

PRINCIPLES OF HOLOTROPIC BREATHWORK®

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THEORETICAL POSITION:

A broad understanding of the human psyche that includes the biographical, perinatal, and transpersonal dimensions. Phenomena from all these domains are seen as natural and normal constituents of the psychological process; they are accepted and supported without preference.

Recognition of the fact that non-ordinary states of consciousness induced by Holotropic Breathwork® as well as similar states occurring spontaneously, mobilize intrinsic healing forces in the psyche and the body. As the process is unfolding, this “inner healer” manifests therapeutic wisdom which transcends the knowledge that can be derived from the cognitive understanding of an individual practitioner or from any specific school of psychotherapy or bodywork.

PRACTICAL APPROACH:

The basic elements in Holotropic Breathwork® are deeper and accelerated breathing, evocative music, and facilitation of energy release through a specific form of bodywork. This is complemented by creative expression, such as “mandala” drawing, and discussion of the experience. Holotropic Breathwork® can be conducted on a one-to-one basis, or preferable in a group situation, where participants alternate in the role of experiencers and “Sitters”.

Before the first breathing experience, participants receive an in-depth theoretical preparation which includes a description of the major types of phenomena that occur in Holotropic sessions (biographical, perinatal and transpersonal) and technical instructions for both experiencers and Sitters. Physical and emotional contraindications are discussed and if there are any concerns, expert assessment is obtained.

Holotropic Breathing is faster and deeper than usual; generally, no other specific instructions are given before or during the session as to the rate, pattern, and nature of breathing. The experience is entirely internal and largely nonverbal, without interventions. Exceptions are constriction in the throat, management problems, excessive pain or fear threatening the continuation of the session, and explicit request of the Breather.

Music (or other forms of acoustic stimulation -- drumming, nature sounds, etc.) is an integral part of the Holotropic process. Typically, the choice of music follows a characteristic pattern that reflects the most common unfolding of the Holotropic experiences: at the beginning, it is evocative and stimulating, later it becomes increasingly dramatic and dynamic, and finally it reaches a breakthrough quality. Following the culmination, it is appropriate to shift gradually to quieter music and end with peaceful, flowing, and meditative selections. Although this seems to represent the statistical average, it should be modified if the energy in the group suggests that a different pattern is indicated.

The role of the Sitter during the session is to be responsive and non-intrusive, ensure effective breathing, create a safe environment, respect the natural unfolding of the experience, and provide

assistance in all situations that require it (physical support, help during bathroom breaks, bringing tissues or a glass of water, etc.) It is important to remain focused and centered while facing the entire spectrum of possible emotions and behaviors of the Breather. Holotropic Breathwork® does not use any interventions that come from the intellectual analysis or are based on *a priori* theoretical constructs.

It is important to leave sufficient time for the sessions, usually between two and three hours. However, as a general rule, the process is allowed to reach a natural closure; in exceptional cases, this can take a few hours. In the termination period the facilitator offers bodywork (energy release work), if the breathing has not resolved all the emotional and physical tensions activated during the sessions. The basic principle of this work is to take the clues from the experiencer and create a situation where the existing symptoms are amplified while the energy and awareness is held in this area, the subject is encouraged to express fully his or her reaction, whichever form it takes. This form of bodywork energy release work is an essential part of the Holotropic approach and plays an important role in the completion and integration of the experience.

Facilitators of Holotropic Breathwork® should recognize that, when they utilize a technique which evokes a non-ordinary state in a client, there is a potential for unusually intense projections, including regressed longings for nurturing, sexual contact, or spiritual connection. These projections are often focused on the facilitator. In such cases the facilitator should be sensitive to the imbalance of power in the facilitator and client roles and take care to assist clients with such feelings as they arise. Facilitators make agreements to conduct their practice of Holotropic Breathwork® in an ethical manner.

Discussion groups take place on the same day after an extended break. During these sessions, the facilitator does not give interpretations of the material, based on a specific theoretical system, including that of Holotropic Breathwork®. It is preferable to ask the experiencer for further elaboration and clarification reflecting his or her insights from the session. Jungian amplification in the form of mythological and anthropological references can be very useful in the discussion of the Holotropic experiences as well as the mandalas. On occasion, references to the facilitator's own experiences in the past or experiences of other people might be appropriate.

There are many approaches that complement Holotropic Breathwork®. However, whenever these are used, it should be clearly indicated that these are not a part of Holotropic Breathwork®. If the practice of conducting the sessions itself departs significantly from the above descriptions, the name Holotropic Breathwork® should not be used for such a procedure. We ask that it be replaced by a different term and not be associated with our names.

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