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## **Transpersonal Psychotherapy**

### **1. Transpersonal Psychology**

The concept "transpersonal psychology" was developed in the United States in the 1960s by the humanistic psychologists A. Maslow and A.J. Sutich and by the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Stanislav Grof. The term had earlier occasionally been used by Jungian psychologists and by Assagioli (psychosynthesis). Transpersonal psychology incorporates spiritual and religious dimensions of the human psyche without committing itself to any specific form of religion (Grof, 1985). It is not concerned with dogmas but personal spiritual experience. Transpersonal psychology links the world view and conception of man developed by the enlightenment - which are basic to modern science and thus also to psychology - with the so-called *perennial philosophy* (Aldous Huxley), "eternal philosophy". The latter expression points to the surprisingly similar world views and images of man held by mystics in all high religions, which are the fruit of their religious experiences. In practical terms, transpersonal psychology combines the endeavours of modern psychology of "curing the soul" with ancient spiritual paths towards reaching the soul's "*salvation*" (Dürckheim), such as meditation, yoga, contemplation etc.

With respect to theory, empirical research and therapeutic practice, transpersonal psychology, as developed in the USA, can largely be described as psychology of consciousness. It encompasses (1) the development and refinement of consciousness towards reaching the highest state of cosmic unity ("*unio mystica*") both in individual history and in the history of mankind (Ken Wilber); (2) the evocation and (healing) effect of altered states of consciousness (Stanislav Grof); and (3) the exploration of meditation and consciousness in general. Besides the authors mentioned above, Charles Tart, Ram Dass, Metzner, Walsh/Vaughan, Arnold Mindell and others have significantly contributed to the development of transpersonal psychology in the United States.

In Europe, the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung had earlier developed his analytical psychology at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is generally considered as pioneer and classic protagonist of transpersonal psychology and transpersonal psychotherapy. Shortly after Jung, an Italian, Assagioli, continued this tradition with psychosynthesis, followed after the second world war by the Austrian Viktor Frankl with logotherapy; in Switzerland Boss and Binswanger propagated *Daseinsanalyse* (existential analysis), and two Germans, count (Graf) Dürckheim and Maria Hippus countess (Gräfin) Dürckheim, developed their *Initiatische Therapie* (initiatic therapy)- to name only the most important adherents to this approach.

## 2. Transpersonal Psychotherapy

The concept "transpersonal psychotherapy" was developed gradually during the 1980s and 1990s, denoting the application to psychotherapy of insights gained in transpersonal psychology. The aim of transpersonal psychotherapy, similarly to the various other forms of depth-psychology and humanistic approaches, is the development of a mature personality and the evolution of a "strong" ego to enable coping with everyday life. In addition, transpersonal psychotherapy also pursues the aim of "perennial philosophy" (see above) as far as this is possible, given the needs and experiences of the respective client and the therapist's personal level of experience and insight: his consciousness of cosmic unity, his experience and realisation that our inner-most being, "God's spark within us" (Master Eckart), is identical with what is divine in the cosmos. The ability of experiencing and comprehending this unity as the basis, origin and destiny of human existence overcomes its inherent isolation and alienation and endows it with meaning. However, in each generation there are only very few individuals who succeed in living permanently within such a state of consciousness.

In his book "The Atman Project" Ken Wilber (1980) describes the possible cycle of development of human consciousness, up to its highest form (atman). Development proceeds from the unconscious (the "pre-personal", childhood development) to consciousness of oneself ("personal", development of a mature ego) on to supra-consciousness ("transpersonal"). For Wilber, transpersonal signifies "the path of the mystic", i.e. giving oneself up to a larger plan of life and growing awareness of the unity of all existence. In this process, the ego does not lose its role, but diminishes in importance. It subordinates itself to a larger unity, the "self", becoming subservient to it.

## 3. Transpersonal psychotherapy and breathwork

### 3.1. History

In the following, one specific method used in transpersonal psychotherapy will be described more closely, i.e. the method known as **holotropic breathwork®** (holotropic means "moving towards wholeness") developed by Stanislav Grof. He was born in Czechoslovakia, studied medicine and philosophy, and received further training to become a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. He experimented with hallucinogenic drugs (LSD, see Grof, 1983) and investigated their therapeutic effectiveness. In 1967 he received a two-year research scholarship as a psychiatrist at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore. He stayed on in the United States, first as head of the psychiatric research department of the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in Baltimore and later as assistant professor of psychiatry at the Henry Philips Clinic of John Hopkins University. In 1973, Grof became a scholar-in-residence at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, where he conducted seminars, gave lectures and wrote books, and where he and his wife Christina developed holotropic breathwork®. He established the "Grof Transpersonal Training" and organised world-wide basic and advanced training seminars in holotropic breathing and transpersonal psychology. He currently lives in Millvalley, California.

From America, the method spread all over the world. During the past decade, a special school (to which the author belongs) developed in southern Germany and Austria. Departing from Grof, this school relates holotropic breathwork® more closely to humanistic methods of therapy (e.g. *Gestalt* therapy). **Sylvester Walch**, a former student of Grof, who is a well-known teacher of *Gestalt* therapy in Austria and Germany, developed a comprehensive

curriculum for training in transpersonal psychology and psychotherapy, in which holotropic breathwork® is the key method. The curriculum (a course of further professional training recognised by *ÖBVP*, the Austrian Association for Psychotherapy) is supervised and run by *ÖATP*, the Austrian Association for Transpersonal Psychology and Psychotherapy. In 1997, in order to document ÖATP's independent approach, its specific method was named ***Transpersonale Psychotherapie und Atemarbeit (TPA)*** (transpersonal psychotherapy and breathwork).

In practical terms, holotropic breathwork® relies on a combination of **more frequent and deeper breathing, evocative music** (appealing to the emotional side), **process-oriented bodywork** and **intuitive drawing**. Although this method could also be organised for individuals, it mostly takes place in groups (at seminars lasting three to five days). **Sharing** and exchange of experiences among the participants is an integral part of coming to terms with events at a seminar. In the following, holotropic breathwork®, and TPA (transpersonal psychotherapy and breathwork), respectively, will be described in greater detail.

### 3.2. The significance of breathing

The role of breathing with respect to body consciousness and the expression of feelings has been widely known at least since the development of different **methods of body therapy** used in the treatment of psychological disorders (e.g. Wilhelm Reich's vegetotherapy or Alexander Lowen's bioenergetics). Practically always, the suppression of feelings is accompanied by flat or blocked breathing. For example, a person may experience a feeling of sadness beginning to rise to the surface, but he or she may not want to be observed in this situation: they will swallow, "choke down" their tears and almost stop breathing. In a contrasting situation, when we are overwhelmed by violent feelings, we breathe very intensively, e.g. when expressing anger through shouting, or in the case of mourning, when one is producing deep sobs. Thus, chronic blockage of breathing combined with blocked and tense muscles have the purpose of suppressing and no longer perceiving "unwanted feelings". This process may happen in early childhood and may be the root of psychic and psychosomatic disorders and complaints that become apparent much later. On the other hand, through induced intensification of breathing, supported by body work to release tensions, it is possible to bring suppressed feelings and subconscious traumatic experiences back into one's consciousness, to express them and to gradually integrate them this way. When this has happened, one usually feels to have been relieved of a burden, one is more aware of oneself and feels more alive and – above all – one's breath is flowing more freely. This then exerts a positive effect on mental and physical health: one has more energy, tensions relax, and the expression and exchange of emotions with others become more flowing and satisfying.

The **spiritual aspect of breath** has to do with the idea that breath establishes a connection between the individual and the cosmos. Through our breath we are connected with our surroundings, our fellow human beings and with the whole universe. Our breath is not only flowing freely in and out of our lungs – it can also start flowing anywhere in our body: through our heart, our feet, the chakra on top of our crown, through the navel. This subtle movement is perceived quite often. In this case, breath resembles more a kind of flowing energy. This movement may also be obstructed, stopped or reduced. "Breathe into your pelvis!" or "Breathe towards your feet!" would be instructions given to support this energy.

The **trance-inducing effect** of forceful breathing has been employed by many spiritual and shamanic traditions. Trance is induced by Sufi singing (zikr), through pranayama yoga exercises, Inuit laryngeal singing, by Tibetan monks chanting OM, or by the Kejak dance in Bali – to name just a few examples. Probably through biochemical change in some neuronal receptors in the brain, an opening-up of spheres of consciousness occurs that is also inducible by hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, Psilocybin, etc. (Grof, 1983). Involved in this are, on the one hand, experiences of one's personal life history which one cannot remember in a normal state of consciousness and, on the other hand, transpersonal spheres transcending the limits of personal biography, space and time. Spiritual experiences of all-encompassing love and unity, as well as insights about relationships in this world can become accessible through altered states of consciousness induced by breathing.

With respect to **physiology**, Grof states the following: "Some physiology textbooks mention the so-called hyperventilation syndrome, a supposedly automatic reaction caused by excessively rapid breathing. Part of it are the well-known carpo-pedal spasms, tetanic cramps in hands and feet. The symptoms of the hyperventilation syndrome are usually considered to be pathological and are explained by biochemical changes in blood composition, i.e. a raised alkaline level and lower potassium ionisation." Grof noted that "... notions of the pathological quality of hyperventilation have not been substantiated. There are many persons in whom prolonged periods of hyperventilation do not lead to the classic hyperventilation syndrome but, on the contrary, to increasing relaxation, more intensive sexual sensations and even mystic experiences; in others, tensions build up in various parts of the body which, through continued breathing, reach a maximum, followed by deep relaxation." (Grof, 1987, p. 209 ff.)

### 3.3. Description of a breathing session or breathing seminar

Breathing sessions taking place during a seminar lasting for a number of days are embedded in a larger **ritual sequence of events**. The optimal duration allowing an intensive and compact process to take place has turned out to be a five-day seminar. The seminar starts on day one, in the late afternoon, and ends on day five, at noon. The first evening allows participants to become acquainted with each other, to tune in on the event, to arrive mentally, and to establish contact with the theme wishing to reveal itself.

On the second day, two breathing sessions take place. Breath-work is usually done in pairs, with one person undergoing the experience and the second person, called "sitter", accompanying the first one. Before the session, preparations are made to ensure that the room where the experience is to take place is safe and optimally supportive. Preparations and provisions include handkerchiefs, loose clothing, a sufficient number of mattresses, pads and coloured wax crayons for drawing at the end of the session, removal of one's jewellery, shutting out the daylight in the room). During the session, most of the experience takes place lying down, but with any movement or expression whatsoever being allowed to happen. To start, detailed instructions are given how to relax, to help participants to let go of everything and entrust themselves to what is to come. The main part of the session starts with the instruction "to breathe more deeply and faster", music sets in and the breathing process begins. The basic assumption in all this is that in our inner-most being there is some formative power of development. To this **"inner wisdom"** we entrust ourselves during the breathing process, allowing it to direct our experience as it unfolds during the session. Mental images, memories, movements and cathartic reactions (grief, anger, joy, etc.) may appear. It is important to allow the process to happen, to support it and not prevent it. The external setting is arranged and protected in such a way that intensive experiences can be allowed to happen.

**Music** supports the experience and helps to direct one's awareness to the internal process taking place. During the initial part of the session, the musical rhythms played are fast, during the middle part the musical sounds are dramatic, ceremonial and ethnic, and towards the end of the session the music becomes relaxing and mystical. Nourishing and releasing **bodywork** (mainly during the last third of the session) helps to overcome blockages or, respectively, to complete the process having taken place. At the end of the session, participants are asked to **draw an intuitive picture** symbolising and condensing what they have just experienced. A breathing session usually lasts for three hours, but it may also be shorter or considerably longer. The sitters are witnesses to the experience taking place, giving support to the experiencing person when necessary. The seminar directors act as "guardians of the ritual" providing professional therapeutic support.

As mentioned above, the breathing sessions are embedded in a larger sequence of activities. There are therapist-directed **plenary group** meetings, meetings of **small groups** for the exchange of experiences as well as **meditations** and **rituals**. This is to support integration of personal experiences into the normal waking state of consciousness. On the last day, the importance of integration is recalled and participants are encouraged to link their particular experience to their current life situation. The insights gained during breathing sessions are reconfirmed and awareness of possible new solutions is strengthened.

It is important for **seminar directors** to ensure a pleasant working atmosphere. Regular meditations, spiritual background music also during breaks, reading of spiritual texts and caring interaction among the participants support contemplative reinforcement. The therapist supports the experiencing process by encouraging participants to let go, to allow themselves to be guided by the wisdom of their inner process and to be open for surprising experiences. He consciously puts himself at the service of this process and assists it. An open heart and personal pursuit of a spiritual path help the therapist to keep up this attitude. His aim is openness to and concentration on the transpersonal space sustaining this kind of work.

**Personal requirements for participation** in breathing seminars are (1) normal physical health, since very strong emotional experiences may occur; (2) normal psychological constitution, particularly if no further supportive therapy follows. *Counter indications* for this kind of self-exploration are: serious complaints like heart conditions, circulatory problems, pregnancy, epilepsy, infections, bone problems, open wounds, etc.

### 3.4. Possible experiences

#### 3.4.1 *Biographical experiences (unfinished life experiences)*

From traditional psychotherapy we know that the integration of traumatic experiences decisively supports internal transformation. During transpersonal breathing sessions such unfinished life situations can be authentically re-experienced. Early abandonment, subjection to violence or rape, traumatic events and chronic, traumatising patterns may be brought back to consciousness and can be integrated this way. The following is an account of a breathing session experience reported by a male participant who had been suffering from intestinal complaints for many years:

*The breathing session was strongly influenced by the circumstance that I had two female sitters, which happened "accidentally" because of the uneven number of participants. Sitter A felt mainly responsible, but it was very*

*important for me that sitter B should also stay around just in case. Having started breathing, I felt after a while that a painful lump was forming in my abdomen. I asked my sitters to press there and felt an impulse to return this pressure with my pelvis and to express this effort vocally. This episode went on for a short while only and was not really accompanied by a satisfied feeling. More and more I felt how important the presence of both sitters was for me and I developed an utterly precise awareness, measurable in millimetres, of their closeness to or distance from me. Then I suddenly felt acute pain in the place where my intestinal complaints usually make themselves felt. I first asked sitter A to put her hand to that spot. This immediately produced sadness and longing of unprecedented intensity in me, such as I had hardly ever experienced. I then asked sitter B to put one hand on that spot, too. My sadness kept growing and I had the clear feeling the two sitters represented my mother and my nanny who had looked after me until I was nine years old. I sensed some kind of competition between them and wanted to tell them again and again: I need both of you!!! Neither of you must go away, each one's place is near me! I also enjoyed the warmth emanating from them and felt strong love and I had the feeling that I could become well and whole this way. And then I saw with my inner eye the following scene, accompanied by an ecstatic feeling: I am with my nanny, in a certain part of a park that I liked very much and visited very often as a child. The nanny holds my hand and suddenly my mother appears. The two women move closer and closer to each other and I have a presentiment of what is going to happen: the two melt into one person in whom I recognise my mother and to whom I am able to say "Mama" and to run up to her, embrace her and be lifted up by her. I suddenly feel tiny, like a baby, I take a cushion lying behind me, snuggle myself into it and go on sobbing for a while. I have the clear impression of being breast-fed by my mother. The role of the two sitters vanishes, they suddenly stop being important. I return to normal consciousness with the feeling that I have found my mother at last and I know that she consists of two persons who are yet only one. About this I was very puzzled and happy.*

### **3.4.2. Perinatal experiences**

Grof has dealt with this extensively. He observed that perinatal experiences frequently occur during altered states of consciousness. The process of being born, a turning point of human existence that is revealed through its physical and symbolic representation, gives us a glimpse of the dynamics of unfolding life. Grof structured the material compiled during many years of research, diving it into four "perinatal matrices" (Grof, 1985), as follows:

The first phase, or *first perinatal matrix*, corresponds to the condition shortly before birth. The foetus experiences its original symbiotic unity with the mother, a condition of complete satisfaction of all needs. Images and sensations of oceanic states, feelings of cosmic unity and wholeness, absence of limitations, obstacles and borders may be experienced. In problematic cases, when there were somatic or psychological problems, the experience reported may be one of "polluted water" or "barren and poisoned nature".

The pattern of experience characteristic for the *second perinatal matrix* is connected with the very first stages of biological birth. Now the original balance of intra-uterine existence is

disturbed, at first by alarming chemical signals, later by muscular contractions. The foetus is squeezed in regular intervals by uterine spasms. The *os uteri* is still closed and no way out is discernible yet. The enclosed situation without exit often causes feelings of fear, panic and hopelessness. This basic sensation then frequently becomes part of archetypal visions of "nightmarish worlds", "being enclosed in a cage", "being submerged in a whirl", "attack of giant spiders", "visions of hell", "Kali, the evil mother-goddess", etc., Depressive conditions can be re-experienced directly and are explicable against this background.

During the *third perinatal matrix* the contractions of the uterus continue, but in contrast to the second phase, the *os uteri* is dilated now and the foetus is able to gradually move through the birth canal. A tremendous struggle for survival starts, compounded by massive mechanical pressure from outside. During this phase, it may happen that compression of the umbilical chord causes oxygen shortage in the child's blood circulation. From the point of view of experience, the third perinatal matrix is diverse and intensive: besides realistic experiences of the actual struggle in the birth canal there are also experiences of "confrontation with violence, aggression, fire, earthquakes, storms". Archetypal motifs and symbolic images like "fighting Titans", "purgatory", "the last judgement", "heroes and mythological battles", "demons and angels", "death and rebirth" may also occur.

During the *fourth perinatal matrix*, movement through the birth canal reaches its climax. Extremely intensive pain, tension and excitement is suddenly followed by relaxation and relief. The child is born and, for the first time after prolonged darkness, it perceives light. Corresponding to this phase, visions of light, an experience of unlimited consciousness, hearing melodic cosmic sounds, as well as feelings of harmony, relaxation and liberation may occur.

### **3.4.3. Prenatal experiences**

Grof paid hardly any attention to the prenatal sphere, but recently our knowledge about this phase has greatly increased. The effects of external stimuli, internal attitudes and chemico-physical circumstances on the unborn child are quite strong. Also, the individual stages of development in the womb are so uncanny as to be nothing short of a miracle: three weeks after procreation the heart begins to beat and after eight weeks all internal and external organs *in nuclei* have been formed. Of course, this is not purely a physiological but also a psychological process. One breathing session participant very dramatically experienced the formation of his own heart. Afterwards, he felt swamped by freely floating love. Even incarnation, the choice of one's own parents, may be experienced through images.

### **3.4.4. Presentiment and clairvoyance**

During breathing sessions it is possible to have experiences that relate to future events. Important existential changes in one's profession, family or place of residence have in fact been seen ahead of time like in a vision. Breathing session may also contribute to a comprehensive inner view, or inventory, of one's current life situation. This mobilises new strength for impending changes.

### **3.4.5. Trans-biographical and transpersonal experiences**

Experiences of possible earlier lives, meetings with deceased relatives, identification with animals, plants and inanimate natural objects, journeys into the opposite sex, into other cultures and ages may occur.

### 3.4.6. *Spiritual experiences*

The mystics of all ages and traditions are reported to have had such experiences. A. Maslow describes them in his "Psychology of Being" (Maslow, 1985), calling them "peak experiences", which, in principle, are accessible to every human being. Spiritual experiences often happen suddenly, after violent inner confrontations. Experiences of cosmic unity, of diving into the stream of love, of timelessness and of unlimited consciousness have been described. It is also possible that chakras (centres of subtle energy in the body) are opened and purified. This may be accompanied by highly unusual experiences. The following is a personal report by a participant about a breathing seminar:

#### *The creative force of consciousness*

*During the first one of two breathing sessions I intensively experienced the opening of the Third Eye (i.e. the 6<sup>th</sup> chakra, on the forehead). This chakra has to do with world-view, the elimination of duality and with the perception of the deeper dimensions of consciousness. -- One year after the respective breathing session, I found an explanation of the "blue dots" I had experienced in a book on Kundalini experiences. The book describes what I had seen as "the blue pearl experience", which means viewing condensed, all-encompassing, cosmic consciousness.*

*The following is a description of the second breathing session:*

*I enter the session quite calmly, determined to accept whatever may present itself. I am breathing very deeply and forcefully and have the idea that I am gradually "turning into breath". Breathing becomes more and more forceful and I rise to kneel upright, so I can breathe really strongly. It is surprising that in spite of massive hyperventilation no tensions or pain appear. After a while, I become aware of being somewhat exhausted and I am about to lie down. However, a voice inside me tells me to "withstand consciousness". So, I cross this threshold and do not stop breathing until I feel breath is returning and becoming stronger again. It is like a kind of "consciousness-breath" endowed with intensive and creative force. What is fascinating is that I am beginning to see bright, deeply blue dots in my entire field of vision. They are moving around but their intensity neither decreases nor increases and they are present for a relatively long period of time. It is as if I could "see" consciousness. The apparition impresses me strongly, as I have never experienced anything like it. Up to this moment I am still able to influence the experience at will or, respectively, a strong will is needed to keep it up. Then I notice how this will gradually weakens and how my head drops back, to my neck. Starting from my legs, partly following the rhythm of the music, shaking movements pass through my whole body. I succumb to this until I cannot go on. I lie down on my back, but with my head dropped back to my neck and being nearly immobile. I feel how my will is completely broken and that no "activity of my own" is left. Sentences form themselves in me like: "destroy me", "extinguish me", "annihilate me". A huge, dinosaur-like head appears in front of me and engulfs me. I know that all I can do now is to wait until something new arises out of myself. I feel like being in some "primeval state", in which nothing is born yet, but the tension is there already, a kind of "pre-creation state". At this point, completely uncoordinated and "senseless"*

*tones and sounds start coming out of me, partly in the form of laughter, partly as babbling sounds and movements of my mouth reminding me of a baby. With great interest, simultaneously being involved and observing, I follow what is happening. I suddenly have the insight that God creates the world simply out of pleasure as a sort of play. I also realise that consciousness creates itself in babies in exactly the same way and that in the beginning, pleasure and ecstasy about this state and the way it arises is great indeed. "God is crazy" crosses my mind, I cannot believe all this and yet it is evident. Suddenly I am aware of another creative process, clearly perceiving the simultaneity of creating and being created: my head is fixed somehow and pressed down, I follow this force and can even enter into a dialogue with it. I feel very clearly that an important creative act is taking place and suddenly it is evident: First, God creates the devil as a symbol of matter and duality. For an instant I actually become Satan myself and feel his power which, however, is not destructive at all. Gradually, Satan turns into the beginning of the universe. I can observe how parts of my limbs become loose and turn into galaxies and disappear into space. The next image I see is the earth in a very early state ("bubbling"), then the first twittering of birds (the music goes with this excellently: first Tibetan sounds as primeval cosmic tones, then music with bubbling sounds and the twittering of birds). Here, too, I feel to be creating things and simultaneously being created within them, it is an exhilarating state, one of complete agreement with everything arising. Subsequently, a number of images appear that symbolise this process of creation, reaching up to the present time. Then my experiencing comes to an end. Slowly I return with my consciousness to the seminar room and note that I am in a state of bliss. I am deeply moved by what I have seen and repeatedly dive into waves of bliss. I understand clearly that I am in contact with the primeval energy of life which is identical with all existing forms of energy. I have the feeling that I am now able "to really see" and that I behold "divine consciousness" within the world.*

### **3.5. General effects of transpersonal breathwork**

- Breathing sessions bring incompletely processes and unfinished material to the surface and express them. What appears is in some meaningful way connected with the current life situation.
- They support the integration of shadow aspects (unloved, suppressed, unpleasant sides) of the personality. Those become more accessible in everyday life and can be expressed more naturally.
- During the experiencing process, the archetypal side of the soul becomes accessible. It becomes possible to view what is essential in plants, animals, other animate and inanimate objects, foreign cultures or bygone times. This helps to develop empathy with one's surroundings and with the world as a whole, and it increases tolerance for all that is foreign.
- Transpersonal self-exploration combines psychotherapy and spirituality by promoting openness to spiritual processes. Having gone through intensive spiritual experiences, participants state that this has profoundly changed the way they understand themselves

and the world. The experience of the basic unity of all that exists promotes one's sense of responsibility and reduces the activity of one's ego.

- Other effects reported by participants: a heightened feeling of being alive, openness to experiences of synchronicity, fiercer ways of going through crises, more unexpected coincidences leading to earlier confrontation with patterns that obstruct development. When crises do break out, they are resolved in a less destructive manner, even if classical medical or psychiatric help must be resorted to.
- Several participants reported having had strong physical symptoms such as diarrhoea or feverish states after the seminar, but they also said that they later felt refreshed and had more energy, as if they had shed something old. Statements like "Something got loosened up, although I cannot put a name to it" were frequently made.
- Interestingly, representation phenomena occur: irrespective of the particular sphere on which one is concentrating, all other spheres are also affected (e.g. physical – psychic).
- The leading themes of a person become more concentrated (coex systems according to Grof).
- Therapists who have gone through this kind of self-exploration have greater courage to work with clients intensively, they feel more relaxed and sure of themselves even during difficult processes. They develop more and deeper confidence in existence, and any narcissistic needs during their work diminish.

### **3.5. Therapeutic indications for transpersonal breathwork (TPA)**

- *As accompaniment to current individual- or group therapy:* TPA is highly suitable as accompaniment and supplement to current individual and group therapy (deepening of the therapeutic process, access to deep-seated blockages and to traumatic experiences lying very far back). If spiritual themes are introduced during therapy, TPA enables a cautious and non-denominational initial acquaintance with spirituality. Participation is not advisable in the case of strong transference by the client or in acute crisis situations. However, this kind of decision should be made case by case. It is particularly fruitful to follow up the experiences of the seminar afterwards in therapy. This is the optimal way of supporting integration and continuing development in everyday life.
- *Psychosomatic disorders:* The holotropic state of consciousness (Grof, 1987) induced by relaxation and subsequent hyperventilation loosens physical defence mechanisms. It allows suppressed feelings and memories to rise to the surface. The term "alexithymia" used in psychosomatic theory denotes an inability of experiencing and expressing one's feelings adequately. If one succeeds in getting access and to express oneself, a new, healthier "track" ("*Bahnung*") can be established. This way, emotions and the content of psychic conflicts that were cut off and suppressed can be integrated.
- *Early traumata:* Essentially, those are deficits and/or traumatising experiences in early childhood that damage the development of the "self". Problems with self-confidence and feelings of inferiority are the consequence. The injured self has more or less withdrawn from the world, feels unloved and vulnerable. Frequently, there is the feeling of being unable to make one's way in this world. Feelings of senselessness, depression and the impression not to be oneself often characterise the emotional way of life. Around the

injured self, a kind of second self is built up, to provide stability and protection. This "wrong self" (Winnicott, 1988) becomes visible by rigid patterns of behaviour and various defence strategies. Because of the seminar's ritual framework and firm structure, it is possible for anything non-structured or chaotic to reveal itself, to be expressed, so a new, more mature ego-structure can build up from inside. This process takes quite some time but promises good results if further therapeutic, social and group-dynamic support is given.

- *Experience of sexual harassment and violence at an early age:* Ordinary psychotherapy often finds it hard to get access to experiences of sexual harassment and violence that happened at an early age. There is massive suppression, denial and taboo. Also, the human soul seems to be able to leave the body, as it were, to escape from an unbearable situation. Polina Hilsenbeck (Tagungsband "*Wege zum Selbst*", 1995) has investigated this process in women who were exposed to violence. Their way back to their body confronts them with their traumatising experiences. Disgust, rage and feelings of helplessness appear most frequently at seminars. In body-work it is important to encourage the full expression of those feelings while still observing respectful restraint. The expression of disgust, above all, may help to get rid of the feeling to be dirty and internally polluted.
- *Secondary nourishment of early deficits:* mainly through nourishing body-work in which deep regression becomes possible (experiencing oneself as a newly born, baby, small child).
- *Overcoming traumatic experiences by drug abuse:* a drug-induced traumatically altered state of consciousness (mostly due to misuse of hallucinogens) sometimes leads to "getting stuck" in that drug-induced process of experience. In contrast to TPA, the effect of the drugs cannot so easily be stopped once they have been taken. Also, in this case, there is no adequate guidance. During TPA, because of its protected setting and the presence of therapeutic guidance, it is possible to continue this kind of misdirected process in a fruitful manner.
- *Support in crucial life situations:* Many people ask for help in decisive life situations. By guided reference to the "inner wisdom" present in every human being supportive and intuitive forces are liberated that make it possible to find "what is best" in a given situation.

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Parts of this article have been taken from a not published manuscript written by Dr. Sylvester Walch.  
This article was published in “Alfred Pritz – Globalized Psychotherapy, Facultas, Vienna, 2002”

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