

## November 2009: Laurie Schwartz

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Laurie Schwartz began her training as a Somatic psychotherapist in 1979 with Ilana Rubenfeld. Her search for the integration of psyche, soma and soul continued. She is certified in the Hakomi Method of Body-Centered Psychotherapy, Somatic Experiencing, Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy, Jin Shin Jyutsu, and Family Constellations. Laurie has also studied Jungian Dream Analysis and Modern Group Analysis. She has been exploring the integration of pre and peri-natal psychology with a biodynamic cranial sacral approach to healing and wholeness with people in recovery for Co-dependency. Her passion and ability to synthesize integrate different approaches to foster recovery, healing and transformation is ongoing. Laurie is a licensed massage therapist and licensed counseling psychologist in New York City. She has been in private practice since 1982. She facilitates ongoing supervision groups for Hakomi graduates, students of Somatic Experiencing as well as others who are searching for ways to be more body inclusive.

The following is a transcript of the original audio, which is part of the Somatic Perspectives series ([www.SomaticPerspectives.com](http://www.SomaticPerspectives.com)). Please note that this conversation was meant to be a spontaneous exchange, not an edited piece. For better or worse, the transcript retains the unedited quality of the conversation.

*Serge Prengel: I am with Laurie Schwartz.  
Hi Laurie.*

Laurie Schwartz: Hi Serge.

*S P: So Laurie you started your professional life with Rubenfeld synergy.*

L S: Yes, I did start with Rubenfeld, although that happened right when I came back from Africa and I was searching for what to do with my life. I didn't want to be a music teacher anymore. And so I entered into Jungian analysis and gestalt therapy. In 1978 and went into liana Rubenfeld's training. That was the beginning, learning how to be sensitive to my body and to the world of consciousness of mindfulness really.

*S P: So from the beginning there was a sense of the psychological work you were going to do, was going to be related to body and you went on to study massage therapy?*

L S: Well, Ilana really synthesized Gestalt therapy with Feldenkreis work and Alexander work, she called it Rubenfeld synergy and in order to be licensed to touch, because all the sessions were really done on the table, I proceeded to go to these classes to get a massage license. And that got me interested in relationship of emotions to meridians to evolution. So I took a few years to just doing body psychotherapies like Gin Shin Shiatsu Shiatsu. There were a lot of hands on works with Ilana and working through the body with emotions.

*S P: And you've studied also other modalities of touch, touch for health?*

L S: Well, my husband, Stuart Friedman, and I met at Omega Institute and he was teaching touch for health. And it so happened that every Sunday when we would do Feldenkreis exercises in Ilana's living room people would really emote, and thought what were these moments they were doing and Feldenkreis was triggered all

these emotions. And so, touch for health was really an easiology testing every muscle and one meridian connecting it to the emotional body. So that was again my interest in understanding the relationship between emotions and sensations and movement and personal connections between people. And of course, Ilana's training, one of the gifts I got, besides the fact that it was a beautiful community and we played a lot, we spent at least 3 or 4 months just learning how to be mindful before we even touch somebody. The whole message in Ilana's was you have to be so connected to the world of sensation before you put your hands on someone, very different from massage training.

*SP: Yea, yea. So, the journey of your own learning mindfulness and this whole thing that you've been doing has been also experiencing these different methods. So, what's your experience in the area?*

L S: Well in Rubenfeld training we have sessions before every training weekend and I was the youngest one in the training. There was a lot of opening and relaxing and letting emotions come through. It was a very organic, intuitive way she spoke and she taught. But I was also in Jungian analysis and training in Gestalt at the same time. The most profound thing for me in retrospect was that I had a dream the first night before analysis that my therapist and I, we embracing each other and our bodies reconnecting and we're both naked. And Jung says it takes about 20 years to understand the first dream. And that dream to me, really I'm coming full circle now, it had to do with wounded feminine risk with the attachment piece to my body is earth, to a mother figure, to being alive and having intimacy. And so when Rubenfeld synergy ended I did not feel confident to be a skill. And my husband introduced me to Hakomi therapy. We did a trade. So that got me very excited, the Hakomi method.

*SP: The Hakomi method, to deepen the body orientation but also to have to bring something more.*

L S: The training was so well organized; I felt both trainings were experiential. In Hakomi we learn really practical tools of how to stay in the moment and how to stay in contact with someone how to help them deepen their mindfulness, how to go down to the core of organizing memories and beliefs and how to work with transformation and the unmet need then how to bring the person back out into the relationship. So I felt that the Hakomi method gave me such a good structure and confidence because I didn't know what I was doing moment, it wasn't all purely intuitive.

*SP: So a sense of mindfulness no longer was being a mystical concept but really a sense of moment by moment attention in a sense of how to be able to master it, to be able to do something about it.*

L S: Exactly, I was sitting, there like a person. We put on the board the world, mindfulness, sensations, thoughts, feelings, memories, images, beliefs, impulses, like how do you do that? I remember the moment when I was dumfounded, before I could actually realize that mindfulness can be applied to everything in the psyche, to a dream, to a feeling. And so from that perspective, I think that is the bridge to wholeness.

*SP: So, again your experience as a therapist and as someone who experiences these therapies. What was your experience with Hakomi compared to what you have been accustomed to before?*

L S: You know what my Jungian analyst said to me when I came back from (...); I lived there for a year. He said, "You're so much more relaxed, you're so much more present, you're really here." "And I thought he could tell me I wasn't here but he was able to tell me that he saw the changes in me when I came back to work with him after the Hakomi training.

*SP: And so maybe we could continue the sense of this journey with going into much*

*deeper into each specific thing. But you're still very induced in Hakomi and the Hakomi community teaching, but you've also gone on to study other modalities.*

L S: Right, in the Hakomi method we work with states of consciousness. Hakomi actually means, where you stand in relation to the many realms. So there's the spiritual realm, the emotional realm, the physical realm, and yet a lot of Hakomi is done with eyes closed to give the person a lot of intrapsychic with themselves but because I think I had some blank spots with my issue with aggression. A friend of mine introduced me to modern group analysis, which is sort of like the cousin to Hakomi, the aggression is really important for all emotions. So in that training and in those groups, you're triggered to get angry and frustrated. So it was very different from Hakomi based on mindfulness and nourishment and staying in the present moment and letting the aggression come up. So I spent a few years in modern analysis, I think, it was probably a bridge to semantic experience.

*S P: Why don't we slow down a bit because what you were saying there is that you went to modern analysis before because there was this emotion this emphasis to help you connect with aggression. What you're experiencing in these different methods is that each one has a special emphasis and that the journey has been a way to go and develop some different aspects of your personality.*

L S: I think the wounded healer becomes the trauma therapist who's been through everything on her own. What I usually provide for people is from the inside out experience so I can become an experiential learner and therefore who has unmet needs to be able to direct with aggression and some fear about it. For whatever reason, I wasn't able to address them in my Hakomi training and that it's not available. I need it for wholeness, I needed it to work with my aggression with people and not be afraid of

it. So it provided a lot more safety with direct emotional communication and actually loose messages not to be so mindful but to be relational as a moment and to clear the history by new experience. There are a lot of similarities with Hakomi and modern analysis. Both want to help you come into the present moment, both want to help you be dimensional and give and receive love and all emotions. They both have the belief that all emotions are healthy. I think that modern analysis, the absence of mindfulness, direct emotional aggression and expression is there. And what was missing in modern analysis was that mindfulness of sensation.

*S P: So another words, it's a question of where you put the focus. You are somebody that's very interested with mindfulness. But at the same time there's a certain lack of focus on aggression and you enjoyed developing the aggression there.*

L S: Well I think when you come from a background where your ancestors went through war or there was mental illness in your family, the ways in which you actually push it down it really causes depression. There's a lot of shame around anger in families about being judged. The aggression and expression in modern analysis actually was a catalyst for joy. And I think there's an edge because many people couldn't stay in their bodies. So there aggression, it's not relational to one's own inner self regulation can also be genetic for people. So again I loved modern analysis, saw how people were frozen and scared and frightened could not access their feeling because they weren't in their body. So, in each method, there's something that was a gift for me and I guess I kept traveling because it was something that I needed. And I just kept learning. I had time and energy to keep integrating these things into my practice.

*S P: So as you talk about it this way you get a sense of the ways the therapist, the method or teacher is going to be an aspect with which your personality can resonate... So*

*definitely you've been looking for the mindfulness part and somebody with whom you can resonate by your ability to be mindful. But then there is the need to find somebody with whom you can relate, resonate and amplify the other aspect which would be aggression.*

L S: Yea, the way I see it is that every emotion is like a musical note and some of us are introverted and we really have a deep, deep inner life, a dream life and some of us really love the world of sensation. I love the world of mindfulness and sensation, and yet the extroverted aspects of life are really expression and relationship and more fire energy which allows for emotions to go back and forth. They're both important to me, both the expression and the ability to go in and track myself and feel and have a choice.

*S P: Going back in a way to the ability to go inside and track you went on to study somatic experience.*

L S: Well, that came because several of my clients in my Hakomi practice in NY, when they went into the child, which is the state of consciousness we call in Hakomi where we contact the inner child. A lot of them would fall asleep or got through frozen and I couldn't stay and talk to them. They weren't able to stay in mindfulness. I thought well that, what was I going to do; I really want to stay connected to these people. I have met Peter Levine at one of the Hakomi conferences. I knew he was a trauma expert so I actually had the luxury of going and spending a few weeks with Peter and watching him work with my client. He took him out of freeze state and death states. And I really watched how Peter helped his consciousness come back into his nervous system and help him feel safe.

*S P: So, it started with a very concrete problem with a client in what you hadn't even seen as a freeze state at the time. Noticing his lack of experiencing, lack of reaction.*

L S: Right, mindfulness wasn't available, so they would fall asleep, was I going to do body work or sleeping? I was confused, I needed help.

*S P: And so what came out of there isn't just help but practical and theoretical framework about trauma, the nervous system.*

L S: Peter talks a lot about trauma being in the body and not in the event and in somatic experiencing he says you're learning the language of sensation. Like a brand new language, so helping somebody be in the present moment. In sensation which we do in Hakomi but in somatic experiencing approach we do much more intricate work with coming out of the freeze responses, working in through fight and flight and helping the nervous system back into resiliency because the message in trauma is that at the moment you are overwhelmed your consciousness freezes and you can't move forward in time. That's why people can be 50 or 60 and have something unresolved in childhood. It was just amazing to see the patterns throughout the tissue patterns could change when you take someone back to the event where the trauma began and go very slowly through the event, mindfully. In somatic experience we just stitch, like the first cousin to Hakomi we stay with contact, we stay with feeling, but as soon as we switch to sensation, the person says, "I'm feeling heat, I'm feeling dizzy, I'm feeling cold, we slow things down and the other big thing in somatic experiencing that we never talk about a trauma or take somebody back to repeat the trauma until we know that they are grounded and contained and resourced and feeling empowered. And I really loved that and it goes really well with Hakomi, we're not here to create more developmental trauma, we're here to resolve it.

*S P: So it's not that there is an antagonism between both but there is that difference of emphasis about the resourcing being very much part of the motto and the approach.*

L S: Yea and I had to address my traumas really in all my therapies. In Gestalt, in Jungian analysis, trauma never came up. All of a sudden I'm like "Oh I was breached, I was phyliaic, colic", I had casts on my leg as if a car accidents. This whole universe opened up and you came into the world of sensation and started to back to unresolved traumatic memories.

*S P: So again we're coming to the part of how when you study to the different approach, it also gives you the exposure to these layers of yourself that you have not necessarily explored to the same extent in other methods.*

L S: And yet I come back to my first dream there I was in my body, there she was in her body and we were just holding each other and I come back to almost, I feel like I've made a full circle because I think it was, Michael Wober that said, "Trauma is a wound at the order of being" and therefore a baby comes into the universe in the state of being and in my feeling the baby isn't thinking. They're picking up the vibrations from their mother's womb, from their ancestors. And so, if you ancestors didn't feel safe your mother was anxious, you actually don't come in feeling whole and resilient and so the need for me was to really restore my nervous system in resiliency because I didn't come in that way. That's why I have so much passion now around the attachment work.

*S P: And the prenatal work and the attachment work...*

L S: It's like it was my journey sort of like peeling the layers of the onion. Going from my ancestors to my developmental experience to my family and then deeper and deeper when you immediate and you're looking for I guess, more wholeness, you start to study what comes up in mindfulness you get more curious. During the SE training somebody mentioned Ray Castellano and perinatal birth work. So we took a workshop. It was five days of really,

really slowing down. It was even slower than Hakomi. And it gave a lot of time to track impulses in the nervous system that in many ways is unconscious. It's even before the development of character structure.

*S P: So again the at slowing down, the tracking what you were talking about before was also your interested in attachment. So you pursue that as well.*

L S: Again, yea, I think my need was how do you stay in the present moment and love somebody and love yourself? How do you stay in the present moment and go through you and not react to the person in a relationship with? How do we do that? I don't see very many people, where we stay with good boundaries and be intimate with ourselves emotionally and then really open the field to want to know and discover what's going on inside someone else. I think there's a passion for me around connection both emotional and spiritual and therefore I've needed to come back into a relationship with my body where I'm feeling really alive and the inflow. And I think that's what babies experience but they don't know it. So to come back into the attachment place, it's almost like you coming back to the kingdom of spirit and soul and energy with the aliveness of the infant the curiosity but the consciousness of the neo cortex of the adult. For me that's the integration for the spiritual and the emotional.

*S P: So back to the flow of the body and the consciousness of the neo cortex the adult.*

L S: I think what I haven't said I think Jung said it, "in all of these processes we dealing with an issue on polarity were dealing with issues about good and bad, love and hate, whether it's a symptom in the body that we want to get rid of it becomes the enemy." Somatic experience teaches us that in the symptoms are the cure, you learn how to allow the symptom to come in and connect to what we call the healing cortex. Emotionally, if we're going to allow to really feeling, some people call it the

transcendent function, the middle pillar, the place where we're not taking sides with ourselves or with another person.

*S P: The place of not taking sides, similar to mindfulness.*

L S: I think mindfulness is the ability to stay grounded and centered and aware of what's happening and not be affected. Have a choice. I think a lot of us are spontaneous which is great to have spontaneous feelings like children have in play, but when it can be hurtful or traumatizing that that's where the wound comes from. So those of us that didn't know, say we were lovable or we could have our needs met grouping up might have never said ask for a need and therefore maybe we got angry and we couldn't express it. So again then we have to come back to, "can I love all the parts of me?" So it not even about mindfulness I think it's also about loving presence and having ambition to connect with all human experience. And I think that's my bias. My bias is to feel the dark and light and get to the place where were neither polarized in the darkness or the light. Searching for the greater soul. Seems to be something I wanted.

*S P: Looks like in your journeys, there are different ways to resonate with different parts or yourself. And one of them which you studied was biodynamic.*

L S: As a result of doing the perinatal birth training, we were required to go into biodynamic cranial sequel workshop. So I went there, and sort of came full circle. I started to experience states of fluidity and states of peace and a real deep resource, very different than going back and forth between a symptom and a resource, like the fluid body and the biodynamic cranial cycle. And if you read Michael Shea's literature he talks a lot about the embryo and the origin story, which says that there is a place that's purely healthy and it's before trauma enters in.

*S P: So you say that it's a state of fluidity, flow which is different from the back and forth pendulating... Talk a little bit more about that.*

L S: Well in all spiritual traditions, we talk about the breath of life coming into the body god breaths life into atom. Atom means earth. So the biodynamic approach for me has an integration of the spiritual realm with also the physiological realm. Although I'm not a scientist and I haven't been wired up, but there is a spiritual component, it's like bringing mindfulness to the fluid body and when you can get to that state of peacefulness it's almost as if everything can flow into the ocean. So it creates a sense of a container, very deep resource of love. I think from the mother infant womb, sitting with someone who's in that residence and they're really in that place of that feeling of fluid love, call it love, call it peace. It's almost as if their cells sense it. It's almost like transmitting unconscious templates to one another. I mean, the client is on their own journey, they're into their own organicity but I noticed when I've gone to those places; my clients also have different experiences. So it's almost as if where I've traveled, I attract certain people that need to travel that journey and I think we all do that. People come into our practice, there's no mystery that who comes in and how they're teaching us and how we're learning, sort of how that happens over time.

*S P: I think it was Jung who said that "whatever I'm working on, whatever I'm exploring in myself, I seem to find patience or experiencing it."*

L S: I said to somebody the other week, how come some of us have had to do so many trainings, can't just stay in one system, and she said it's because not everyone needs to do perinatal training. We needed it to find wholeness.

*S P: So maybe that's a good place to say having all these experiences and having found beauty and wisdom and all of these*

*things. What happens when you're in a session or in sessions with people?*

L S: Well, in my training every human being is completely unique. When someone comes in the first thing I'll do is ask them what their intention is, I might take some history, but most people would be referred to me from body psychotherapy because they know I do Hakomi. They're already coming in with the expectations they want an experiential therapy. Of course thing are trust and safety and letting them experience me and ask me questions. As soon as someone feels that you're really tuning into them, you're making contact and turning them inward and they have permission to be free, the process has a life of its own. Most of my clients come from trauma, either depression or a lot of different categories of trauma. In every case, I want to see what their relationship is with their body, can they feel grounded, can they feel sensation, teach them mindfulness and in the work we slow things down, I never know from beginning to end, what's going to happen in the session, because we stay in the present moment and we see what's coming up next. What's their intention, what am I tracking, because we also look at the nonverbal cues. If the head is moving, if the arm is moving, if we see a feeling coming through. I feel in we're in this constant state of birth and connection. When somebody comes back into the fluid body and they go home again and I feel whole. They can actually feel the love and the child that was wounded and also feel themselves as the parent. There's a unity that starts to happen. What I would say to you after all this training. I discovered that I need to be in recovery for codependency because in my family origin there was mental illness and war. What was a shock to but I am grateful to have read all these books and now I'm helping people come out of codependency into self nourishment, into self love, into boundaries in their body, ultimately we come in alone and we got out alone. It's really how do you experience love.

*S P: So you come alone and leave alone, but there's also the connection between.*

L S: And if we don't feel the connection with ourselves, the in between connections can be tumultuous. That's really what therapy is all about isn't it. It's about the missing pieces of contact between our parents and us. In some ways, were in this journey of consciousness.

*S P: In a journey of consciousness and also in a journey for the missing pieces.*

L S: And when you realize, like the American Indians say, your harvest the gift of the womb, when you get to the place of not feeling lovable, teaches you what love is. It almost like we can't take it for granted because as we go through the journey of healing trauma we expand so much more aliveness and so much more compassion for other people. But I'm learning what I need from what the absent of not having had it. Some people get angry look at it as an opportunity to discover the whole universe.

*S P: So you journey, your meetings with these different people in trainings is a good journey to find the things you know you didn't have but also maybe in a way finding a place, finding the things you know you didn't have.*

L S: it's really the mystery of the unconscious comes through a dream or somebody putting their hand on their shoulder and all of a sudden your shoulder relaxes and you didn't even know you shoulder was tense. Because there are so many parts to the unconscious, it's really making the unconscious conscious. Such an interesting process. In Hakomi we talk about repetitive patterns and that's a lot of what character structures are. So when you slow down there's this whole universe to discover, whether you're discovering it through sensation or feeling or relationship; you're getting to know who you are. As I change on the inside, then how I perceive the world on the outside changes. I have a confession to

make, when I went to Israel I was walking into a hospital to help trauma training and my toes froze and my eyes got tight. I was able to feel that I was that sensitive, this is very interesting, I was walking into help and yet my body is having a response, a fear response. That became something to be curious about, what was it that froze in my toes and my eyes that I needed to come back and allow it to discharge so that I can feel safe again.

*SP: So maybe this is a good place to wrap this up. We end at that sense of interaction between curiosity, the desire to learn, learning what is and taking it as an opportunity to expand and grow through curiosity.*

L S: Curiosity is a real gift. When you are traumatized it's hard to be curious. But when you have that attitude of curiosity then you can use any method and start to let it work for you and serve you on the journey back into life and wholeness. If you're in a relationship, it's better to be curious about why your partner got annoyed at you and to react to it and to be able to be mindful and stay resilient. "Ok tell me what happened and I would have to be curious about all your feelings and my own if I really wanted intimacy or else we wouldn't have it.

*This is part of USABP's "Somatic Perspectives" series, edited by Serge Prengel. Transcribed by Yuliya Kaziyeva. This transcript was not proofread.*

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