

# Psoma – the Heart and Soul of Hakomi

First of all, I would like to express immense appreciation for Ron Kurtz and his Hakomi Method, which has been the focus of my practice and teaching since 1990 when I first met him. Working closely with Ron during the last twenty odd (pun intended) years of his life was a blessing and a gift. I feel a huge debt of gratitude to him and to the legacy of Hakomi that he bestowed on me.

Having practised and taught yoga for more than 50 years, the Hakomi I learned from Ron seemed like another version of this ancient practice as I understood it. It seemed completely natural to me to teach yoga in a Hakomi way and to incorporate my understanding of yoga in how I taught Hakomi. Ron always encouraged this and told me that much of his way of working that came to be known as Hakomi was inspired by his experience of yoga as a self-awareness practice, especially using mindfulness for self study and self discovery.

More than a decade ago, when I was teaching my integration of Hakomi and yoga, the name “psoma” occurred to me as a way of expressing the unity and wholeness of body/mind/spirit. While still appreciating and honouring the legacy from Ron, more and more I am now using “psoma” to describe my version of this approach. As I transition to using “psoma” in place of “Hakomi” to differentiate my approach from what other Hakomi teachers are offering, I have decided to temporarily use the phrase “psoma – the heart and soul of Hakomi”.

## The Heart of Hakomi:

It was my great honour to be working and teaching with Ron Kurtz during the development of what he called the “practice of loving presence” and to be invited by him to write the book together. We unfortunately never completed it before he died, so it was not published until 2019. Nevertheless, I have stayed true to Ron’s intention to encourage Hakomi trainers to use this loving presence practice as the foundation of the method. It is the true “heart” of Hakomi.

As the co-author of both the practice of and the book about Loving Presence, as well as the extension of it that we called the Personhood Series, I feel especially grateful for this amazing part of his legacy and responsible to continue sharing and teaching this aspect of Hakomi more than any other part of the work.

## The Soul of Hakomi:

While he was alive, in the late 1990’s, the Hakomi trainings I was teaching with Ron were called “psychotherapy as spiritual practice”. We called them the *Higher Ground* trainings. We also did several workshops called *Hakomi for the Buddhist-minded*. Part of the legacy Ron left me, including and besides the practice of Loving Presence, is this idea of Hakomi as a spiritual practice. With my beloved friend, colleague, and Hakomi legacy holder, Flint Sparks, who is both a psychotherapist and Zen priest, we have continued to offer this very special aspect of Ron’s work. This feels, to me, like the “soul” of Hakomi.

So, with loving presence as the *heart of Hakomi*, and spiritual practice as the *soul of Hakomi*, along with Ron's encouragement and blessing to continue to refine and develop and personalize my version of this work, I humbly offer you "psoma" as the "heart and soul of Hakomi"... soon to be known simply as "psoma".

One of my spiritual teachers has been the well-known Tibetan Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron. Although I've only spent one week in a personal retreat with her – during which I made so many notes about how relevant her teaching was to Hakomi - I often listen to her talks and read her books. I recently listened to her teaching on the Way of the Bodhisattva and realized that her reference to an ancient text was expressing a key part of this approach called psoma -*wakefulness*.

Pema Chodron speaks about the Way of the Bodhisattva, based on the ancient text by the 8<sup>th</sup> century Indian sage Shantideva. Listening to this teaching, I noticed that she refers to the Tibetan word *sheshin*, which is sometimes translated as "vigilance" and which she prefers to call "alertness". There's a whole chapter (5) about sheshin in Shantideva's book on how to be a bodhisattva, which, she says, is essentially a teaching on how to work with our own mind.

Pema Chodron's Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa apparently translated sheshin as "presently knowing". She explains this by pointing out that our minds have the capacity to know the difference between "what helps and what hurts". We humans have the ability to recognize what causes suffering and therefore to choose something else, another possibility. And, she continues, we can help others to connect with this capacity, this "alertness" of mind, and thus to transcend their own suffering. In psoma we call this capacity of mind, this alertness, this present tense knowing, "*wakefulness*".

This is exactly the point of psoma as a healing approach – waking up to what is causing suffering and to what else is possible. This is not quite the same as "mindfulness", which is a practice of paying attention to present moment experience, just as it is. The practice of mindfulness is one way to develop our innate capacity for wakefulness, for this discerning way of knowing.

Using awareness, and attention to cultivate a habit of noticing what is happening in present moment experience can certainly assist us to begin to awaken to the root of suffering and to other possibilities available, not just to the experience of suffering itself. Pema Chodron teaches that the root of suffering is "our confused mind". In a psoma journey, we are waking up to how our mind is both confused and embodied. Our embodied experience becomes a portal to discovering how we are confused and how this confusion is causing unnecessary suffering. We are also beginning to discover the natural openness and spaciousness of our true nature.

Again, the foundation of this healing approach is loving presence – the intention and practice of being fully present in an open-hearted way. And the soulfulness of this approach rests on an appreciation of healing as an inside job, understanding and trusting that wholeness is intrinsic. There is nothing wrong, nothing to fix. We can be a companion, a spiritual friend, to someone on their healing journey of remembering wholeness. On such a journey, we are both healed.