

# Inhabiting the Body as Unitive Consciousness

Judith Blackstone

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the Realization Process, a method of body psychotherapy that includes a series of inward attunement exercises for experiencing unitive consciousness as the basis of deepened contact with one's own being and with other people. The paper focuses primarily on this method's understanding and facilitation of embodiment. In the Realization Process, embodiment is viewed as the experience of being present everywhere in one's body simultaneously, as unitive consciousness. This is a shift from being aware of the body, to inhabiting the body. The paper describes how the Realization Process utilizes the embodiment of unitive consciousness to heal deficits in contact with oneself and others, and to refine the therapist's capacity for empathy. Brief attunement practices from the Realization Process are included to illustrate this shift.

**Keywords:** embodiment, Realization Process, body psychotherapy, consciousness

Received: 16.12.2020

Revised: 06.05.2021

Accepted: 19.05.2021

International Body Psychotherapy Journal  
The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis

Volume 20, Number 1,  
Spring/Summer 2021, pp. 36-45

ISSN 2169-4745 Printing, ISSN 2168-1279 Online

© Author and USABP/EABP. Reprints and  
permissions: [secretariat@eabp.org](mailto:secretariat@eabp.org)

**E**mbodiment is the primary focus of body psychotherapy. How we organize our experience of being in, or as, a lived body in relation to our environment, how trauma affects us somatically, and how we can help people heal and mature through bodily interventions have been explored by all of the innovators in our field. Early in our history, Wilhelm Reich (1945) wrote about an energetic realm of embodiment that he called orgone energy that became bound into "character armor" in reaction to painful or overwhelming experiences. Stanley Keleman (1979) also wrote about how we shape our personality through the way we live in our body, especially with regard to how we organize or contain excitation and pulsation. Embodiment is also often understood as interoception, the awareness of internal experience, such as sensations and emotions, and as proprioception, the ability to sense our physical location and movement in space (Fogel, 2020).

This paper presents an understanding of embodiment as our potential to experience ourselves as present everywhere in our body simultaneously. This is a shift from being aware of the body to inhabiting the body. When we inhabit our whole body, we uncover a dimension of undivided, unitive consciousness that we experience as the fundamental ground of our being. We know ourselves as the undivided stillness of unitive consciousness, disentangled from and allowing for the free flow of the movement of life, including our energy system, and our cognitions, emotions, sensations, and perceptions. As the unified ground of being, unitive consciousness enables us to be in contact with ourselves as a whole, and to function as a whole; for example, thinking and feeling at the same time.

When we live within our body, our experience of our identity is not just an idea, constructed by our imagination. We can also ex-

*... embodiment is viewed as the experience of being present everywhere in one's body simultaneously, as unitive consciousness.*

perience that we are not just our physical anatomy and physiology. We can access an experience of ourselves on the more subtle level of our energy system – the pulsing, streaming flow that is mentioned in Reichian (Reich, 1945) and Bioenergetic (Lowen, 1976) forms of therapy, and in subtle forms of body therapy such as Craniosacral therapy (Kern, 2001). When we inhabit our body as a whole, we can attune to an even more subtle level than energy and experience our primary identity as unitive consciousness.

## Context for Unitive Consciousness

The direct experience of a unitive ground of being appears only rarely in the literature of the psychotherapy field. Roberto Assagioli (1977), a contemporary of both Freud and Jung, developed a method called Psychosynthesis. He claimed that one could have an actual experience of the self, and of pure self-awareness. Jung (1968) also wrote about a self that was beyond or behind the fragments of our personality, and he theorized about a collective unconscious, in which the deepest contents of all of our minds were somehow shared. However, Jung presented these as ideas and symbols, rather than as accessible experiences. Abraham Maslow (1994), one of the founders of the humanistic movement in psychology, described peak experiences of unitive consciousness, which he considered to be indications of personal maturity. However, he described these as intense, temporary experiences that one necessarily returned from in order to live a normal life.

Ken Wilber (1980), a transpersonal theorist, included the realization of unitive consciousness as the pinnacle achievement in his stages of development. The Diamond Approach, developed by A. H. Almaas (1998) as an integration of mystical Islamic concepts with psychodynamic psychology and Tibetan Buddhism, also points directly to an innate essence of ourselves. Almaas wrote that we could dissolve and live without our learned object-relations templates, and that this was necessary for knowing ourselves as our underlying essence.

Recent research in the field of contemplative neuroscience has begun to explore the neural processes that may mediate unitive consciousness (Josipovic, 2014; Josipovic and Miskovic, 2020).

There are many descriptions of unitive consciousness in the Asian spiritual literature, especially within some lineages of Zen (Hinton, 2020) and Tibetan Buddhism (Rabjam, 2001), and the Hindu traditions of Advaita Vedanta (Sankara, 1989) and Kashmir Shaivism (Muller-Ortega, 1989). The 14<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan Buddhist teacher Longchen Rabjam (2001) described unitive consciousness: “This vast expanse, unwavering, indescribable, and equal to space, is timelessly and innately present in all beings” (p. 83).

In the Asian traditions, unitive consciousness has been called buddha-nature, pure consciousness, Self, *rigpa*,

and the clear light of wisdom mind, among many other names. The twentieth century Zen philosopher Nishitani (1982) described it as “primordial subjectivity” (p. 32). The Buddhists describe unitive consciousness as “self-knowing”, rather than as self-object knowing (Rabjam, 2001). It is consciousness that has become conscious of itself (Tolle, 2008). We know ourselves to be the knower. We experience that we are the unified ground of fundamental consciousness.

Asian metaphysical systems often view unitive consciousness as impersonal because it is considered to be universal, and even to pervade the whole universe. However, when we uncover this ground within our own being, it feels like who we really are. We have a sense of finally shedding the constructed images and superficial layers of our being to uncover our authenticity. Nishitani (1982) calls it “the original self in itself” (p. 151).

I do not make an ontological claim for unitive consciousness in the Realization Process, as is often done in traditional spiritual teachings. Instead, I describe it as an experience that we can access through subtle, inward contact with our body (Blackstone, 1991, 2007).

There are relatively few references in the Asian spiritual literature that focus solely on the embodiment of unitive consciousness, but there are some. The contemporary Tibetan Buddhist teacher Lama Thubten Yeshe (1998) writes, “Buddha’s body is not crowded with blood and bones; it is transparent and light. It is a conscious body, a psychic body” (p. 104). The twentieth century Japanese philosopher Yuasa (1987) says of embodied consciousness, “The ‘mind’ here is not the surface consciousness but is the ‘mind’ that penetrates into the body and deeply subjectivizes it” (p. 105). The Japanese philosopher Nishida (1979) writes, “To immerse oneself in the world does not mean to lose the body, nor does it mean that it becomes universal. On the contrary, the self is deepened or, rather, it is thoroughly at the base of one’s body” (pp. 324-5).

In general, the field of psychotherapy has ignored or dismissed the notion of an essential aspect of ourselves beyond our learned and constructed templates. Even within Asian spiritual traditions, there is debate regarding the existence of a foundational ground of being. Tibetan Buddhism has delineated two main categories of spiritual realization – those believing that there is a ground of being, or *buddha-nature*, referred to as “empty of other” teachings, and those that assert that there is no ground or any sort of uncompounded, permanent aspect of human experience, referred to as “empty of itself” teachings (Hookham, 1991). The long-standing conflict between these two points of views was imported to the West along with the Buddhist teachings.

The dominant understanding within the psychotherapy field has been of human nature as made up of mental constructs and nothing else (Mitchell & Black, 1995). This had the effect that when Buddhism began to gain popularity in the West, many psychotherapists were

"[Mindfulness techniques] ... instruct the practitioner to become increasingly attuned to even tiny shifts in their internal experience, and they calm the mind by gradually reducing and eliminating mental elaboration. However, the focus of these practices is specifically on the content of experience. They do not approach inhabiting the body as a unified ground of consciousness."

ready to embrace and incorporate into their work the school of Buddhism that denied any inherent ground of being. Today, in the West, as it was even in ancient Tibet, the "empty of itself" concepts of Buddhism are more widely known than the Buddhist teachings that point to a fundamental ground of being. The integration of psychotherapy with the no-ground, empty of itself theories and practices of Buddhism have led many psychotherapists into increasingly disembodied forms of therapy.

The popularity of mindfulness forms of meditation, and its incorporation into Western psychotherapy modalities, although focused on bodily experience, has supported Western psychotherapy's rejection of an essence or ground of being. Mindfulness techniques cultivate and refine the ability for monitoring interoception. They instruct the practitioner to become increasingly attuned to even tiny shifts in their internal experience, and they calm the mind by gradually reducing and eliminating mental elaboration. However, the focus of these practices is specifically on the content of experience. They do not approach inhabiting the body as a unified ground of consciousness.

As an example of how fully the Buddhist "empty of itself" philosophy, and the focus on interoception that is associated with it has been accepted in Western psychology, here is a quote from Peter Levine (2010):

Paradoxically, the only way that we can know ourselves is in learning to be mindfully aware of the moment-to-moment goings-on of our body and mind as they exist through various situations occurring in time. We have no experience of anything that is permanent or independent of this. Thus, there is no ego or self, just a counterfeit construction. While counterintuitive to most of us, this is common 'knowledge' to highly experienced meditators (p. 287).

However, this is not the knowledge or experience of all highly experienced meditators. Experienced meditators have been debating exactly this point for many centuries (Duckworth, 2017, Gyamtso, 2001).

## The Realization Process

This paper presents a method of body psychotherapy that facilitates the shift to living within the body as unitive consciousness, and that utilizes this subtle dimension of self-experience to heal deficits in contact with oneself and others resulting from childhood relational

trauma. This method, called the Realization Process(tm) (Blackstone, 1991, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2018), was developed by the author as a method of personal and relational healing and nondual spiritual realization. It includes a series of inward attunement exercises for living within one's body, and for deepening the innate capacities that are found in the body, such as our capacities for love, understanding, and sensual pleasure.

The Realization Process also includes an original method for releasing trauma-based constrictions from the body by focusing within these constrictions from a subtle channel that runs vertically through the innermost core of the torso, neck and head, known as *shushumna* in Hindu Yoga, and the central channel in Tibetan Buddhism. The Realization Process relational practices help couples heal, balance and deepen their contact with each other from this subtle vertical channel, and as the unitive consciousness that they can both attune to pervading both their bodies. The Realization Process practices for nondual realization uncover unitive consciousness pervading our internal and external experience at the same time. This aspect of the work helps people know themselves as whole and separate at the same time as they know themselves as unified with their surroundings. This paper will focus only on the embodiment and relational aspect of the Realization Process.

The description and benefits of inhabiting one's body that I present in this paper are based on my experience teaching the Realization Process. Exercises such as the ones included here, although generally taught as longer and more elaborate than these, have yielded consistent self-reports from students of feeling more authentic, unified, spontaneous, grounded, and self-confident, based on their increased contact with themselves (Blackstone, 2018).

## Context for the Realization Process

The Realization Process differs from the majority of other body psychotherapy approaches, such as Somatic Experiencing (Levine, 1997), in that instead of focusing directly on the nervous system as the main arena of trauma, the Realization Process focuses on the fascia. The fascia is everywhere in our body, surrounding every part of our physical anatomy, and serves as an interface between our mind and our body (Lesondak, 2017). We brace and constrict ourselves through the medium of the fascia in order to protect ourselves in relation to our environment. Over time, through repeated movements into constriction, we rigidify patterns of holding back our own behaviors that might evoke disapproval or punishment, such as our anger or tears, and we protect against situations of perceived danger and overwhelm in

our environment, such as parental criticism, shaming, and abuse. We may create patterns of limitation in our fascia in order to obstruct the impact of abrasive stimuli, such as loud noises or cigarette smoke. We may also mirror the patterns of constriction of important people in our early lives. We do this automatically as we open to the contact and warmth of other people, and as we close off those parts of ourselves that are not met with contact and warmth. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Blackstone, 2018.

Through the medium of the fascia, we can constrict ourselves anywhere where fascia is present within the interior space of our body. By inhabiting our whole body, we can experience shifts in the fascia that occur within the internal depths of our body in reaction to painful events, or in the recounting of those events for therapeutic purposes. We can also discern even small rigidities within the interior space of our body where fascial tissues have glued together to create rigidly held limitations in our functioning, such as our ability to feel emotion or experience sensual pleasure. It is possible, through the medium of the fascia, to limit our ability to love, for example, with a movement so small within the depths of the chest that it would not be visible to most observers or accessible to a person who was not deeply in contact with the internal space of their body. In this way, the Realization Process refines and can supplement those methods of somatic observation offered by Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (Ogden & Fisher, 2015).

By accessing and living within the subtle vertical energy channel (shushumna) that is experienced within the innermost core of the torso, neck, and head, we can achieve a focus that is deep and subtle enough to focus within the constrictions within the interior space of the body. When we focus within these constrictions, there is a spontaneous movement further into constriction, and then a release along the exact trajectory that was used to create the constriction. This precision often also yields access to the memories and intentions of the constriction and produces a lasting release of the pattern.

By providing a technique for uncovering the unitive ground of our being throughout our body, the Realization Process provides a container for the release of the

energy and tissue bound up in somatic constrictions. We do not just become more open, energetic, or self-aware as we release trauma-based constrictions. We become more whole, more internally unified. We release into the unitive ground of our being.

The Realization Process also differs from those therapeutic methods that view our basic nature as consisting of parts (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020; Howell, 2005). Schwartz (2020) wrote that he views the psyche as “a relational milieu that is populated by independent entities” (p. ix). As unitive consciousness, we experience our primary identity as undivided and unchanging. The constantly changing content of our experience flows through the unified ground of our being without changing this underlying experience of primary identity. We have an ongoing sense of internal coherence, a felt experience that we are basically one and the same being, even as our understanding, behavior, and depth of self-contact change over time.

The experience of ourselves as an ongoing, undivided internal wholeness means that we can tolerate greater intensities of pleasure and pain without fear of being overwhelmed or shattered. We can encompass the depth, intensity, and free flow of our perceptions, cognitions, emotions, and physical sensations. We can more easily tolerate the intensity of emotional release that often accompanies the release of traumatic wounding.

The Realization Process contributes to the body psychotherapy field a step-by-step method for arriving at embodiment that is not just self-awareness, not just physical sensation or instinct, but that uncovers a subtle primary dimension of self-attunement encompassing every facet of our experience.

## Inhabiting the Body

To live within the body is to be in contact with the internal space of the body. To inhabit our hands, for example, means that we are in contact with the whole internal space of our hands. To be in contact everywhere in our body produces an experience of internal wholeness, a unified ground of being (Blackstone, 2018).

## Embodying the Ground of Consciousness

*Here is a brief exercise to illustrate the shift from being aware of the body to being within it*

Rest your hands in your lap. Take a few moments to become aware of your hands. As you do this, you may experience sensations in your hands, or the temperature of your hands, how hot or cold they are. You may experience how relaxed or tense they are. Now enter into your hands, inhabit them. Feel that you are the internal space of your hands. Feel that you are living and present within your hands.

You may be able to feel the difference between these two experiences: aware of your hands and inhabiting them.

This contact is consciousness. When we inhabit our body, we feel that our consciousness is everywhere in our body. This is a tangible experience. We feel that we are made of consciousness. This is a shift from knowing ourselves abstractly, from having an idea about who we are that may change in different circumstances, to embodying an unchanging, non-conceptual ground of consciousness. As the embodiment of unitive consciousness, we know our basic identity experientially, rather than conceptually.

Inward contact with one's body is at the same time inward contact with our human capacities. For example, inward contact with the internal space of one's neck is contact with one's voice, one's potential to speak. If we constrict our neck and limit our ability to live within it, we limit the use of our voice. Inward contact with the internal space of one's chest is contact with one's capacity for emotional responsiveness. When we constrict and limit our embodiment of our chest, we also limit the depth and fluidity of our emotional responsiveness. For this reason, inhabiting the body is crucial for recovering from early psychological wounding. For it is these innate capacities of our being that we constrict in reaction to overwhelmingly painful or confusing events in our lives.

We cannot suppress either our perception of the world around us, or our own responses to it, except by clamping down on our own body. For example, we cannot keep from crying, except by tightening the muscles in our chest, neck, and around our eyes. We cannot shut out the sound of our parents fighting, except by tightening the anatomy of our hearing. For this reason, we cannot recover ourselves, the depth of our emotional responsiveness, for example, or the acuity of our senses, without freeing ourselves from these bodily constrictions.

These rigid somatic configurations obstruct our ability to inhabit the internal space of the body. They therefore diminish our experience of contact with ourselves and others, and limit both our internal coherence and our capacity for intimacy. In the Realization Process, the process of accessing and finally inhabiting the internal space of our body facilitates our ability to discern and release these constrictions and regain the freedom and depth of our innate capacities.

As an antidote to the denial of our reality that is often an aspect of childhood trauma, the free flow of our experience through the unchanging ground of our being can help us to know what we really feel, really perceive, really know.

As the embodiment of unitive consciousness, we experience no distinction between our body and our being. We experience that we are the internal space of our body. Unitive consciousness is experienced as stillness. But it is not emptiness; it is not hollow. It feels like our own presence. It feels like the deepest, most direct contact that we can have with our own being.

As unitive consciousness, we can experience all of the parts and aspects of ourselves at the same time. We can experience our legs and our head at the same time, for example, because we experience the internal space of our whole body at once. When we inhabit both our head and our chest, we can think and feel at the same time. Our thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and perceptions occur as a single, integrated experience.

In one of the main Realization Process exercises, we practice inhabiting the body, part by part, and then inhabiting the whole body at once (Blackstone, 2007). Even this simple process of embodiment has much to contribute to psychological health. Through the cultivation of living within one's body, we are able to experience increased self-possession, and as a result, increased self-confidence. The experience of having internal volume, of "taking up space" in the body, can help us feel less overwhelmed by other people. It can help us to stay in contact with our own perceptions and needs in relationship with other people. The felt experience of one's own being can also engender self-love.

When we inhabit our body, we uncover qualities of our being that appear to be innate, since we discover them rather than construct them. We can experience the actual feel of our intelligence and understanding within our head, the quality of our voice within our throat, the feel of our love within our chest, the quality of power within our midsection, the quality of sexuality and, for those who identify as having a gender, the quality of gender (as a feeling, not an idea) within our pelvis and genital area. Uncovering these qualities also supports our recovery of compassion for ourselves. It becomes harder to tell ourselves that we are stupid, for example, when we actually feel our intelligence. It is hard to dislike ourselves when we actually feel that there is love in our chest, even when we are alone. We feel less intimidated or diminished by other people when we embody a quality of power.

## Clinical Illustrations

I worked with a woman who was severely depressed and had made several suicide attempts. She described herself as "garbage" and as "damaged goods." Since she knew many Hebrew blessings from her religious upbringing, I suggested that she take a moment to bless each part of her body as she inhabited it. After several months of practice, she seemed to glow from inside. She began to sit up straighter, even though we had never mentioned posture. And she began to make better choices in her life. Of course, we also had many conversations about the painful events that she had endured as a child, and a warm relationship developed between us as I listened to her. But it was after several months of practicing the embodiment exercise that she told me she had suddenly realized that she was "too precious to throw away."



The importance of inhabiting the body is often ignored because we, as a culture, are accustomed to the state of disembodiment. In general, we do not question it. Where do we live, if not in the body? The answer is that we live in front of ourselves, and above ourselves, or in just a part of ourselves.

Recently a man in a workshop I was teaching asked me what I meant by the instruction: inhabit your feet. The instruction had no meaning for him. I asked him where he lived in his body. He had to think about this, it seemed like an odd question to him, but finally he pointed to his head. I suggested that he take a moment to experience what it felt like to live in his head, not just to be aware of his surrounding from his head, but actually to be living within the internal space of his head. It took a moment, but he was able to feel himself living in his head. "Now let yourself have this same experience in your feet," I said. This took even a little longer, but he did come down and enter into his feet, so that there was, visibly, as lively a quality in his feet as there was in his head. When he entered into his feet, he also began to inhabit his legs, and his lower torso. This internal foundation allowed him to soften in his chest. Over the course of the workshop, he began to feel, and to look, alive in his whole body. He reported that he felt much stronger, and at the same time, somehow softer when he lived in his whole body, and that it changed his sense of relationship with everything around him.

## Embodiment in Relationship

When we inhabit our body, we not only experience our internal wholeness as unitive consciousness, we also experience unitive consciousness pervading our environment. We experience that we are made of consciousness, and that everyone and everything around us is also made of the same one ground of consciousness. As an undivided ground, unitive consciousness appears to pervade and coincide with the substance of everything that we perceive, so that everything appears to be both empty and substantial at the same time.

Although I have not found references to this experience in the psychotherapy literature, there are many in the Asian spiritual literature. Muller-Ortega (1989) wrote, "No longer do finite objects appear as separate and limited structures; rather, the silent and translucent consciousness out of which all things are composed surfaces and becomes visible as the true reality of perceived objects" (p. 182).

This pervasive, unified consciousness provides a sense of continuity between ourselves and other people, and enhanced contact and "mutual transparency" when the other people have also attuned to unitive consciousness (Blackstone, 2011).

The internal space of the body can experience contact with the internal space of other bodies (Blackstone, 2011). Contact with other bodies depends on our contact with the internal space of our own body. If two people both inhabit their hands, the contact they will feel if they touch each other's hands will be more vibrant and intense than if they were not inhabiting their own hands. They will each experience the contact within the internal depth of their own hands. This is true for any part of our body that we inhabit. We can experience contact with the internal depth of another person's body and being from within the internal depth of ourselves.

The contact between inhabited bodies does not necessarily require physical touch. It can even be felt across distance. If two people each inhabit the internal space of their chest, for example, they can experience contact with each other within the internal depth of their chests, across the distance of a room.

This exercise will produce an automatic connection between your love and the other person's, a connection of love with love (Blackstone, 2011). This is not an emotional response to each other, and not a mirroring or entrainment of each other's emotional state. It is even more subtle than energetic resonance, although it includes and can facilitate that level of connection and exchange as well. Rather, this is the subtle contact of the ground of one's own being with the ground of another

## Meeting in Unitive Consciousness

*This exercise needs to be practiced by two people at the same time.*

Stand or sit across the room from another person. Each of you inhabit the internal space of your chest. This means to experience yourself as present within the internal space of your whole chest. Next, from within your own chest, without moving from your own chest, find the space inside each other's chest.

*You can take this contact exercise a step further.*

As you just did, each of you inhabit your own chest. Next, attune to the feeling of love within your chest. Without moving from within your own chest, let yourself experience the feeling of your own love in your own chest and the other person's love in their chest at the same time.

person's being. It is an attunement to the unmoving, but quality-rich ground of unitive consciousness pervading one's own body and the bodies of other people.

This exercise can be practiced with any part of our body and any quality of our being, such as the qualities of understanding, voice, power, and sexuality or gender. I often do this and other similar relational attunement exercises with couples to help them feel where they easily connect with each other, or where there is some obstruction in their mutual contact. Then these obstructions, whether they be caused by chronic constriction in one of the partner's bodies, or by specific issues between the partners, can be understood, released, and resolved. Their mutual attunement to the pervasive, unified ground will itself contribute to the release of the barriers to the contact between them.

It is important to note that this is not a projection of oneself (of one's focus or energy) into the other, which would be felt as invasive. Nor is it a merging of oneself with another, which would mean loss of contact with oneself. When we meet another person in the pervasive space of unitive consciousness, we do not leave the internal space of our own body in any way. To find oneself and another person at the same time within this space is a more subtle attunement than projecting or losing oneself in another person.

This is a contact rather than a perception or information-gathering exercise. It may facilitate our ability to see and feel, to some extent, the specific emotions or sensations that another person is experiencing, even within the internal space of their body. This can be thought of as a refinement of theory of mind, which usually relies on more superficial cues, such as facial expression and bodily posture, rather than on the movement of feeling within the body, to reveal another person's experience (Baron-Cohen, 2000).

Body psychotherapy modalities such as Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (Ogden & Fisher, 2015) and Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011) have made huge strides in the understanding and treatment of attachment disorders by helping people closely observe their somatic responses in relation to other people. The relational exercises of the Realization Process contribute to this self-observation by allowing us to perceive and understand the ways we obstruct the pervasive space of unitive consciousness when we attune to it pervading our own body and the body of another person (Blackstone, 2011). These exercises can also help heal relational difficulties by teaching a way to experience intimate connection with another person without losing inward attunement to our own authentic responses and needs. We neither have to cut off contact with others in order to protect the integrity of our own existence, nor give up our own connection to ourselves in order to experience intimacy with others.

## Unitive Consciousness in the Therapeutic Relationship

When we embody unitive consciousness, we experience ourselves as both whole within our individual form and as part of the spacious expanse of consciousness pervading our own form and our environment at the same time. This experience can enhance the effectiveness of the psychotherapeutic process in several ways. As the embodiment of unitive consciousness, we are present, open, and responsive to our client at the same time as we are contained and separate. This allows the client to feel fully received by the therapist without feeling intruded upon in their self-exploration. Put simply, they may feel more space to be themselves, to focus inwardly, and to access the memories and emotions that they need to uncover for their healing (Blackstone, 2018).

Unitive consciousness also facilitates the free, unobstructed flow of our responses. This fluidity of responsiveness, and lack of self-manipulation or agenda on the part of the therapist, can help the client feel safe to be more authentic themselves, to more fully reveal themselves both to the therapist and to the mirror of their own self-inquiry.

The spontaneity that arises as we allow our responses to flow also appears to facilitate the spontaneous emergence of the healing process. It facilitates the functioning of more subtle phenomena such as synchronicity and intuition (Blackstone, 2006). Both the client's insights and the therapist's guidance seem to arise directly out of the pervasive space of unitive consciousness with less effort and error.

The capacity of embodied consciousness to connect across distance with the internal space of other bodies refines our ability not only to connect deeply with other people, but to know, to some extent, what other people are experiencing. This knowing is more subtle than the experience of entrainment. Instead of feeling another person's emotions in our own body, as many sensitive people do, we can feel them "over there" in the other person's body. In the Realization Process, we call this type of perception across distance a "see-feel." It is not intuition, but rather a subtle range of our normal senses, and seems to yield a mixture of tactile and visual information. It is a kind of "trans-interoception." Almost everyone that I have trained to teach the Realization Process has found they have access to this ability. It seems mystifying at first – how can we possibly feel what is going on within someone's body across the room without mirroring it ourselves? What sense is that? But apparently, it is a subtle capacity of our senses that we can access as unitive consciousness.

This "see-feel" is a refinement of our natural human capacity for empathy, our ability to know, "what the inner life of man is, what we ourselves and what others feel and think" (Kohut, 1977, p. 306). As it requires that we know ourselves as the unified ground of unitive

consciousness pervading our own and the other person's body, it also requires that we remain within our own body. For this reason, it is not an invasive energetic movement into the other person's body or space. It also means that we can clearly feel our own responses to the other person, whether it be an answering grief, or compassion or aversion, without becoming the other person. Without running the other person's feelings through our own body, we can more clearly experience the distinction between the other person's experience and our own responses.

We can also sometimes experience when, where, and how the pervasive ground of unitive consciousness is obstructed in our relationship with our clients. Where the pervasive space is open, we are in contact with each other, and where it is obstructed, we are not in contact. Just as with intimate partners, this obstruction may be caused by areas of chronic disembodiment, based on childhood trauma, in the client's or the therapist's body, or by areas of temporary disembodiment/constriction in reaction to obstacles in their specific relationship. This gives us a new pathway in which to explore a client's responses to the person and behavior of the therapist, or the superimposition of the client's earlier, formative relationships onto the therapist. In the same way, we can track our own obstructions to the pervasive space in relation to our clients, and better understand even our most subtle responses to them.

In the Realization Process, the direction of healing is toward both a more complete experience of internal wholeness and a more complete experience of self-oth-

er oneness. We combine the embodiment exercises with a method for releasing trauma-based constrictions from the body, along with verbal dialogue to understand and encompass the client's painful past and its effect on their present life. As the client is able to live more fully within their body, the pervasive consciousness between the client and the embodied therapist becomes increasingly open.

## Conclusion

By inhabiting our body, we heal the rift between body and mind, between perception, cognition, emotion, and physical sensation, and between self and other. Whenever we inhabit our body, we are both in contact with ourselves and open and available to the present moment in our environment. In the internal depth of our body, we access an experience of unified consciousness pervading our body and environment. This ground feels like our own true nature, the basis of our authentic connection with ourselves, with our environment, and with other people.

Understanding and facilitating the experience of embodiment as inhabiting the body can enhance the healing potential of the clinical encounter. If we view the therapist's art as maturing in the direction of empathic attunement and close attention to subtle, unspoken aspects of the therapeutic encounter, then it is important to extend our attention to the quality and configuration of the embodied contact between ourselves and our clients.



**Judith Blackstone**, PhD, developed the Realization Process, a method of embodied psychological and relational healing and nondual spiritual awakening. She teaches the Realization Process worldwide and online, in workshops and teacher certification trainings. She is a licensed mental health counselor in New York and was in private practice as a psychotherapist for thirty-five years. She is the author of *Trauma and the Unbound Body: The Healing Power of Fundamental Consciousness*, *Belonging Here*, *The Enlightenment Process*, *The Intimate Life*, *The Subtle Self*, and *The Empathic Ground*.

Email: [judithblackstone@gmail.com](mailto:judithblackstone@gmail.com)



## REFERENCES

- Almaas, A. H. (1988).** *Pearl beyond price*. Berkeley, CA: Diamond Books.
- Assagioli, R. (1977).** *Psychosynthesis*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Baron-Cohen, S. (2000).** Theory of mind and autism: A fifteen-year review. In S. Baron Cohen, H. Tager-Flusberg, & D. Cohen (Eds.). *Understanding other minds*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (pp. 3-20). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Blackstone, J. (1991).** *The subtle self*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Press.
- Blackstone, J. (2006).** Intersubjectivity and nonduality in the psychotherapeutic relationship. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 38 (1), 2006: pp. 25-40.
- Blackstone, J. (2007).** *The empathic ground: Intersubjectivity and nonduality in the psychotherapeutic process*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Blackstone, J. (2008).** *The enlightenment process*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon Books.
- Blackstone, J. (2011).** *The intimate life*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Blackstone, J. (2012).** *Belonging here*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Blackstone, J. (2018).** *Trauma and the unbound body*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Duckworth, D. (2017).** Grounds of Buddha-nature in Tibet. *Critical Review for Buddhist Studies*, no. 21: pp. 109-136.
- Fogel, A. (2020).** Three states of embodied self-awareness. *International Body Psychotherapy Journal*, Volume 19, Number 1, Spring/Summer 2020: 39-49.
- Gyamtso, T. (2001).** *Progressive stages of meditation on emptiness* (S. Hookham, Trans.). Auckland, New Zealand: Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal Publications.
- Hinton, D. (2020).** *China root*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Hookham, S. (1991).** *The Buddha within*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Howell, E. (2005).** *The dissociative mind*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Josipovic, Z. (2014).** Neural correlates of nondual awareness in meditation. *Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci.* 1307: 9-18.
- Josipovic, Z., & Miscovic, V. (2020).** Nondual awareness and minimal phenomenal experience. *Front. Psychol.* 11: 2087. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02087
- Keleman, S. (1979).** *Somatic reality*. Berkeley, CA: Center Press.
- Kern, M. (2001).** *Wisdom of the body*. London: Thorsons.
- Kohut, H. (1977).** *Restoration of the self*. New York, NY: International Universities Press.
- Lesondak, D. (2017).** *Fascia: What it is and why it matters*. Scotland, UK: Handspring Pub. Ltd.
- Levine, P. (1997).** *Waking the tiger*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Press.
- Levine, P. (2010).** *In an unspoken voice*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Press.
- Lowen, A. (1976).** *Bioenergetics*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Maslow, A. (1994).** *Religions, values, and peak experiences*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Mitchell, S., & Black, M. (1995).** *Freud and beyond*. New York: Basic Books.
- Muller-Ortega, P. (1989).** *The Triadic Heart of Shiva*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nishida, A. Kitaro (1979).** *Complete works of Nishida Kitaro* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Nishitani, K. (1982).** *Religion and nothingness*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Ogden, P., & Fisher, J. (2015).** *Sensorimotor psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Porges, S. (2011).** *The polyvagal theory*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Rabjam, L. (2001).** *The precious treasury of the basic space of phenomena* (R. Barron, Trans.). Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing.

- Read, H., Fordham, M., McGuire, W., & Adler, G. (eds). (1968).** *C G Jung: Archetypes and the collective unconscious* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (R. Hull, Trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press/Bollingen Series XX.
- Reich, W. (1945).** *Character analysis* (V. Carfagno, Trans.). New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Sankara (1989).** *Upadesa sahasri* (S. Jagadananda, Trans.). Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math.
- Schwartz, R., & Sweezy, M. (2020).** *Internal family systems* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Tolle, E. (2008).** *A new earth* (reprint ed.). Global: Penguin Books.
- Wilber, K. (1980).** *The atman project* – Wheaton, IL: Quest Books
- Yeshe, L. (1998).** *The bliss of inner fire*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.
- Yuasa, Y. (1987).** *The body: Toward an Eastern mind-body theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press.