

# *Personal Process of the Integration of Hakomi Body-centered Psycho-therapy with Holistic Nursing and Healing Touch*

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**Editor's note:** In the midst of her doctoral studies at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute, which grants credits toward the doctorate for studies in body-centered modalities such as Hakomi, Nancy Perrault offers a personal reflection on how her work with Hakomi, holistic nursing, energy work and more are integrating in her work as a therapist.

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses how the concepts of organicity, mindfulness, nonviolence and unity are integrated within a personal practice that combines body-centered psychotherapy with holistic nursing and energetic healing. Challenges to the therapist are considered, and the uses of Hakomi principles are discussed as they relate to the personal process of the therapist.

## **Introduction**

My personal, emerging style of using body-centered psychotherapy is based in a belief system that explicitly honors the wholeness of the individual. In my search for the best way to facilitate healing, I came to realize that when one focuses only on physical, or mental symptoms, or when one concentrates only on emotional expressions, one loses the bigger picture and it might be difficult to accurately perceive who is the person behind the symptoms, or what is actually being communicated. In order to provide care and healing that is integrated, not fragmented, it is necessary to consider all aspects of what makes a person human. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual components of the person are vital to understanding the person in her wholeness and to facilitate the person's own exploration, understanding and change through psychotherapy.

With the perception of integrating wholeness into psychotherapy, and through personal experiences with body-centered psychotherapy, I came to realize that including the body was fundamental to accessing one's inner wisdom and to accelerating personal growth. The underlying principles that inform my practice include the belief that we bring our wholeness as human beings to all communication and interaction, the belief that our energy

systems also serve as a vehicle for communication (and that we are embodied in our energy systems), and the principles of Hakomi (Kurtz, 1990).

The foundations for my approach are in the practice of holistic nursing, a specialty of nursing in which I hold the certification as an Advanced Practice Board-Certified Holistic Nurse. Within this framework, the person is perceived as reflecting the nature of the self in all expressions of the self, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Holistic nursing does not dilute the essence of the person by considering only specific physical or emotional systems or symptoms; rather the person is considered to bring the entirety of the self to each interaction.

As my knowledge of holistic nursing evolved, I became aware of a personal neglect of the spiritual aspects of care. Spirituality is an integral part of being human, yet I found that I had little direct access of the spiritual dimension of humanness, until I began the study of energy work. Working in the human energy field allowed another aspect of consciousness to be accessed, which is considered by many (Brennan, 1988; Hover-Kramer, 1996; Kunz, 1985) to be the spiritual aspect of consciousness. As my study of energetic therapy increased, I realized that the body was the

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entry into the wholeness of the human being, allowing contact to deepen experience of the mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of the self. Healing Touch is an energy based modality involving hands on the body or in the energy field of the person. Healing Touch is non-invasive; it has not been known to cause harm to the client and it is done with the client fully-clothed. I obtained the experience, class work, academic and personal credentials to achieve the certification as a Healing Touch Practitioner (CHTP) and I use energy techniques from Healing Touch in various venues, including private practice.

Yet, I found that my practice was still missing a truly integrative aspect of care: the ability to work deeply with processing the thoughts and feelings that arose spontaneously in the body. I had the desire to learn more about psychology that included the body. Until I began the study of Hakomi, I had only an intuitive knowledge of how this might be accomplished. When I began to study Hakomi, there was a resonance in my being that the study of body-centered psychotherapy might provide the path to allow me to practice holistic nursing and energetic healing in a way that maximized the potential for human growth, and that truly embodied the principles that I espoused.

### **The Use of Hakomi Methods in Practice**

The study of Hakomi led me to the pursuit of a Ph.D. at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. Faced with the choice of embarking on a doctoral program of study, I made the decision to temporarily discontinue the formal study of Hakomi. After one year of Hakomi study, I realize there is still much to learn and it is an area of study that I plan to continue. The guiding principles of Hakomi (organicity, mindfulness, nonviolence, mind-body holism, unity; Kurtz, 1990) allow me to integrate the concepts of holistic nursing and energetic therapy with other beliefs about body-centered psychotherapy into my practice.

The concept of organicity implies that humans are naturally developing and evolving towards a more coherent way of being. As plants turn towards the sun, so are humans also innately programmed to move towards nourishment. Kurtz (1990, p. 25) writes, "healing is an act of self-recreation," and the therapist serves as a midwife for this process. The therapist essentially holds the space for healing, but the "answers and resolutions, completions and new directions, are all within" (Kurtz, 1990, p. 25). This principle is consistent with the practice of holistic nursing, which is non-prescriptive, instead honoring the individual's own time and capacity for healing. Similarly, energetic healing allows the client's process and intention in a healing session.

Mindfulness is a principle that acknowledges the reality of the present moment. While the roots of an issue might occur in the past, the event that already happened can not be

changed. Healing, psychotherapy, and consciousness occur in the present. By encouraging the client to be mindful of the present experience in psychotherapy, physical sensations and movement might hold unconscious information that sheds light on old events. The history of the person becomes part of who the person is and mindfulness in therapy is useful to bring consciousness to the fragmented parts of the self with the "the hope . . . [of] . . . transcend[ing] them . . . know[ing] them . . . completing then and moving on" (Kurtz, 1990, p. 28).

Kurtz (1990, p. 28) discusses the principle of "nonviolence: reverence for life" as flowing naturally from the principle of organicity. The person knows inherently what is needed for healing and it is the therapist's task to allow the unfolding of the other in a way that honors the implicit knowing. The person has innate knowledge of what is needed for healing and the actions and sensations in the body provide insight into that knowledge. If the therapist acts in a way where assumptions and interpretations of the person's experience are viewed as more valuable than the person's innate wisdom, then the therapist is negating the wisdom of the body and behaving in a manner that might be considered as violent. Similarly, standards of practice for holistic nursing ask the nurse to "assist the person to access inner wisdom that can provide opportunities to enhance and support growth, development, and movement toward health and well-being" (Dossey, Keegan, & Guzzetta, 2000, p. 32). Likewise, teachings in Healing Touch ask the practitioner to "make no comparisons; make no judgments; delete your need to understand" (Hover-Kramer, 1996, p. 218). By opening the self to the experience of the client, while resisting the urge to make meaning for the client, self-understanding and transformation might occur in a nonviolent manner.

The Hakomi principle of mind-body holism is inherent to holistic nursing and to Healing Touch. Kurtz (1990, p. 30) elaborates on the concept of holism in psychotherapy: It implies

the influence deeply held beliefs, guiding images and significant, early memories have on behavior, body structure and all levels of physiology, from cellular metabolism and the strength of the immune system, to blood flow and the distribution of heat and muscle tone in the body, to the expression of these beliefs in posture, movement, gesture and facial expression.

Hakomi body-centered psychotherapy, like holistic nursing and Healing Touch seeks to integrate the body and mind in a way that honors the personal experience of the individual.

The final Hakomi principle is "Unity: A participatory universe" (Kurtz, 1990, p. 31). This concept implies a spiritual dimension of the human, containing, yet also transcending the present moment. We exist with other beings in a world that is continuously shifting and evolving. Healing Touch addresses the communication that occurs

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between client, practitioner and the universe as a conduit for healing (Hover-Kramer, 1996). Holistic nursing also identifies the connections between individuals, nature, and “the Absolute” as integral components of one’s spiritual self (Burkhart & Jacobson, 2000, p. 94). Kurtz (p. 33) writes, “The unity principle states that the universe is fundamentally a web of relationships in which all aspects and components are inseparable from the whole and do not exist in isolation.” Being in relationship with the therapist, invites the witnessing of the unconscious forces in the body that allow the personal interpretation of experience.

### **Other theoretical considerations**

La Barre (2001) describes Freud as being the first to explain how the body depicts the internal workings of the mind. La Barre further discusses how Deutsch elaborated on Freud’s body-mind connection by hypothesizing that unconscious influences were manifested by changes in the physical body. There are similarities between the Hakomi method and between Deutsch’ theories. Deutsch considered that unconscious behaviors or gestures might symbolize unconscious conflict and that these unconscious movements might be fertile ground for analysis. Likewise, in Hakomi therapy, clients are invited to mindfully experience body movements, as the movements might lead to insight around unconscious processes.

Fosha (2000, p. 20) discusses the “core state . . . [as] an altered state of openness and contact where the individual is deeply in touch with essential aspects of his own experience. The core state is the internal affective holding environment generated by the self.” In Hakomi therapy, the mindful attention to physical sensations and movement is often the precursor to accessing the core state. The unconscious movement serves as a clue to the holding environment, which might lead to identification of the core state. Fosha (p. 21) describes how the core state is often accessed by affect, which “unlocks deeper experiencing, and through it, entire realms of previously unavailable material”. In Hakomi therapy, it is in mindfully bringing the unconscious movement, gestures or sensations to consciousness, that core affect and memories are accessed.

The experience of mindfulness has been further described by Surrey (2005) as a connection that enhances the relationship between therapist and client. The connection described by Surrey has elements similar to the unity principle described by Kurtz (1990) in creating a state of being in which both client and therapist appreciate “a more whole and spacious state of mind and heart . . . [where] the interdependent nature of our existence is intuitively experienced” (Surrey, p. 95). Germer (2005) also writes about the transcendent nature of mindfulness when used in a non-directive way. It seems that the concepts of nonviolence and mindfulness are intertwined as Germer (p.

172) discusses “the paradox between goal-directed behavior and non-striving” as an attempt to allow the client, in the present moment to have an experience of moving through past fear and hurt. In this endeavor, Germer recognizes, as does Kurtz, the harm that can result from compelling a client to prematurely abandon defenses leading to accessing unconscious material that has served to protect the client for many years.

### **My experience as a body-centered psychotherapist**

The Hakomi principles of organicity, mindfulness, nonviolence, mind-body holism, and unity form the philosophical basis for my body-centered psychotherapy practice, which I also consider to be my holistic nursing practice. Hakomi principles, like holistic nursing principles and energetic healing principles embrace the individual as a holistic being, who exists in relationship with others. Energetic therapy adds another dimension to the experience of spirituality and universality as it works within the body, yet transcends the physical experience.

My intention in psychotherapy is to honor the client and to ask for the highest good of the client. I bring my own belief system to the therapeutic process: the most basic is that the person (client) exists as a bio-psycho-social-spiritual being who is innately programmed towards wholeness. Whatever resistances might exist were formed as methods of adaptation (Sieck, 2007). With humility, I seek to honor the resistances and provide a safe place where they might be explored. Fosha (p. 29) writes, “The essence of the therapeutic presence in the affective model of change is being inside the patient’s world as an other, and the patient’s feeling it and knowing it”. Using my bodily sensations, and feelings that are evoked with a client, I try to offer the client a safe place for us to be with her experience.

Shaw (2003) suggests that empathy in an embodied psychotherapist consists of understanding, by perceiving the other’s experience in one’s own body. The simultaneous perception of one’s own body sensations and experience, and that of a client is integral to using energy field therapies. In my holistic nursing practice, my body is the main tool that I use in relating with clients. The feelings and sensations that I experience might provide guidance about unconscious client feelings, or about my own countertransference. As I increasingly learn to trust my body, I also learn to trust my intuition. The principle of non-violence implies that I not impose my beliefs on the client, yet my intuition might lead me to invite a client to consider a perhaps, unconscious thought-form (from an energetic perspective) or emotion.

With body-centered psychotherapy, my intention is to use a psychodynamic approach to psychotherapy, along with my presence, both physically and energetically to communicate

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my honoring of the person and why they came to me. On a spiritual dimension, consistent with Kurtz' (1990) concept of a participatory universe, I believe that my client's and I "chose" each other on many levels. We have co-created the potential for a healing relationship. The experience with the therapist is one wherein the client might perceive her connection with another human being (Fosha, 2000), which might be considered as a small representation of seeing the divine in the self reflected in the being of another.

Philosophically, and practically, my body feelings, and sensations provide the vehicle used to access the inner experience of another in psychotherapy. Philosophically, I think that a prerequisite of a body-centered psychotherapist is to be aware of one's own body sensations and movements with a client. From a holistic nursing perspective, my presence, including embodied mindfulness and empathic attention is the best tool to use to facilitate healing.

From a practical position, using techniques such as energetic healing, guided imagery, intuition and the resonance of my body in relationship are familiar. With these techniques, I can easily trust the process. I know that the unfolding of the client's experience will come as I hold the space for the healing. I know that the desire for wholeness is innate; I merely create the container for that to occur.

It is with more difficulty that I seek to encourage mindfulness with my clients, to help them become aware of their bodily sensations, to assist them in seeing the body as a friend, companion, and deep source of information and experience. Although licensed to touch, I sometimes find myself hesitant to use touch to support, restrain, or amplify a gesture. When a client is reluctant to "stay with" a sensation or physical experience, I have self-doubts: Is it my own reluctance that they sense, or is it their body wisdom saying, "Not yet, not now"? Perhaps, I have not created an environment where safety is felt or where the body is accepted. I have the knowledge to use techniques that enhance the experience of the body; I have the theoretical basis to use that knowledge; and I trust techniques of body-centered psychotherapy. Is it only the confidence that I lack or is there more to it?

The benefits of practicing within my comfort zone seem very familiar, even old. My clients get an experience in therapy that works for many: they feel understood, personal perception increases, change results, and they terminate therapy having achieved their goals. Their experience in therapy honors their wholeness, uniqueness, encourages core affect, and supports the exploration of insight and change.

Recognizing that we exist in a participatory universe, I question my reluctance to use a bolder approach in psychotherapy. Am I truly espousing the concepts of nonviolence or am I doing the client a disservice by allowing the resistance to the body's wisdom? As I write

this, my awareness as a body-centered psychotherapist, indicates a knowing over my upper abdomen, in the area of the third chakra, the solar plexus chakra. (I am leaving in the message from my unconscious as my intention was to write "gnawing", not "knowing".) My background as a Certified Healing Touch Practitioner informs me that the solar plexus chakra is "associated with power, strength, and the ability to feel one's ego identity" (Hover-Kramer, 1996, p. 63). Physical dysfunction in the solar plexus chakra is manifested by digestive disturbances such as ulcers, symptoms which I am presently experiencing. My body is speaking to me and my knowledge base allows me to read the signals. The benefit of practicing inside my comfort zone may be negated by the cost to my body.

The principle of unity suggests that my experience does not occur in isolation. By not allowing the experience of my full identity, how can I allow that of my clients? If I don't take the risk of stepping outside my comfort zone, how can I expect my clients to do so? How can I best advance my practice as a holistic nurse and as a body-centered psychotherapist when I have difficulty turning theory into practice? How can I most effectively support the professions of holistic nursing and somatic psychotherapy?

The principle of organicity suggests that I am in a continuous state of flux; I am evolving and moving towards higher growth. The principle of mindfulness allows me to be aware of how my body responds to unconscious, unresolved issues. From the gnawing and knowing in my gut, to the movements that my hand makes while typing, I can be aware of my body's communication to me. This feels spiritual; it is as if the universe is telling me, "Don't miss this," in a language that is too compelling to dismiss.

Writing this puts me in relationship with my peers, teachers, clients, and the universe: we are all interconnected, what touches one resonates with all. The most difficult part of the lesson for me, in the present moment is perhaps, the principle of nonviolence. It is putting the concepts into personal practice and trusting that as I continue to develop, my issues around personal identity will resolve at the right time, without force. My work in Healing Touch has taught me about setting intention and the movement of energy. My background in holistic nursing has taught me to trust that each of us (including myself) is doing our best in each moment. Allowing the concept of organicity involves trusting the process of the self as well as that of the client. As tears come to my eyes, I remember how truth that resonates deep within the body is accompanied by affective experience and expression.

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*He who knows men is clever;  
He who knows himself has insight.  
He who conquers men has force;  
He who conquers himself is truly strong.*

*He who knows when he has  
got enough is rich . . . .  
And he who dies but perishes not  
enjoys real longevity.  
(Lao Tzu, 33)*

*Be content with what you have;  
Rejoice in the way things are.  
When you realize there is nothing lacking,  
The whole world belongs to you.*

*(Lao Tzu, 44)  
(Lao Tzu quoted in  
Johanson & Kurtz, Grace Unfolding, 1991)*