-help industry, to reduce religion (the traditional spiritual traditions and their spiritual practices) to psychology and psychotherapy. An example is Stanislav Grof, who in his therapeutic technique “Holotropic Breathwork” is combining Regression psychotherapies with Cathartic psychotherapies, and is calling this technique a spiritual practice with an ancient shamanistic lineage. He even claims that this technique is able to skip years of meditation within the traditional practices. The intention is to provoke paranormal phenomena of the same kind as those known from spiritual crises (the awakening of kundalini, para-psychic opening, Hero’s journey, the shamanic crisis, channeling, close encounters with UFOs, memories from past lives, near-death experiences, possession states, peak experiences – see my article **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**).

The misunderstanding, and the following misleading of clients, happens because of the psychologizing of these phenomena. Grof wrongly thinks, that these experiences correspond with the theories within Regression psychotherapies and Cathartic psychotherapies, and that the goal is to re-experience or re-visit them; that is: you

have go through heavy ordeals of regressive and/or cathartic kind, and experience death and rebirth (especially known from the shamanic illness and the Hero's journey) in order to experience healing and personal transformation.

All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com

Copyright © 2014 by Morten Tolboll.

Terms of use:

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.en_US