

FOREWORD

You hold in your hands a visionary book, one that offers a new understanding of healing, mental health, and human potential, along with powerful techniques to bring about these transformations. Developing such an integrated understanding, which combines science, experience, and spirit is critical for the twenty-first century.

The prevailing materialistic culture has created a divided world where the sacred is relegated to churches and temples, the body to the gym, mental health to pills from the pharmacy. Economic growth is pursued as if it had nothing to do with the environment and ignorance, racism, and warfare continue to separate people and nations. These divisions and the great suffering they produce result from a restricted and limited human consciousness.

Through decades of their work, Christina and Stan have developed a psychology that reintegrates the fractured consciousness of the world. They offer a psychology of the future, one that expands our human possibility and reconnects us with one another and the cosmos. In forging this new paradigm, they exemplify the courageous and prophetic spirit of pioneers and join a handful of remarkable figures who have helped the field of psychology grow in revolutionary new ways.

This book is foremost a detailed guide to the experience and practice of holotropic breathwork, but it is more than that. It outlines the radical vision of this new psychology. To begin with, it includes one of the widest possible maps of the human psyche I have ever encountered. Within it the full breadth of human experience is valued and integrated. Just the knowledge of this map, presented in the beginning of their workshops by Stan and Christina, has a beneficial effect on those present. It includes, validates, and integrates such a wide range of experience that healing takes place in the hearts of some who simply hear this map.

The holotropic map of human experience is not just theoretical, it is born out of extensive clinical and experimental experience. To witness a large group practicing holotropic breathwork is to see a remarkable range of experiences, with practitioners reliving any stage of their own history or entering the realms of archetypes, of animals, of birth and death. Being present at a group breathwork session is like entering into Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with the realms of Paradiso, Purgatorio, and Inferno all on display as breathers go through the profound process of breathing, healing, and awakening.

In holotropic breathwork the field of mental health and therapy is expanded. Most of the medical modes of Western psychology have been limited to the study of pathology. While new understandings of psychopathology are discovered in this work, the Grofs offer a comprehensive vision of mental health and of human growth potential that extends the range of psychology to dimensions of the perinatal, the transpersonal, the transcultural, and mystical. Their work organically incorporates the indigenous wisdom of shamanism and the natural world, the cultural and historical basis of consciousness, and the far-reaching breadth of modern physics and systems theory. In it, the personal and the universal are equally valued, the physical and the biographical, the cultural, evolutionary, and spiritual dimensions of our humanity are included.

The vision behind holotropic breathwork also radically redefines the role of healer, shifting from "the healer as expert," the doctor who knows best treating the ignorant patient, to the "healer as midwife." In this role, the healer safeguards, facilitates, and supports the patient's own profound natural healing process. In this revision it is not the therapist or psychiatrist or healer who is wise, but the psyche of the individual whose wisdom is tended and brought to flower.

The therapeutic benefits of holotropic breathwork are remarkable, as the cases written here attest. The healing of illness, anxiety, depression and conflict, the release and healing of trauma and abuse, the reintegration with family and community, the opening of compassion, forgiveness, courage and love, the reclaiming of purpose, the finding of our lost soul and the highest insights of spiritual understanding all come spontaneously from the unfolding of this powerful process.

While visionary, this is also a guide for people experiencing and practicing holotropic breathwork. In a hands-on way, Stan and Christina offer the simple directions for holotropic breathwork, how to introduce the practice, how to nurture and safeguard the participants, how to deal with unexpected difficulties, and how to integrate these experiences into everyday life. They articulate the importance of release and healing through the complementary practice of bodywork, and detail the roles of music, creative art, and storytelling that are essential to the breathwork.

For thirty-five years I have had the privilege of learning from and collaborating with Stan and Christina. My own training as a Buddhist monk in Burma, Thailand, and India first introduced me to powerful breath practices and visionary realms of consciousness. I have felt blessed to find in their work a powerful match for these practices in the Western world. I have valued being part of the growth of holotropic breathwork, from its inception to its current form, and come to deeply respect the international community of practitioners that has grown with it.

In holotropic breathwork, Stan and Christina have blended scientific and intellectual understanding, masculine and feminine, and ancient and postmodern wisdom, and made their work and training available on every continent. In time, I believe their contributions will be seen as a major gift to the field of psychology and to the healing of the world.

—Jack Kornfield
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