

HOLOTROPIC AWARENESS

INGO BENJAMIN JAHRSETZ

Abstract

What is holotropic awareness? The discovery of the divine in the everyday consciousness. It is the liberated being which exists in every human being. Sometimes it appears in the twinkling eyes' of our neighbor, sometimes it is one word which deeply moves us, one unexpected small action.

Holotropic awareness is what we discover when all the concepts fall apart. It is a deep stillness which contains and creates everything.

The psychotherapeutic work with enhanced states of consciousness can open the door for the liberating part. It strengthens the so-called ego and helps to overcome the "ego-centric" attitude towards life. The article shows the possibilities and also the traps of this work.

1. What is holotropic awareness?

Holotropic awareness means what is real in our world. It is the initial freedom with which we are born. It is redemption from the imprisonment of the human soul that is caught in anxiety and suffering.

Holotropic awareness is the "finger pointing to the moon." It is not the moon itself. The Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh expressed it like this:

*"The finger is needed to know where to look for the moon but if you mistake the finger for the moon itself, you will never know the real moon."*¹

The finger is a teaching, it is a raft which takes the inquirer to the other shore of the river. When arrived he/she will not have use of the raft anymore.

Enlightenment is seen as something to reach by way of more and more experiences, by more suffering and perinatal ego deaths. All this – it is not what enlightenment is. There is nothing to reach, nothing which comes from the outside. It means being at home; it is not an experience.

The addictive grasping for spiritual experiences in holotropic states can generate the most painful suffering a human being has to bear: the suffering which comes from the oblivion of bodhi-citta. This means developing selflessness and surrender, becoming spiritually liberated for the sake of others.

The holotropic mode of healing fosters the transgression of ego limits.

Under ego conditions, this can blast the safety of all containers. Relationships can fall apart, and not only those which are in bad conditions. The problem is dealing with dissociative energies that endanger the coherence of relationships and of psycho-spiritual groups which exist to further healing.

In addition, holotropic groups tend to attract people with “weak,” “dissociative” ego structures. *Ken Wilber* mentions this difficulty in his book “The Eye of Spirit¹⁹ relating to *Almaas’s Diamond approach*.” Wilber says that groups transporting subtle and causal energies have tendencies of falling apart.

To give this work some protection, he proposes it be integrated in larger social communities. Traditionally, it is said that spiritual progress is only possible with the support of a Sangha.

*Buddha*²⁰ once was asked by *Ananda* (one of his favorite students): “*Isn’t spiritual friendship half of the spiritual life?*” *Buddha* answered: “*No, Ananda, spiritual friendship is the whole spiritual life.*”

When ego limits are stretched, when people relativize conventional rules, when emotional qualities become more intense, the spiritual discovery is broadening – then the manipulative and self-sustaining forces of the ego also identify. The ego tries to maintain its dominance, particularly in when it wanes or is endangered.