Halko Weiss

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Halko Weiss, Ph.D.**,** is an accredited psychotherapist and lecturer for medical and psychological therapists in Germany. He is also a founding trainer of the Hakomi Institute who directs the Hakomi Institute of Europe. Halko works internationally as a somatic psychotherapy teacher, couples therapy teacher, and as a management trainer. He is well-published and the co-editor of the *Handbook of Somatic Psychotherapy*.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Proactive Mindfulness* project.

The following is a transcript of the original audio. Please note that this conversation was meant to be a spontaneous exchange. For better or worse, the transcript retains the unedited quality of the conversation.

Serge Prengel: I'm with Halko Weiss. Hi Halko.

Halko Weiss: Hi, Serge.

S P: So, do you want to start by saying a little bit about who you are?

Halko Weiss: Yes, I'm a German. I'm an accredited psychotherapist and an accredited lecturer for ongoing training for accredited psychotherapists in Germany. I've also been one of the founding members of the Hakomi institute, which we founded in 1980, and ever since, I've been on a mission to show people some of our core ideas about the Hakomi method.

S P: So, your main orientation is Hakomi; however, you're also the editor of a handbook of somatic psychotherapy.

H W: Yes. My friend, Gustl Marlock, and I became painfully aware at some point, of the fact that cognitive behavioral psychotherapy, and also psychodynamic therapy schools were finding out about the body, and acted as if they were just inventing the effect of using the body in psychotherapy, and had put on conferences about it, and hadn't invited anybody from us, from our colleagues, although we have such a long history and actually know quite a bit about how to work with the body and have so many ways of doing so. So, we got really angry about that and said, well, somebody should write a book that establishes, that, body psychotherapy as a field. And we were kind of wondering why nobody's doing it, and getting upset about it, and then we suddenly realized, well, we are not doing it either. So then we decided, okay, let's try to do it.

S P: So you went ahead. And this is not a book about Hakomi, it's a book about, from different approaches to body psychotherapy.

H W: Yes, we are actually trying to offer our colleagues everywhere in the world, if we can, an idea of what body psychotherapy is, from its history, and its basic methodology, its applications, clinical aspects, and all kinds of things that are valuable to know about body psychotherapy and which reflects the knowledge that we have in the overall field. You know, people, a lot of people

contributed, like Eva Reich, Eugene Gendlin, Stanley Keleman, David Boadella, Ron Kurtz, Al Pesso, Jack Rosenberg, Alexander Lowen, Pat Ogden, Don Johnson. Many many people from the field that most body psychotherapists know, have all contributed a piece of their knowledge, their particular knowledge that they have some authority over. And it's turned out to be a big, big volume, about a thousand pages in German, and our English translation would probably cut it down to about eight hundred, because English is a little easier to write, and everything turns out a little shorter.

S P: Yeah, but so, at this point it only exists in German.

H W: At this point, the book only exists in German, but of the articles right now, about 80% of them have been created in English originally or have been translated.

S P: Oh, of course, because a lot of the writers are English speakers, English writers.

H W: Yes, actually about 80 authors participate in this project and they're from twelve countries.

S P: So, who uses this book in Germany?

H W: Well, it's a book that you will find in universities, university libraries. But, I think a lot of our body psychotherapists have picked it up because it's an excellent book to just kind of look up certain kinds of issues. It's not about the different methods, it's about different issues that concern us.

S P: Do you want to maybe give a few examples?

H W: For instance, we may have a chapter on the history or general procedures- how we are using the body in psychotherapy in general- or it might be something about how we access psychological material through the body, or procedures of some sort, and applications, like how it's being used in trauma therapy, or in working with children or in groups. So, it has a wide range of topics and there are about a hundred chapters in it.

S P: Mmm. So, for instance if you had a chapter on trauma, would it include one author's perspective or different approaches?

H W: Well, the typical thing we would do, we would look at who in our field has a particular knowledge about it, in this case, when it came to trauma, we asked Pat Ogden and Kekuni Minton, who have published a really interesting book that many of our peers may know, "Trauma and the Body," and we asked them to write a chapter about that approach, but write it in a way that it's not just about their own method. That they are the experts on the larger perspective, so we'd ask, "Please include the larger perspective," that was the standard request that we made to all the authors, "Do not write about your method, but write about that issue."

S P: Yeah... yeah. So, you say the book is used, of course, by body-oriented psychotherapists, but also in universities; has it helped to make some headways in mainstream, general psychology programs?

H W: You know this is all Germany so far, and Germany has always been more open about the use of the body in psychotherapy, and it's being used in many hospitals- body psychotherapy- so it's more accessible there. But, one of the things that we found out, is that we got really, really, really good reviews. We sold comparatively really, really well in Germany for such a book. Actually, I got

together with a publisher a couple of weeks ago, and he said, well, you guys are one of our success authors now. A lot of people from mainstream psychology picked it up and looked at it, and it got really, really good reviews.

S P: Right, so in other words, the hope for the American-English edition is that this provides a bridge between somatic psychotherapy and mainstream psychotherapy.

H W: Well, actually, what we are hoping here is, one issue is the bridge, and the other one is that we actually define the field, that we say, you know, this is not so and so's psychotherapy, this therapy, and that therapy, and all kinds of little elements that don't really establish a coherent idea in people's minds. But, to have a common description that people can have an idea about the fact that body psychotherapy is an art that has history, that has developed, and that has a wide range of applications and methods. So it's a whole, in a way, so that it can appear in people's minds as something that's out there.

S P: Yeah.

H W: And then, of course, to show people that we know what we are doing, we have a lot of knowledge, we have a lot of history, and that we can contribute to the art of psychotherapy considerably, and maybe deal with certain kinds of things better than other methods.

S P: So when you say "showing the field as a whole and the commonalities," how would you, what is it that seems to really create, define this field of body psychotherapy?

H W: Well, you know, there are some big questions. One of them is the understanding of wholeness, of the body-mind spiritual unity. That's a very big piece that has always been part of the field from, you know, even pre-Freud times when there were psychotherapists that have actually used the body in an integrating way. Even Freud did it: in the early years he would put his hands on somebody's forehead or something like that. It seemed to be part of the psychotherapy procedure, and was lost or pushed aside.

S P: Yeah

H W: So, one of the things that we all share is certainly this idea that the body is essentially an integrated part of who we are. And in many ways, from some very important perspectives, it may actually be the very core of what we feel is our self. And so we put it in a very central place, we body psychotherapists, especially when it comes to problems that arise early in life, where there's just procedural and emotional memory, and no language yet. A lot of the things we learn around that time is bodily stuff, is procedure, is emotion, and we feel by using the body, we can get to some very essential aspects of the human being that you cannot really touch by a lot of other means.

S P: Yeah. So that sense of the centrality of the body and…

H W: Yes. And sensing and feeling, and all the procedural processing of movements, the way we act intuitively and automatically, all those are established in, well -- modern psychotherapy talk -- are established through implicit memory. If we look at a comparable word- which is quite different, but it's comparable- it would be the "unconscious." Since unconscious pattern actually run our lives;

that's pretty obvious for most psychotherapists. And how do we touch it? How do we bring it in? How do we find a connection to it without losing ourselves by going through the mental realm only?

S P: Right, so a sense of paying attention to bottom up things?

H W: Yes. Bottom up is really important, but also top down, because we can- and maybe that's another very important point- is that we can touch consciously some of the basic things that run our lives, and actually influence them a little bit too. So, it's going bottom up and top down. But, I think you're right; the more important thing is the bottom up piece. And I think that we, who are using the body, can actually do an excellent job in using, touching, and working with these realms, that we will not get by reflecting.

S P: Yeah... yeah. So, you say that in Germany, the mainstream community is more receptive to body approaches than in this country. So, what is it, what are the things in the body-oriented approaches that the mainstream connects to more easily? Either in terms of techniques or in terms of philosophy, or you know, what helps build bridges that maybe people here can use to build bridges with the mainstream community in the U.S.?

H W: Well, I'll give you a little example. Germany has, for instance, had a type of institution that you don't have in America, or in any other country but Germany, and that is psychosomatic hospitals.

S P: Wow.

H W: We have a bunch of them, in almost every big city, and I don't know exactly how many, but there are many. And where the whole notion of~~,~~ the somatic and psychic realms were looked at in an interconnected way for a long time. And we've had some early pioneers like Helmuth Stolze who have developed some of the first body psychotherapeutic methods in the, I think in the late forties, early fifties. Stolze's method is being used in those psychosomatic clinics and in hospitals~~,~~ almost everywhere in Germany, and…

S P: So these psychosomatic hospitals, the people who work there, are they trained originally as doctors, MDs?

H W: Yes.

S P: So it's something that started from the medical profession to…

H W: Yes, Stolze, for instance, was an MD- he became a professor of Munich later- but he was an MD, and he got really interested in the body early on. So it's a normal thing that if somebody goes to a hospital in Germany, that they would also do some kind of movement stuff, some kind of body therapy. It's been quite in a physician's mind, in Germany, for a long time.

S P: And you're talking- when you say some kind of movement in body therapy- you're not talking about physical therapy for an injury, you're talking about something that's psychosomatic.

H W: Yes, it has clear psychological emphasis.

S P: So, one of the characteristics that the medical profession itself has an interest in is the connection between the somatic and the psychological. What about the psychological profession- the psychotherapy professions- what is it that makes them more receptive to the body orientation?

H W: Well, you know, in the medical field in Germany, where there's an openness to body psychotherapy, of course, the psychological community is also open to this. Beyond that, I don't think that the psychological community is generally more open in Germany. Like, basically all university training is cognitive behavioral, there are a few that do psychodynamic training, but most of it is pretty classical and traditional. Actually, the psychological community is pretty conservative.

S P: Yeah. So, there is a sense of perspective, of just looking at things from a cognitive behavioral perspective.

H W: Yes. When it comes to the academic realm, yes it is.

S P: So do you have, for instance, do you have something like managed care in this country where people would have treatment plans, where they would have a bit of a slant or cognitive behavioral?

H W: Yes, we do. I mean, the whole system is different in Germany, but when you get paid by insurance, that's most likely what you get. Somebody who is diagnosing you, then uses one of the treatment plans.

S P: So, how do you work in body psychotherapy within that context? Is it something you have to do outside of the treatment plans?

H W: Well, most of the time psychotherapists that using something else, try to make it look like it was cognitive behavioral. [Laughs]... and, you know, describe it in ways that'll be accepted, but then they do what they think is right.

S P: So, maybe as part of something like writing a handbook, some kind of a system of creating a translation of explaining the concepts of body psychotherapy in terms that behavioral, cognitive behavioral people can relate to, or you know, what's, you know- are you creating new concepts for these people, are you creating bridges? What..

H W: Well, the attempt is a two pronged one. One is to actually give the field some kind of identification as a whole. Like we are body psychotherapists and this is what we do, and we are all in it and all are big creators and people who have contributed are in it, and this is something whole that we can identify with. That's the one thing. The other thing is we want to show our colleagues that do not know about psychotherapy, or body psychotherapy, that we do indeed have something to offer; that is substantial what we have. It's not some kind of whimsical fancy idea that was invented recently, and, that doesn't have much substance- but no, this is real.

S P: Yeah. So, you know, as you're now bringing it- and you've been working at bringing it in the U.S. for awhile now- what kind of, what are you encountering among editors, or the people who would be the gate-keepers, publishers?

H W: Well, you know, we haven't talked to a lot of publishers yet, because before we can talk to publishers, we have to have all the key chapters translated well. And that is a big, big problem,

because the body psychotherapy field is not very big, so there are only so many people who know body psychotherapy well enough to even understand the text correctly for translation. And then they have to be native English speakers, knowing either German or French or Spanish or Italian. So they need to be able to translate it, know the subject they're translating, understand what they're translating, and translating it in a way that sounds appropriate to the American audience. And American audiences are pretty jaded when it comes to the quality of writing. If you go to Europe and read the academic writing, it's, it feels stilted from an American point of view. So, a translator also has to adapt the text in a way that the American audience would receive it and not just kind of turn away being disgusted by how complicated it sounds.

S P: Right.

H W: So it's a real art to translate something, to know about the body, to be really good at English, have enough time to do a lot of work like that and get little money for it, and all those kinds of things together; you hardly find anybody who can do it all.

S P: So is this a call for translators?

H W: Oh, yes, I mean, we can use any kind of help. You know, there's a lot of American peers who really would like to have this book because they see the use of it, and we've made quite a bit of headway. We raised a lot of money from the German, and the Swiss ABP organizations and from the EABP, but I think now it's America who has to chip in as well.

S P: Good. So, we could end on this note, but I just want to check if you have something else that you might want to say.

H W: Well, you know, basically what I would like to say is we can use support, so if some of you are interested in having that book, your help is welcome. And we're trying to find people in America right now who will complete this process, because as you can tell by listening to me, I am not a native English speaker, and I have no way of weighing how good a translation is. So it needs a lot of American friends who look at the text and say oh, this doesn't sound quite good, and we need to change this a little bit and polish it to make it publishable.

S P: Yeah.

H W: And, so help - financial and work wise - is needed.

S P: Good. Good. So hope that people will respond to this. Thanks, Halko.

H W: Thank you, Serge.

This conversation was transcribed by Angela Guida.

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