

Hakomi Mindfulness-Centered Somatic Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice

An Interview with Halko Weiss, PhD

By Nancy Eichhorn, PhD



As I began to read *Hakomi Mindfulness-Centered Somatic Psychotherapy: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, my writer's brain worried with the underlying process—how difficult was to structure an in-depth review of a psychotherapeutic methodology adding in history and theory?

Meanwhile my inner editor wondered—what does it take to shepherd multiple authors to one final resting place that fits your initial vision and how do several editors create a working relationship that is satisfying, personally and professionally?

The task filled me with a sense of overwhelm. It's one thing to write what you want as you want, it's another to collaborate and bring a shared vision to fruition. According to Halko Weiss, PhD, one of the three editors responsible for the creation of this book, it was a long time coming and well worth the work and the wait.

"It is hard to believe for me, but I started the project in 2005, 10 years ago!" Weiss shared. "Finding the right team was very difficult for me in the beginning, and it took years until I finally found my team. But it is really my fault that it took so long to realize that Gregory Johanson and Lorena Monda were the ones that I should have asked from the beginning. Once we got working as a team it was fantastic. Gregory is such an in-depth scholar, and so devoted to our work, and Lorena has been the steadying force who has put a huge amount of work into fine-tuning the overall language and the balance of the book. For an editing team it is essential to find just the right people, but if you have them it is very satisfying."

Why this book? Why now?

The book was written to address a perceived gap in the Hakomi literature that caused concern. There were multiple books written, including those authored by Ron Kurtz. However, his books, though beautifully written with a general appeal, lacked the depth of the professional know-how that the Hakomi Institute and Kurtz had fleshed out in their work over many years. Nor, according to Weiss, did the current materials reflect the clarity of Ron's scientific mind.

"Ron wrote profusely, but he had a hard time spelling out what we understand and do, in a systematic way," Weiss said. "For decades we wanted a really professional book, and a textbook for our students to represent our work accurately. That has been a major obstacle for our development as a training provider."

"Eventually I felt that that problem became so big that I took it upon myself to start this book project as a collaborative effort of the whole faculty, and as an expression of the diversity of voices that make up the Institute today."

"The vision was to not only have a comprehensive text on the Hakomi method for our students, but also one that would show our professional peers of all the different heritages and the depth of our approach, and how we are linked into the larger discourse."

The Process

"When I started in 2005, I began with developing an overall structure, an inventory of chapters, their sequence, and an outline of content for each of them. The outline was meant to show the depth of understanding that we have about the current state of knowledge within our field, as well as how we feel we have something major to contribute. Gregory and Lorena really helped in honing those aspects and emphasized that we offer a highly interesting and powerful method when looked at from the current state of affairs in

our professional environment."

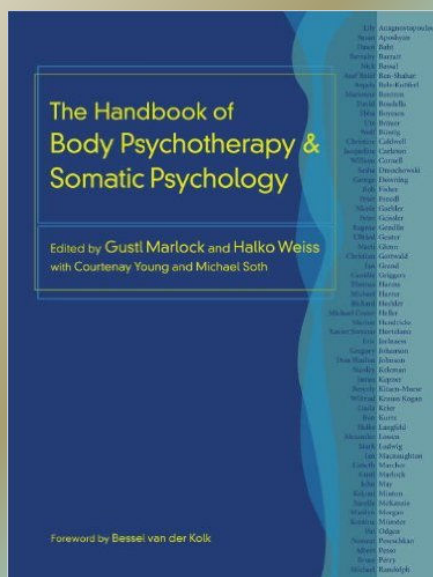
"I tried to persuade even those of our trainers who are not experienced writers to contribute certain content, informed them about the style and other requirements I felt were essential to create a coherent text that would meet the standards of a professional book, and that would show how well we are connected to the discourse in our field."

"As the book evolved, there were many changes of course. And when Greg, and later Lorena, joined the effort, their contributions helped further shaping the overall structure, and the quality of writing. As I am not a native English speaker, they really moved the process along as the book reached the stage where their skill at English was crucial."

Putting it all Together

Pulling pieces together from a worldwide puzzle was not easy. But in the end, the 'whole' reflected the 'individuality' of each contributor with a sense of cohesion, a feel of, this is what we what are about and why.

"It is probably hard to understand by someone who has never done such a project how extensive and time consuming the work on such a book is. I had an even larger effort with the *Handbook of Body Psychotherapy and Somatic Psychology*, which included about 60 authors, many of whom are leaders in the field.





"If there are many authors, there are questions of balancing the content, dealing with redundancies, style of writing, etc., that sometimes end up as 10 or 12 consecutive versions of a single chapter that have to be reviewed and worked on by three editors, who have to communicate among each other across continents. There are delays, misunderstandings, personal sensitivities, and so on that can take months and months to work out. Then there are unforeseen events that create major breaks, like the untimely and shocking death of Greg's wife in the middle of the process."

"There were many moments where it felt too big a stone to haul up the mountain, and some periods where nothing seemed to happen at all. I certainly went through times of many frustrations, but eventually we could really count on those who contributed, and they were really gracious in allowing us editors to work with them and even mess with their writing in major ways. We felt blessed with much understanding and support from all of them."

Writing with Readers in Mind

While reading the text, I noticed that all the chapters were rather short, which as a reader was nice for me—I felt safe to immerse myself in the chapter and absorb

key points while not fearing I'd be reading one chapter all day with some heady vernacular and the need to research terms and situations to truly understand what I was reading and why. Weiss explained that just as in his previous project - the Handbook already mentioned - the editorial team asked the contributing authors to limit themselves to some volume of text, each weighed to balance the book according to the weight of the issue to be covered. He shared that it was "extremely difficult in some cases where writing extended hugely past the requested pages." They also had ideas about which chapters needed what extent of references, what style of writing, which limits to what they would cover, etc. At the same time they wanted to have some redundancy so that chapters could be read separately, and still be understood well.

"The work with the contributors was quite extensive at times, with many revisions, and additions from the editors," Weiss said. "There were hardly any chapters that we needed to reject because we worked with each of the authors, sometimes just by some tweaking, sometimes with a lot of input, to bring them into a shape that would suit the overall concept of the book."

Within the overall plan, Weiss also knew he and his team members were going to write, to contribute their knowing and experience. Weiss had planned to write a chapter on the characteristics of Hakomi, and on its history, but he also had to fill in, as well as cooperate on some topics. He explained that this give and take was all part of how the overall process evolved as necessities arose over the course of time. Basically, he said, "the role of us editors is pretty much a bit of a service to what seems to be needed."

Coming to Life

It is one thing to have a vision, another to strive to create it. I asked Weiss what was it like for him to see this vision come to life and how was it to write with Ron and at

times edit his work, a student editing the teacher in a sense. Did he have any moments of insecurity or doubt? Weiss admitted that they did not edit Ron's chapter except for some minor items. He was such a good writer, Weiss said, they had no intention of losing his personal style. Ron's chapter was actually one of the first ones completed for the project. "Smaller pieces, like a chapter, is more in line with what he is really good at," said Weiss. "We could very much count on him."

"For a long time, when the overall process seemed to be stalled, and I was not able to move it, it was a very frustrating experience, and I might have given up were it not for some peoples' contributions, like Ron's, that were already in, and who we could not let down after they had put in an effort that was often enough huge for them, especially for those who are not used to writing."

"But in the end, when we saw that the book really would be done at a foreseeable time, I became quite excited. And when we realized that Norton would take the book - and that we would not have to find an obscure publisher, or self-publish - we all had a real high! Now that it has even been #1 on the Amazon new release list for psychotherapy, we are quite ecstatic! That we never expected. We were completely taken by surprise, and still are enormously happy that Norton felt that we have what it takes."

About the Authors/Editors

Halko Weiss, PhD, is the co-founder and senior trainer of the Hakomi Institute. A clinical psychology and lecturer on body-psychotherapy, couples therapy, and relationship skills, Dr Weiss is the author of six book and 20 professional publications.

Greg Johanson, PhD, is a founding trainer of the Hakomi Institute. He has background in therapy as well as theology. He is the lead author of *Grace Unfolding: Psychotherapy in the Spirit of the Tae-te-ching*. He has a special interest in integral psychology, which relates spirituality to individual consciousness and behavior in the context of social and cultural issues

Lorena Monda, MS, DOM, LPCC is a certified therapist, trainer for the Hakomi Institute and adjunct faculty at the AOMA Graduate School of Integrative Medicine in Austin, Texas, She is the author of *The Practice of Wholeness: Spiritual Transformation in Everyday Life*.

References

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that the book presents additional means of practicing within those existing frameworks, and is derived from many of the same theories and ideas. The tone is inviting, and in spite of the book's density, avoids seeming too much like a text book. As a reference for those already familiar with this therapeutic modality, it is a helpful summation of essential past and current tools used, although it by no means is all-encompassing of the many derivative and particular practical styles for Hakomi. The book is more concerned with the goals and ways of considering certain aspects of therapy and mindfulness than expecting strict interpretations and applications of those ideas. In this way, it is further expanding how mindfulness and self-awareness can be used for meaningful and constructive change with clients.