



# The Inner Door

A Publication of the Association for Holotropic Breathwork™ International

Volume 21 Issue 3

ISSN# 1524-623X

August 2009

## BEHIND THE SCENES OF MOVIE YOGA: A CONVERSATION WITH TAV SPARKS

by *Karey Pohn*

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak with Tav Sparks about his newest book, *Movie Yoga*, which is being published this month. Tav has also written several other books, *The Wide Open Door*, a transpersonal perspective on recovery; *Doing, Not Doing*, a monograph for the training; and *Through Thunder*, a poetic chronicling of the death/rebirth journey. Tav has also written seven screenplays and is working on several other books.

Tav and I share a love of movies and have found them instrumental in our own process of transformation over the years. During my graduate work, I used movies to illustrate and explore concepts related to depth psychology, and my dissertation used movies to explore the archetypal aspects of play, which turned out to be the death/rebirth process. I was very fortunate to have Stan Grof as the chairman of my dissertation committee. So, during my breathwork training, when Tav used the term “movie yoga,” needless to say, it was tremendously exciting and resonant for me. I have eagerly awaited this book and got to read an advance copy. During the interview, Tav and I both express the view that entertainment in general and movies in



Tav Sparks, Director of Grof  
Transpersonal Training  
(Photo courtesy of Gordon Edwards)

particular have tremendous and often untapped healing potential.

We also share a love of the holotropic perspective and a desire to have this valuable information reach a wider audience. This desire is part of the reason that I used Disneyland and the movies *Mary Poppins* and *Chicago* in my dissertation and presented my dissertation on a web site ([www.cosmicplay.net](http://www.cosmicplay.net)), instead of having it collect dust in a library somewhere. I am certain that *Movie Yoga* will also help accomplish this goal; and in the process, it will be instrumental in helping people find out more about Stan’s work and Holotropic Breathwork, which is right up AHBI’s alley!

From *Movie Yoga*’s breathtaking cover to its amazing accessibility, readers are in for a real treat! The following interview takes us behind the scenes with Tav, and gives insight into what movie yoga is, how it came about, and how to do it. (In Part 2 of this interview, Tav will share his plans for the book tour, how the breathwork community can get involved, and what’s in store for the future.)

○○○

**Karey:** First of all, what motivated you to write *Movie Yoga*?

**Tav:** I came up with the term “movie yoga” during the training. But basically, it grew out of my life passion for watching movies and for what they’ve meant to me. Ever since I was little, movies have felt life-changing. They’ve provided a sort of epic window through which to experience the world.

As I look back, it feels as if I have lived—from the very earliest days of my life—as though I were in an epic. Everything’s always felt somehow larger than life, larger than just some individual life. I felt connected and more whole through contact with the archetypal realm, although I could not have described it that way as a kid. This is what happened when I was in movie theaters. I felt at home there in a way that I never felt anywhere else. So, my whole life, I’ve just adored movies.

▼ **Movie Yoga - Continued on page 10**

### In This Issue

#### Articles & News

**Behind the Scenes of Movie Yoga: A Conversation With Tav Sparks** by *Karey Pohn* 1

**Report on the Transpersonal Center Project in Western North Carolina** by *Brack Jefferys*, and *Tav and Cary Sparks* 3

**The Journeywork Project: Examining the Healing Potential of Holotropic Breathwork** by *Oliver Williams* 4

#### Columns

**Editor’s Notes** 2

## ▼ Movie Yoga - Continued from page 1

When I was 20, I had my first actual, life-changing, psycho-spiritual death and rebirth—the most profound experience of my life up to that time—in a theater watching a movie. It catapulted me into a new dimension of being, and it's the reason I'm here talking to you now.

That experience became a movie-watching blueprint, like an archetype for me at that point. Then, when I began to do Holotropic Breathwork, and later when I grew into my role as working in the training, I realized that even though I was a pretty good communicator, I felt hampered somehow. Even though I had owned most of the material that we teach, it seemed there must be some broader and maybe more creative way that we could reach people in the training, to give them a deeper experience of the concepts we were trying to impart.

Then, I wondered, what if I brought in my passion with movies to amplify what we are teaching? So, that's what we did. We would show and discuss film clips that would enhance whatever the topic was for the particular module we were in.

For example, for the Spiritual Emergency module, I might show a clip from *Fearless* by Peter Weir, the Jeff Bridges movie about a man who survived a plane crash and was stuck on the cusp between the third and the fourth matrix, and who had a death/rebirth experience at the end. I thought that by using films, there might be a more emotional experience of the topic, as well as the theoretical understanding. Participants would get a deeper, more nuanced version of the truths we were trying to share so that it might become cellular for them. So, I was very excited about it, and the groups really responded positively.

Then, I discovered that participants had an aversion to certain types of movies. Some people in the training did not like movies at all, and some were afraid of violence. Or, they were afraid of seeing scary things or any number of situations. And, I realized films could be an even greater teaching tool than I had previously thought. It dawned on me that the basic holotropic perspective, the thing that we do on the mat, could provide the perfect blueprint for watching these films as a therapeutic practice.

So, we've got this basic holotropic strategy: that we all have an Inner Healer, which is always working for us, and that we use the breath to contact this power. One of the major healing mechanisms that we use is awareness itself: Transformation is guided or mobilized by the process of the Inner Healer, issues emerge into our awareness, and we heal by making patterns conscious. This strategy, as we know, is part and parcel of many of the world's mystical traditions.

So, I thought, "What if we were to watch films in the same way that we did the breathwork, by basically taking the holotropic perspective and applying it to movie watching?" Now, this was not a new insight for me. After I had been doing the breathwork for many years, I realized that the holotropic perspective was way larger

than just what you do in a weekend workshop or a six-day module. The basic strategy of trusting the Inner Healer—and [knowing] that whatever comes up for you is guided by that power—essentially constitutes a life strategy. And this life strategy can work in relationship yoga and work yoga and raising children yoga and whatever life endeavor we are undertaking.

So, I began to call this practice "movie yoga." Before we watch these film clips, I suggest that every experience you have while you are watching is not coming to you from the outside, not being caused by what is happening on the screen. What is actually happening is that scenes in the movie—the music, the characters, the events, the story, whatever is going on—these things are really outside triggers, much in the same way that music and other sounds in the room are triggers during a breathwork session. But, you cannot blame the movie for what you feel, any more than you can blame the music in a breathwork. This is always brought home the next day when

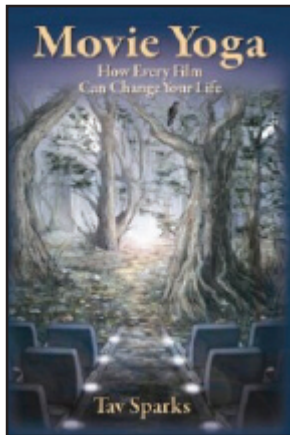
we discuss the film. With the exact same scene, you might have all 25 people in the workshop having different reactions. So, it's clear our reactions cannot be coming from or caused by the movie. They are being guided by what is going on inside ourselves.

Then, [the idea] began to emerge that movie-watching is an incredible therapeutic tool, much in the same way that just lying down and breathing is a powerful therapeutic tool. So, that's how movie yoga took off. You watch a movie, and whatever reaction you have, you trace it deeply within yourself. You go vertical, as I would say. You take the horizontal experience, which is what is happening on the screen, as your trigger. You do not say, "Oh, the movie *made* me feel this way"; you say instead, "I felt sad after watching the movie." Then, you trace the sadness inside yourself to see what is going on, where it comes from. We then might ask ourselves one or two questions, something along the lines of: "Have I ever felt this before?" or "Is this feeling familiar?"

Frequently, the answer is like, "Aha! It is something I know well!" This type of inquiry frequently takes us to a COEX (system of condensed experience), leading us to an experience where we have biographical issues around the particular theme that we've uncovered, triggered by what came up in the movie. Or, we find perinatal implications, or we make conscious archetypal or karmic memories, and so on. Our birth chart, our transits, or whatever, all of these might play a part in the reactions we have to the movies. Thus, the films can be a powerful therapeutic medium.

What is even more perfect is that most movies are totally designed to evoke powerful emotions anyway. By that I mean, this is what they are created for; they are designed for people to have powerful experiences—that's what sells movies; we have some kind of experience. So, this is movie yoga, and you know, it became rather notorious in the training.

The way I see being with movies is that theaters are not just places to go to be entertained. It is as if we enter a hall of mystery, as if we enter a temple. And, it is very much like what happened



**Movie Yoga: How Every Film Can Change Your Life (2009) Written by Tav Sparks; Hanford Mead Publishers ([www.hanfordmead.com/books/002,014.php](http://www.hanfordmead.com/books/002,014.php)) 192 pages List price: \$18.95**

throughout history, where, let's say, in Cro-Magnon days, people would go deep into the caves, like Les Trois Frères or Lascaux. They would go into the darkness, leave the brightness of the sun, descend into the cave. And, they would have these powerful inner experiences, in the dark, away from the light of day. These would be transformational, death/rebirth experiences. We are doing the same thing in movie yoga. We go into a darkened movie theater; we leave the world behind.

It would be like the Eleusinian mysteries, where initiates leave the outside world and enter the Telesterion and drink the kykeon; then, they would go through death and rebirth. However, now, we take popcorn and chocolate, watch films, and have the opportunity to go through death and rebirth. Or, if you were in ancient Greece, it would be like the Aristotelian idea of catharsis. You would go to a play, where you are not just an observer, but you are a participant, and you feel what the tragic hero is going through and what his or her downfall is. Then, you grieve with them, and you have this emotional catharsis, this letting go, this healing experience. This is how I see watching films. It has always been this way for me.

We did the *Lord of the Rings* module a few times, where, after some framing on The Hero's Journey and so on, participants just basically breathed and saw the films, and met in between in councils like the Fellowship did at Rivendell before they set out for Mount Doom. Recently, we did a Movie Yoga module in upstate New York, near Woodstock, at this new place. It is just the prettiest, most powerful place I have ever done the training. In these modules, we just get into films and do the breathwork, go through the perinatal film clip show, and have integration sessions, of course. So, that is the practice.

Three years ago, I thought, okay, I am going to write this book; and I had a creative rush and wrote it in about three weeks. I am really excited to be working with Kylea and Jim of Hanford Mead [Publishers] because they have a lot of passion for it, too, as well as expertise, and they totally believe in the project.

**Karey:** You mentioned before that you had your psycho-spiritual death/rebirth experience watching a movie?

**Tav:** Yes, it was in 1970, and the movie was Walt Disney's animated classic *Fantasia*. This was an experiment in animation that was set to famous pieces of classical music, each with a different visual theme based upon the type of music they were using. So, it was basically this ongoing guided imagery.

The last segment of the movie is a treatment of the profane and the sacred. The profane comes first, with *Night on Bald Mountain* by Mussorgsky. And then, the last piece is Schubert's *Ave Maria*. Prior to this experience, reflecting my Sun conjunct Pluto natal chart, I had really resonated with the Dionysian. So, I totally loved the *Night on Bald Mountain* segment, where the mountain opens up and this demonic being emerges, and he summons the minions of the dead and all that is evil, and the music is very powerful. To me, this was like the pinnacle, the culmination of spirituality up to this point in my life; I mean, that sort of Dionysian ecstasy, or volcanic ecstasy, was the height of power and beauty. I had always been drawn to the dark side and read the great horror masters for many years and loved this stuff. So, I am thrilled and in ecstasy during this segment, this orgiastic dancing of all the wild demons and so on. It is just fantastic.

Then, the church bell rings, and the demon cowers against the power of the coming dawn; all his minions slink off to their caves and graves and whatever. Then, the scene switches, and here comes the *Ave Maria*. Now, it is like the beginning of dawn, and you have this procession of women in long robes carrying lanterns, going across this arch over a pool, with reflecting moonlight. And, it is just beautiful. Yet, to me, it was like, "Oh man, this is boring, so dull; there goes all of the good times: the thing that I love the most." So, I found myself getting antsy—really, really agitated at this moment at the loss of this third matrix, the plutonic feeling.

Then, something happened. It was as though lightening struck me; and in that moment, sitting in the movie theater, I died. The last thing I remember saying to myself was "I am no thing, I am no thing, I am nothing." Then, I thought "Who am I to have missed the power of this beauty before in my life?" That was my rebirth. I left the theater a different person than when I went in. I was transformed. It was a wondrous experience with the Divine, and it completely changed my life, upgraded everything. That moment was the beginning of my spiritual journey.

So, that was how it happened for me when I was 20 years old. It is amazing that I still find going into a dark movie theater as powerful as going into a temple. And, it's been a great gift to have the possibility of observing my life—myself, the epic journey—being played out on the screen, frame by frame, and then to become that by feeling what the characters are feeling. To be able to use that as a tool for my own transformation has been such a blessing. So, anyway, that is what movie yoga is all about.

**Karey:** For me, in my first breathwork and in several subsequent breathworks, I have had visions from movies come up that have been very profound, metaphoric, and enlightening. The Divine seems to speak to me in movies, and so it is not surprising that they actually come up when I am breathing, and my breathwork experiences featuring movie scenes very much influenced my work at Pacifica and my dissertation.

**Tav:** That's awesome. I did not know that about your experience.

**Karey:** Yes, and I actually wrote a paper called "But Wait There's More," and on the cover page is a picture of the scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* where Indiana Jones is in the map room. That vision came to me in a breathwork that influenced my dissertation, and the paper was for a course in the mystery traditions. It's a very fourth matrix scene, and later I realized that it symbolized Stan's cartography of the psyche. In that paper, I discuss using movies to transform consciousness, movies as a mystery tradition, very much along the lines that you were just discussing. I am so on the same page as you.

**Tav:** Beautiful. That's so the thing. What you are saying so resonates. The possibilities with using computer-generated images to create inner landscapes is just incredible. You can do anything. You can create films with such spiritual power that it can be totally transformative. Billions of people watch movies every year, billions of times a year. It is just insane what a transformational opportunity this is.

**Karey:** In my dissertation, I point out that entertainment is very powerful because it is play and because it is not serious. Because of this, people can go and have these experiences and not even realize they are working through their issues.

**Tav:** Exactly. I think it is such a beautiful idea that you can have your cake and eat it, too: which is that you can have fun, and while you are having fun, you can transform. I mean, that is what I am saying in this book. I try to say, “Look, movie yoga is a game.” Transformation can be really hard work. Sure, even with movie yoga, we get in touch with stuff that is intense and is difficult to go through sometimes. But, think of all the times we want to go lie on the sofa or go to the theater. We would rather do that than do meditation or whatever else we do. What if we could be, as my son Bryn would say, “petting two cats with one hand”? That is, while we are having fun, we could be doing transformation, too. What a gift.

**Karey:** Yes. Also, it helps Stan’s work get out to a broader audience, to those who could really use it.

**Tav:** Movie yoga is a great way to introduce people to the holotropic perspective in a two- or three-hour segment. And, you are exactly right. It is really difficult for people, in this sound bite age, to have time for deep inner work. We say, “How can I fit transformation in? I have 15 extra minutes, or I have two hours. I do not have a whole weekend, or a week to go to a workshop or module.” Movie yoga is a way to consciously engage the holotropic perspective in a manner that is fun and less time-intensive.

**Karey:** In the book, when you are describing the perinatal matrices, you call them “zones”?

**Tav:** Yes. In this culture, you have to have a quick sound bite or “buzzable” word. I talked with Stan about this, and we are calling the first matrix the “Safe Zone,” even though it does not quite describe the full first matrix experience. Then, for the second matrix, we are calling it the “Trapped Zone.” And, the third matrix, we are calling it the “War Zone,” while the fourth matrix is the “Free Zone.” I like the Trapped Zone, the War Zone, the Free Zone. These are catchy terms that I think people will easily relate to.

There’s another interesting thing I did for the book: In the training, I’ve taught for years about the “yoga of the cross,” with its vertical and horizontal dimensions, as a way to define how humans live in the world. The horizontal is everything that happens outside us—our interactions with people, places, and things—and the vertical is that which is inside us. The lower half of the vertical arm represents all of our personal and interpersonal issues that have become unconscious, but which, of course, continue to motivate us; this also includes the perinatal. The upper vertical arm represents our striving and reaching for our higher self, our higher aspirations, spiritual inspirations, and so on. What we learn is that breathwork is a vertical strategy—that it’s totally about what happens within

us. So, this is the strategy we use for how to be with the breathwork, how to be in the module, and how to do movie yoga. But, I realized I could not use “yoga of the cross” in the book, especially in America, because the cross has such loaded associations.

So, we went through all kinds of ideas. We were going to call [this strategy] the “plus sign strategy guide,” but finally ended up with something that we actually trademarked. It may sound a little weird to you, but we love it. You know the GPS in a car, the global positioning system? Well, what we call it now is the APS, which is your Awareness Positioning System. Not optional, but totally standard on all human models. We, as humans, just have to figure out how to make it work.

**Karey:** Oh, that is great. How exactly does the APS work with movie yoga?

**Tav:** Well, I have conceived of movie yoga as something fun, a game, and this is how you play it: You bring your APS online. You activate it, start thinking and visualizing in terms of its horizontal and vertical vectors. And, we can do this at any time we have a powerful experience, where we are feeling something. As opposed to thinking “this outer thing made me feel this way,” if we bring our APS online, we can start thinking in terms of the horizontal vector as representing triggers, which are great opportunities to go vertical and heal. Anyway, I think it is going to be a catchy term, where 21st century people can really resonate with the phrase much better than “yoga of the cross.”

**Karey:** I think it will be a catchy term, too. Thanks for everything, Tav, and good luck with the book! ▲

[*Editor’s Note:* For more information about movie yoga, go to [www.movieyoga.com](http://www.movieyoga.com).]

*AHBI Board Member Karey Pohn, J.D., Ph.D., serves on the Community Support, Membership, and Publicity committees. Occasionally teaching Dissertation Development at Pacifica Graduate Institute in the Clinical Psychology program, Karey is introducing Stan Grof’s work on the cartography of the psyche to help students understand the dissertation process.*



## *Join Now!*

Join the Association for Holotropic Breathwork International (AHBI) and support the practice of Holotropic Breathwork as a resource for healing and transformation. If you care about the practice of Holotropic Breathwork, its preservation, and its evolution, AHBI needs you!

AHBI supports the practice of Holotropic Breathwork facilitators and participants, and enables communications among all who are interested in Holotropic Breathwork. AHBI also supports research into the theory, practice, and effects of Holotropic Breathwork.

For information about joining AHBI, go to [www.ahbi.org](http://www.ahbi.org) and click Membership. Dues payments and donations can now be made online using PayPal®. AHBI is a registered California non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, so donations are tax-deductible for U.S. taxpayers.