

Exploring Holotropic Breathwork

by Kylea Taylor, editor

reviewed by Chris M. Bache • cmbache@cc.ysu.edu



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Exploring Holotropic Breathwork is an excellent book on the theory and practice of Holotropic Breathwork and represents an important contribution to the literature. In addition, it addresses many challenging aspects of spiritual practice not often discussed outside circles of committed practitioners. Thus, there is a “hands on” quality to this volume that is both refreshing and inspiring.

Since 1988, more than 800 persons from 36 countries have completed Stanislav and Christina Grof’s training program in Holotropic Breathwork, a widespread, non-drug psycho-spiritual practice that the Grofs developed after therapeutic work with psychedelics was no longer legally sanctioned by our culture. Holotropic Breathwork employs evocative music, deepened and accelerated breathing, and focused bodywork to enter powerful non-ordinary states of consciousness.

This volume contains 144 articles published in the training program’s in-house journal, *The Inner Door*, between 1991 and 2002. Most of the 85 authors are professionals in medical, academic, therapeutic, and spiritual fields who are sharing their insights and experiences with other practitioners. The articles are predominantly short (three to four pages) and therefore efficient in their delivery of information. They cover a wide variety of personal and professional topics that emerge from the Holotropic Breathwork process.

The pertinence of this collection to psychedelic studies hinges on the fact that Grof has demonstrated that the experiences evoked through Holotropic Breathwork overlap significantly with the experiences evoked through various psychedelic agents. Thus, there is much in this volume that is immediately relevant to psychedelic research and therapy.

Anthologies as large as this one (600 pages) all too often are ponderous tomes, unwieldy and tedious to use. Not so here. Kylea Taylor has done an excellent job of shaping her material into a well-organized and easily accessible reference work. Each article is usefully annotated in the Table of Contents and collected into categories that are well aimed. The reader will find articles on Holotropic Breathwork and shamanism, trauma, addiction recovery, kundalini, astrology, other breathwork systems, and more. The result is a rich compendium of information written by insiders about the nuts and bolts of Holotropic Breathwork, with many anecdotes of physical, psychological, and spiritual healing, which places Holotropic Breathwork in dialogue with other systems of healing.

As valuable as the individual contributions are, what I enjoyed most about this book was the opportunity to enter the community of Breathwork practitioners and “listen in” to their conversations as they processed their experiences and pushed the boundaries of their disciplines. One gets the sense that one is following a social movement that is consciously breaking new ground, watching them take risks, and listening as they learn from each other’s experiences.

There are too many excellent articles to pick and choose favorites, but for its historical significance alone I would draw attention to the articles discussing the role of natal and transit astrology in deep therapeutic work (many written by Matthew Stelzner). This is truly paradigm breaking work. As well, Richard Tarnas’ discussion of Stan Grof’s natal chart is not to be missed.

Exploring Holotropic Breathwork is an essential volume for libraries, schools, and serious collectors of transpersonal and clinical theory. •

Exploring Holotropic Breathwork is \$69.95, available online at www.hanfordmead.com (or from www.amazon.com). Those who order ten or more books directly from the publisher receive a 40% discount. Also available are books on Holotropic Breathwork, ethics, and SoulCollage™. Contact Hanford Mead Publishers by phone at (888) 727-7310 or e-mail at info@hanfordmead.com for more information.