

Holotropic Breathwork Meets the Oneness Movement

by Ole Ry and Susanne Andrés

The Oneness Movement is a spiritual group founded by an Indian couple, Amma and Bhagavan, often together named Sri AmmaBhagavan. They are considered to embody one consciousness with an extraordinary spiritual power to induce transformation in other people. In particular, this transformation happens through the Oneness Blessing or Deeksha, where the hands of the blessing giver are placed on top of the head of the receiver.

The results of the blessing can facilitate a higher state of consciousness, a state of Oneness, where boundaries cease to exist—boundaries between people, nations, religions, casts, and so forth. To become a blessing giver, one has to receive a blessing and take a week-long course in the philosophy and psychology behind the movement.

It is the vision of AmmaBhagavan that by the year 2012, enough people in the world will be in this state of Oneness, at the same time, to cause a major shift in global consciousness. The critical number is estimated to be 64,000 people. When this happens, the movement will have fulfilled its mission and will be dissolved.

The Oneness Movement is nondenominational in that it embraces all religious systems, even though it is based on Indian traditions. It is claimed that there are millions of followers worldwide. The movement is headquartered in the Golden City, a location outside Chennai (Madras) in southern India. The main attraction here is the Golden Temple, an enormous architectural construction with a main hall that can contain eight thousand people.

The “inner circle” around AmmaBhagavan are the *dasas*, who are comparable to monks and nuns. There are well over a hundred *dasas*, most of them at the Golden City, but also placed at many smaller centers in and outside India. The *dasas* have all undergone a very long, intense spiritual training. A few of them, called Oneness Beings, are in a constant state of enlightenment (referred to as “samadhi”) and are able to give particularly strong blessings.

First Encounter with the Oneness Movement

We met the Oneness Movement through Tony Robbins in 2008. We were invited to Tony’s resort in Fiji to introduce Holotropic Breathwork to him. At the same time, *dasas* from India were offering a weeklong Oneness course at the resort. We completed this Level 1 training to become blessing givers. After experiencing



Ole Ry and Susanne Andrés, Danish Holotropic Breathwork facilitators who are joined together in marriage and in work

Holotropic Breathwork, it was Tony’s opinion that breathwork could add a powerful dimension to the Oneness process, and he encouraged us to pursue that idea.

With support from Stan Grof, we contacted Bhagavan directly. Stan’s support included a signed copy of his book, *The Future of Psychology*, and a DVD with a specially designed interview for the occasion, conducted by Susanne Andrés. (To view the six-part interview of Stan on YouTube, go to www.youtube.com/user/holoworlddenmark.)

Immediately after receiving our letter and watching the DVD, Bhagavan invited us to India to work with the *dasas*. In Bhagavan’s opinion, Holotropic Breathwork and the Oneness approach were aiming toward the same goal, and he saw that Holotropic Breathwork could potentially speed up the process, something he wanted to implement as soon as possible.

Holotropic Breathwork in the Golden City

In October 2009, we canceled all our appointments and immediately traveled to India. This was our first journey to India, and as everyone who has been there knows, India is a culture shock, but we were cared for extremely well and offered a fairly protected life in the Golden City. This enabled us to fully concentrate on introducing Holotropic Breathwork to this community. We spoke in English, which most of the participants understood. A few needed translation into these languages: Tamil, Telegu, Kanada, and Hindi.

Experiences from around the world have taught us to be modest in our expectations of local technical and practical possibilities, but in the Golden City, everything was at the top end of



the scale. The sessions took place in the spacious, well-equipped "Power House," which included a state-of-the-art sound system. (AmmaBhagavan's son happens to be the owner of one of India's largest music companies.)

Our first "test drive" with Holotropic Breathwork was with four open-minded, male Oneness Beings. Usually, a typical breathwork session implies some noise and a little action on the floor, but in this case, the breathers turned out to be exceptionally quiet and motionless. There was absolutely no indication of how far in the process they were, or if they were approaching closure. In the end, we had to communicate with the sitters about what was going on. They offered to wake up the breathers, if we wanted them to, because we could not be sure when they would come back by themselves. After more waiting, we encouraged the sitters to make contact with the breathers. They seemed to wake up, and we found it appropriate to ask how they felt in their bodies. That question caused some confusion, and we did not succeed in getting any straight answers. At this point, we were reasonably puzzled and a bit worried about the whole project.

To our surprise, in the sharing later, all four participants expressed major satisfaction with the sessions, which had taken them to new horizons and territories and had given them important insights. We also learned that in the process, they had left their bodies and gone to blissful realms. The question: "What do you feel in your body?" didn't make any sense because they were not in their bodies and didn't feel any urge to come back to them, unless some outside necessity called for it. For them, this phenomenon was familiar. To us, it was very new, and we did not have any ready-made strategy to handle the situation. To be honest, we felt some panic lurking in the background and decided to try to make contact with Stan. Unfortunately, he was occupied elsewhere in the world, so we were left on our own.

The Oneness Beings reported their satisfaction to Bhagavan, who decided to let us work with a group of 37 male dasas, and after 3 1/2 days with them, a mixed group of 56 male and female dasas, and finally, a group of 57 female dasas. We continued until all dasas had been introduced to Holotropic Breathwork and had each had two double sessions. That amounted to a total of 16 sessions over a 3-week period, and we felt like candidates for *The Guinness Book of World Records*.

To handle groups of that size, we needed help on the floor and had to speed-train the dasas from the first group and later, a few of the more talented women. Not an ideal situation, but better than nothing. We needed extra hands because many breathers took the opportunity to let go at the beginning of the sessions, probably as a polarity to their more serene daily life.

Male and female dasas are not allowed to have physical contact with each other, so when we worked with the mixed group, a tall dividing wall of mattresses was made. After a little initial hesitation, both of us were accepted to work with both sexes because as teachers we were given a special status. This status was also reflected in the suffix "ji" given to our names: Susanneji and Oleji.



The issue with the "out-of-body breathers" resolved to some degree along the way. Many of the dasas went into a state of bliss (samadhi) during the sessions, and only a few took the initiative to return by themselves, as we are more used to from other settings. We found out that it was usually possible to communicate anyway and to suggest coming back. There were no negative reactions to that, probably because they knew it was a place to which they always could return. Also, we

realized that it was very contagious to be near a person in such a state, as we experienced being drawn into that very state ourselves.

The Four Baskets

During the sharings, the dasas often reported strong spiritual experiences, which likewise were reflected in the mandalas they were asked to draw afterward. There appeared to be a lot of references to "the Four Baskets," a concept that was new to us, but as we found out, had a very strong resemblance to Stan's four perinatal matrices. In our discussions with Bhagavan, this similarity became even more obvious. Bhagavan seems to have developed this concept out of his own experience and was astonished to hear about Stan's four matrices; he was very interested to learn more about how the two concepts overlap.

Because the baskets are an important aspect in Bhagavan's teachings, we will describe them here. To our knowledge, Bhagavan has not written anything about this prenatal period. The following is mainly based on our understanding from our discussions with him and the dasas.

We all journey through four different stages of birth, as we emerge from our mother's womb into the world. The Four Baskets describe these stages, with each having an underlying psychological pattern that can influence our lives. Each pattern is individually colored by the mother's state of mind and physiology during pregnancy. Later in life, we can be more or less stuck in one of the baskets, until the baskets are fully experienced, acknowledged, and resolved. This is an important step to set us free to reach a state of Oneness. See the next page for a summary of the Four Baskets.

As our individual themes from the perinatal period (first to third baskets) and postnatal period (forth basket) are all worked through, Bhagavan suggests that we will become free of past bindings, which is considered an important step toward a higher state of consciousness.

The Mind, Kundalini, and Breath Triangle

Bhagavan describes his approach as primarily dealing with the Mind and Kundalini. He sees them as two corners of a triangle, where the third corner is Breath. He had not explicitly been dealing with this third corner and now imagines Holotropic Breathwork as a powerful contribution to that aspect, though he found it too early for him to draw any major conclusions. He said he would closely follow the effects of Holotropic Breathwork on the dasas in their endeavors inside and outside of India, and he anticipates that it could very well speed up the process toward the goal for 2012. He also suggested that we organize a formal training in Holotropic Breathwork for a chosen group of male and female dasas. This would be for “internal” purposes among the dasas, as he did not see offering Holotropic Breathwork to the outer world as being part of their agenda. However, if breathwork turns out to be as

powerful as we claim, he would recommend it to the Oneness network, which, as mentioned before, counts millions of followers.

Antaryamin: The Inner Healer

In Holotropic Breathwork theory, reference is often made to the Inner Healer, as a short term for the organism’s own ability to heal on a physical, psychological, and spiritual level. This can be seen as an inner drive toward wholeness that, for some reason, seems to operate at its best in a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Every time we mentioned the Inner Healer to Bhagavan or in our introductions to the dasas, they appeared to be very familiar with the concept. Their word for the Inner Healer, they told us, is Antaryamin.

Also in Holotropic Breathwork theory, it is emphasized that healing comes from within and is not caused by some outside

The First Basket

WHEN: From conception to the fourth month in the womb.

WHAT HAPPENS: The fetus tends to be quite still and in a happy state. At the end of this stage, Bhagavan suggests that because the fetus grows and develops, it wants to get out of the womb but cannot. As there is no way out, this might cause a sense of helplessness and inability to act.

CONSEQUENCES: These people are quite happy and satisfied with where they are in life. They also have no intention—no drive, no motivation, no energy, and absolutely no ambition—to achieve anything or to move forward in life. They passively see things happening around them, but not to them. At times, they can be quite dissatisfied about their situation, but cannot and will not take any responsibility or action to do something about it. In the worst cases, they tend to blame their surroundings.

The Second Basket

WHEN: From the third to fourth month after conception to the eighth month (still in the womb).

WHAT HAPPENS: The womb becomes even more uncomfortable as the fetus rapidly develops and expands. There is no space anymore, and the fetus might anxiously attempt to escape. Then, at last, hope begins to surface as the contractions start, but still nothing happens.

CONSEQUENCES: People who are stuck in this basket tend to struggle a lot in life, with very little outcome. There is often intense suffering, helplessness and hopelessness, a lack of concentration, depression, and oftentimes desperation and suffocation. People can also feel unloved and have a strong experience of “nothing is happening.” Life seems to painfully lack meaning.

The Third Basket

WHEN: From the eighth to the ninth month after conception (still in the womb).

WHAT HAPPENS: Now, the fetus struggles even more strongly to get out of the womb and will move between feelings of hopefulness to hopelessness, from optimism to despair.

CONSEQUENCES: These people are very hard workers. They struggle to do their best and use a lot of effort, but tend to achieve very little compared to the huge amount of energy that they put into a given project. It is like repeatedly taking three steps forward and two steps back.

The Fourth Basket

WHEN: The moment of birth and the first six hours of life in this world.

WHAT HAPPENS: This basket is often related to a sense of freedom because the baby is finally able to move. This stage is significant as to the way the baby will be, behave, perceive, and live in this world. It is like an inscription that is imprinted according to the way the baby is treated in this world around its appearance, gender, or color, and whether the baby is welcomed with great joy, love, and affection, or met with disappointment, disgust, and rejection.

Caesarean babies can often be born with very little effort on their end and might therefore need a push in order to move forward in life.

CONSEQUENCES: These people are often happy and free. Their lives run smoothly, and they frequently experience success in whatever they do.

authority. This is seen as empowering to the individual. At the same time, we have our gurus, hierarchies, transferences, and counter-transferences. To some degree, a discrepancy between the ideal and reality exists.

Working with the dasas gave us an impression of another perspective. At the same time that they accepted the concept of the Inner Healer/Antaryamin, they also gave credit to AmmaBhagavan for the gifts they received in breathwork. This devotional aspect seems to contradict a more Western wish for personal empowerment and individual responsibility.

Evaluation

At the end of our first trip to the Golden City, one of the dasas gave the following little talk that highlights the positive atmosphere in which Holotropic Breathwork was experienced:

Namaste, everybody!

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Sri AmmaBhagavan for making this program possible.

We thank Sri Susanne and Sri Ole for accepting our invitation to come to The Oneness University and conduct these Holotropic Breathwork programs.

We appreciate their patience, their understanding, their commitment, and their working together as one being.

These workshops have helped all of us in either deepening our state—or clearing our blocks—or both.

We especially thank them for breakthroughs achieved in

the case of [names of five dasas].

We are greatly touched by the way they related to us. We feel they are part of us.

We also wish to record our special thanks and gratitude to Sri Stanislav Grof, the founder of Holotropic Breathwork.

We are eagerly awaiting their next visit to India to continue this beautiful work, which we are sure will help us in our mission of global transformation.

We, too, look forward to our next meeting. It is our strong opinion that Holotropic Breathwork is a powerful means for personal exploration and development. However, in order to meet the urgent global situation, it is of utmost importance that we search for new ways of presenting the work to as many individuals and groups as possible, embracing those who want to take part, thus building bridges between nations, religions, and tribes. This is how we understand both the Oneness Movement and the Holotropic paradigm. ▲

Ole Ry, M.D., and Susanne Andrés are married and live in Denmark. Ole, born in 1946, is a psychiatrist, specializing in psychological and spiritual treatment modalities. He became certified in Holotropic Breathwork in 1993. Susanne, born in 1960, has worked as a body-oriented psychotherapist since 1985. She became certified in Holotropic Breathwork in 1997.

Holotropic Breathwork has taken both Ole and Susanne to all continents as members of the GTT staff or as facilitators running workshops of their own. They have organized the Holotropic Breathwork training in Scandinavia and are currently looking into starting a new group. They work from the assumption that Holotropic Breathwork is both a form of psychotherapy and a spiritual practice. They can be reached at jarmsted@dadlnet.dk or www.holoworld.dk.

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That very same day, many people had participated in what will go in the “books” as the largest Holotropic Breathwork ever... with over 400 people going through that important experience at the same time! The music enveloped the entire floor, and even for those of us not “on the floor,” we could feel the intensity of the experiences going on in the two rooms used for the sessions.

The press dinner was a treat, as I sat with Stan and Christina over dinner, talking about their upcoming time in Paris. Bernard Lietaer made a strong impression on me right away, as he previewed his talk on the Mystery of Money, which I was very glad to attend later in the week. The feeling of familiarity was profoundly touching, and as I looked around, I could feel the communality of vision, of interests, of a way of thinking that bonded us all in that room.

Dr. Karan Singh’s opening discourse established a tone of global consciousness and deeper purpose, which held my attention during the entire conference. His words of wisdom truly resonated with the audience, and were received in gratitude and deep respect.

As the days at the conference unfolded, I connected more deeply with some colleagues from Spain and from France; reconnected

with friends from the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS); and met wonderful men and women from South Africa, Australia, Germany, Moldavia, and other places.

The Grofs; Alex and Allyson Grey; Silvia Nakkach; the Tuvan shamans; the Russian researchers; the European, Russian, and American institutes of transpersonal therapies; the psychedelics research; spiritual leaders from India, the United States, and

Europe—all were present, all spoke, all ignited strong interest. There was a weave of layers of experiences between body, mind, and spirit, which was tangible through the variety of speakers and specific interests of each attendee.

I thoroughly enjoyed the panels on transpersonal therapies, which blended Russian, American, and Indian speakers; the juxtaposition of ideas and cultural differences was insightful. I also joined many fascinating discussions in the corridors with people I had not met before as if I had known them anyway. I exchanged interesting information with colleagues about our overlapping curiosities, and we promised to further our dialogue.

As mentioned earlier, I was struck by Bernard Lietaer’s talk on money, in which he demonstrated the urgent need to balance the existing financial model based on masculine principles with a more “yin” model inspired by feminine principles.



Stan Grof at the press dinner