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**Healing the Trauma of the Body/Mind Split through
Accessing Instinctual Gut Feelings: A Protocol for
Facilitating the Somatic Reflection Process (SRP)**

by Silver Love

To my surprise last spring, an article titled “Gut Almighty”, which briefly explained the latest emotion theories on how intuition comes from the gut, was featured in *Psychology Today* (Flora, 2007) at the same time that my article on gut instinctual somatic responses and healthy life choices was published in *Somatics* Spring 07 issue (Love, 2007). I wondered if two articles published on the gut in one month might surely be a record, as the gut has not seemed to have so much attention in the media since Gershon’s (1998) book acclaiming it through his neurological research to have a mind of its own.

In the months I awaited the publication of my article, I reread Gershon’s (1998) book and it was again delightful to me to read that a scientific investigation actually uncovered evidence that the gut has a separate capacity to generate and record vital responses and functions as what he calls our *second brain*. Gershon outlines the biological functions of the gut as being its own intelligent brain and having its own vitality that is in communication with, but not dependent upon, the head brain. As I combed through his book and shared emails with my colleague, Robert Sterling, it became quite clear to us that Gershon’s work was supportive of the clinical findings in the work we did as guidance counselors in the 70’s. Our work centered around assisting people to assess the meaning of their experiences through an awareness on the empty-full instinctual feeling responses that they identified in the gut region of the body. We found with

the people that we counseled that these gut responses were linked to the dynamic struggles of balancing the two needs of the person for acceptance and for feeling in control of one's own responses (the freedom to respond naturally), and that these two needs were instinctual and necessary to fulfill on a moment to moment basis for continued vitality of the person. Similar to Gershon's findings, it was also our conclusion that the gut area of the body contains a feeling response center that holds a relationship to the thinking processes of the person, but is a separate response center from the thinking head responses and certainly not dependent upon it.

Feeling inspired by Gershon's (1998) work and the attention recently given to the gut in the literature and media, I decided to write a second article for *Somatics* that further explains the specific technique of the Somatic Reflection Process (SRP). The intention of this article is to answer the questions about the process that I have been asked in the past year by many friends and colleagues who read my first article last Spring on the findings of Robert Sterling's and my somatic work as guidance counselors. I am including both the method and a protocol for facilitating the SRP, as well as a brief summary of a recent research study using the SRP protocol presented (Love, 2005).

An Overview of the Somatic Reflection Process (SRP)

Perls (1969) found that for people to make lasting changes in their awareness of themselves, they needed to explore the feelings in their body and to bring their awareness into the here and now. In an attempt to stay in the here and now, Robert Sterling and I developed the Somatic Reflection Process as a feeling process that emphasizes awareness in the body. For this reason, it is important in this process that the person who is reflecting holds privately the details of the experience being reflected upon in the mind while turning the awareness toward the inner experience of feelings in the body. Such a reflection on the somatic instinctual feelings in the body, without the emphasis on the story or details of the life lived, is a reflection method that is the key to discovering for the first time the real meaning of experience for the person.

Woodman and Mellick (2000) stress the importance of listening to the body in order to get in touch with the deep cellular memory that it holds. The stories and details may be helpful in understanding the environmental factors that the person is experiencing and the person's perceptions of the environment, but they are external to the person's experience and are not feeling memories stored in the body. We found that it is important to help the person discover the

impact of the experience upon them within their body rather than the details of the experience because that is what is still felt in the present. It is the impact of the experience — the emotional feelings and sensations in our bodies — that is the painful part of the experience that we often try to avoid remembering and hold in our bodies (Perls, 1969).

While centering the awareness on inner feelings, we asked people to reflect backwards in time and find an earlier time in their lives when they felt the same way. Our experience in counseling was similar to what Janoe and Janoe (1979) found in counseling people dealing with emotional feelings arising from present day issues. They observed that emotionally charged issues triggered unresolved feelings from the past. By expressing the feelings around the unresolved issue and reflecting on these feelings, backwards in time, they discovered that people found the sources of their confusion and suffering felt in the present. These emotions were triggered in the present experience to signal to people that they needed to reflect upon the past issues in their lives to free themselves from their past unresolved feelings that were still burdening their lives. And these feelings, rather than the details of external events, seemed to be the accurate record of the impact of life experience.

We often found that if people reflected on an emotion in the present — like guilt or fear — and traced it back to an earlier time in their life, it was originally experienced in connection with a profound presence of emptiness on the gut level. For many people this emptiness was held deep within the body's memory. In the present, the emptiness that our clients felt often seemed to be unconscious, similar to sensations and emotions that are cut off from awareness during trauma (Levine, 1997). Often through reflection on somatic feelings, people became aware that the emptiness they were feeling related to the fact that their needs for acceptance and for the freedom to respond authentically were not being met at that earlier time in their lives. That awareness of the lack of fulfillment of these needs had been stored in their bodies on an unconscious instinctual gut feeling level of emptiness.

Disque and Bitter (2004) stress the importance of connecting the awareness of the original emotional feeling experience stored in the body to the present thinking capacities, in order to reorganize the person's thinking about themselves. Through reflection back to earlier times in life with their counselees, they found that it became clear to people that a confused way of thinking about oneself often originated with a direct external view or judgment of who they were from authorities in their lives.

Through becoming aware of the inner life using the Somatic Reflection Process, we found that people learned to reevaluate their judgments about themselves that were based on inaccurate assessments in their past. This allowed them to feel acceptance of who they had been and who they were in the present. Through the Somatic Reflection Process, people gained new insights into how they could have served their own needs in a more effective manner and began to understand how they came to be confused by an external view of themselves that did not accurately describe the meaning of their behavior. While people began to take full responsibility for their lives, they remained free of blaming themselves for the actions that they took or did not take. With this feeling of acceptance and the awareness of inner needs, people expressed that they felt free again to make decisions in their lives that they felt were healthy.

Facilitating the Somatic Reflection Process

There are three ways that the Somatic Reflection Process is facilitated. It is facilitated with another person acting as a *facilitator*, an *imaginary facilitator* (imaged by the reflector) or an *inner facilitator* (through an inner dialogue between the instinctual responses and one's own ego). The following is an explanation of the initial method of facilitation, that with another person acting as a *facilitator*. Later, as the *facilitator* becomes internalized, the person may successfully use the process with an internal *imaginary facilitator* or *inner facilitator*.

The Somatic Reflection Process initially begins with a *facilitator* who guides the reflector through the process by asking a series of questions designed to assist the reflector in identifying an unresolved issue in the present life that has a strong emotional or somatic feeling attached to it. The reflector is guided to describe the feeling and the personal impact of the issue and then to go back in time to earlier felt memories of the same feeling.

This process is similar to Gendlin's (1981) technique of guiding the person through focusing as a method of centering on the felt sense in the body. The SRP is different from focusing in that the facilitator is always mindful of the empty/full feelings as a gut level response of the reflector and assumes that the reflector has two levels of feelings — emotional feelings and gut feelings, with the gut feelings as instinctual responses. Using the protocol of the Somatic Reflection Process, the *facilitator* assists the reflector in staying aware of feelings in the body, and in exploring the levels of feelings and the earliest memory of these feeling. The *facilitator* asks questions that guide the reflector in looking at the inner needs at the time of the early feeling

memory and in identifying how those needs were met or not met. The reflector is encouraged to stay with the awareness of the feelings in the body to make these assessments.

The questions asked by the *facilitator* are designed to guide the reflector in examining how assessments were made of the reflector's behavior and what, if any, external authorities were involved in those assessments. The *facilitator* guides the process, but it is the reflector who makes meaning out of the experience. It has been said by Jung that people rarely integrate what someone else tells them (Hannah, 1981), and interpretations will probably only be accepted if they come from the person's own awareness.

In the final stages of the Somatic Reflection Process, the *facilitator* guides the reflector in using the awareness of the early somatic memory and the meaning of that experience to look at the present unresolved issue. During this final stage, the reflector generally will voluntarily make the connection to the conflict that has emerged in the present and an old one that relates to the same inner needs that were buried in the unconscious during early childhood. At the completion of this final stage, I have found that the reflector often indicates feeling more in the present moment and sensing that a burden of misconceptions from the past has been lifted.

Being Attuned as a Facilitator: Empty Mind — Full Belly

In order to be attuned with the Somatic Reflection Process, the *facilitator* must learn to listen to one's own instinctual feelings in the body. Prendergast (2003a) posits a similar idea concerning therapists who perform non-dual psychotherapy. "Therapists will not be able to invite their clients to experience the truth of their being or the intimate touch of awakens unless they have done so themselves" (p. 16). Krystal (2003) suggests that it is essential that therapists listen with empty minds that have no agenda or judgment to change anything about the clients. By bringing to an empty mind the awareness of what the clients are describing, therapists can experience the issue without interjecting their own personal judgments that may change the meaning of the experience.

My colleague and I propose a similar view, in which the *facilitator* brings an empty mind and centers upon the gut feeling. The *facilitator* must enter into the process prior to meeting with the reflector, and come to a feeling of fullness in the gut by working through any felt unresolved issues using the Somatic Reflection Process. It is our experience that *empty mind — full belly* is the state of being that people experience when their instinctual needs are met for both acceptance

and freedom. The facilitator must be able to clearly be in touch with inner somatic responses and be capable of staying aware of the authentic self within, experiencing a feeling of fullness in the belly. If the facilitator is experiencing a feeling of emptiness, it is important that time is taken to care for the needs of oneself as a facilitator before caring for the needs of another person. Hunt (2003) points out that therapists must feel the connection to the inner self or they can't hold the space for others to experience it. She further posits that if therapists are separated and split in their awareness of their minds and bodies, they cannot invite non-separation of the truth of their being for others.

Borrowing Gershon's (1998) model of the second brain, another way of viewing the importance of the state of *empty mind — full belly* is that when our head brain is calm and void of external judgments about what it should or should not be thinking, we are at our best for it to communicate with our gut brain; and conversely, when our gut is full and satisfied of its needs, we are at our best for it to communicate with our head brain. It is in the *empty mind — full belly* state that our body/mind connection is optimum.

At the same time that the facilitator holds an awareness of *empty mind — full belly* in the background of consciousness, there is the awareness in the foreground of consciousness of the interaction with the reflector. By centering awareness on gut feelings, the facilitator's own body can be used to understand how a reflector may be feeling. I call this process *somatic gauging*. Robert Sterling and I often found that we got ideas or clues of what was important to ask the reflector as we centered on how we felt in our own bodies — particularly as we centered on the gut feelings of emptiness or fullness. The intuition of the facilitator seems to be directly tied to the awareness of gut feelings. Holding the *empty mind—full belly* state in the background of awareness, the facilitator may ultimately experience an *empty mind — fully belly* state in the *somatic gauging* process concerning the feeling state of the reflector. This generally occurs as the reflector becomes aware of gut level feelings that are related to early experiences and begins to be mindful of an inner awareness of instinctual needs. The awareness of the feeling of connectedness and integration of the authentic self that has been held in the background by the facilitator then moves to the foreground for both the facilitator and for the reflector as well (Krystal, 2003). Prendergast (2003b) calls this process *sacred mirroring* (p. 89). It is a form of mirroring in which therapists stay in awareness of their own authentic selves, or “timeless dimension of being” (Prendergast, 2003a, p. 13), and share this with their clients. He views this

experience of sacred mirroring as supporting the “phenomenon of a consciously shared field of awareness” (p. 13) and as the state in which the deepest healing response occurs.

When I am aware through *somatic gauging* that both the reflector and I are experiencing this state of *empty mind — full belly*, I have often experienced a numinous feeling (Storr, 1983), or a feeling of awe. The numinous is the illuminated sense of the experience in an intense and uplifting way. Prendergast (2003b) describes this same numinous quality with clients when he experiences sacred mirroring. I have often felt that this experience of the numinous during the Somatic Reflection Process is an indication that both the facilitator and reflector have experienced the healing process. Healing, the feeling of wholeness and the integration of the link between the body awareness and mind awareness, has come to both the facilitator and reflector through the connection to a greater whole, the larger quantum field, that is experienced with the sharing of the authentic Self.

The Somatic Reflection Process Protocol

Six years ago, a friend of mine, Jim, was in a car accident and suffered severe head injuries that rendered him traumatized with confusion and long-term memory losses. Unable to remember how to perform his skilled job as a builder or draw from his vast past experiences in decision-making on the job, he was experiencing a withdrawal from his profession, causing him both economic hardships and personal esteem problems. It was now three months after his accident, he was not recovering from these problems, and his life was tumbling on a downhill slope, with a loss of his long-term relationship and the prospect of facing homelessness without a means of support. While I had facilitated hundreds of people using the Somatic Reflection Process working as a guidance counselor with students who experienced homelessness, war trauma, economical disadvantages, and drug addiction problems, I really couldn't remember working with anyone who had as a severe physical problem as Jim was experiencing. But because he came to me for help and it was clear to me that he didn't have anyone else to turn to, I decided that we had nothing to lose by giving the Somatic Reflection Process a chance and using it to explore a new realm of healing possibilities with him.

I met with Jim once a week for three hours and we began reflecting on his somatic feelings around the issues of confusion and loss in his present situation. Initially, he couldn't understand how reflecting on feelings relating to the impact of the past could change the overwhelming

challenges and difficult feelings in the present. But soon after he began the process of reflecting somatically backwards in time, he was amazed that although he couldn't remember things that he wished he could remember concerning his present life, he was able to access his feelings concerning unresolved past experiences and an incredible amount of details around the feelings concerning his early childhood. He was able to access his feelings from early childhood of the fear of being unworthy and inferior, and of feeling empty and alone. And he identified these as the same feelings that were being triggered in the present situation.

Each session we explored his feelings using the Somatic Reflection Process and he continued to report feeling less and less confused, more hopeful, and after five sessions he could identify a feeling of fullness in his gut and some memories of his job skills returning. On his eighth session, he told me that he had just begun a new job in his field of building construction and was making more money than he made before the accident (and actually more money than I was making at my job, I might add) and having more responsibilities than he had ever had in his past building career. He seemed confident and more self-aware and expressive than I had ever know him to be in the five years of our friendship, so I asked him if he thought we had completed our work together for now. He agreed to a time off period and four months later, I saw him and he was not only full of energy and vibrant with excitement about his new job, but he was quite happy with a new love relationship by his side.

Would Jim have recovered just as well on his own without being facilitated through the Somatic Reflection Process? I can't say for sure, but I did see a remarkable transformation in him as he accessed and discovered his somatic feelings and became more and more aware of his inner world, expressing greater and greater understanding of his inner instinctual needs and compassion for himself and others. His access to the recovery of the memory of past experiences, from which he could now draw upon to make decisions in both this personal and working life, had been not only restored, but also further developed. It seems that it was through the reflection process on somatic feelings that he restored the right hemisphere networks of his brain that are responsible for organizing and accessing learning experiences that may then be felt on the gut level and are what may be commonly called "gut feelings" (Cozolino, 2007, p. 73) as intuitions that are used in the decision-making process. I hypothesized that the Somatic Reflection Process supported him in *rewiring his consciousness* or configuring the combinations

of strings of synapses to make the link between his body and mind more functional than even before the accident (Rothschild, 2000).

This exciting experience with Jim was the foundation for my passion to write the protocol for the Somatic Reflection Process and to begin a formal research study to explore the value of the Somatic Reflection Process (Love, 2005). The following is a protocol of questions and responses for facilitating the Somatic Reflection Process. Although the questions are described in sequence, they are not necessarily sequential. It is important to view this protocol as a flexible guide and not feel limited to asking each question in the order it appears.

1. Can you identify the most unresolved issue in your life and center upon the feeling in your body that accompanies it? Where is this felt in your body?
2. Now notice what the issue is and the people involved in the issue that relate to your feelings. Are there any faces you see or sense? How do you feel in relation to these faces? Where is this feeling in your body?
3. How would you describe the feelings that you have concerning this issue? Please keep the details of the issue in your own mind as you describe the feelings.
4. Can you identify the feeling you described as being accompanied by a somatic feeling of emptiness or fullness in the hara (stomach) or solar plexus? If so, describe this feeling in your own words. (Occasionally, a reflector will start the process out with an awareness of a gut level feeling, rather than an emotional level feeling. In this case, it is only important to have them keep with the gut feeling they have described. Also if the reflector can not get in touch with their gut feelings at this step, have them go back and center on the original emotional feeling they described in #3. In other words, assist the reflector in going to as deep a somatic feeling awareness as possible, but it is not necessary to go any deeper than the reflector is willing to voluntarily go.)
5. Now, go back in time and remember when you felt this way before. You may wish to only go back only a few years ago, but this is up to you. Just see where it takes you. Now describe the feeling again and look again at the issue to see if it is the same issue as the one you started with. Describe it again. How does it feel in your body?
6. Now go back in time a little further and identify a previous time you felt this same feeling. Repeat directions for describing the feeling again as in #5, going back further and further slowly in time.

7. Continue to go back in time and repeat #6. Repeat again until you get to the earliest remembered experience of this same feeling and begin to have the reflector explore what the inner needs were at that time. Can you identify a need that you feel at this time in this experience for acceptance or a need for freedom and being in control of your own responses? Can you describe the feelings you had at this time? What do you feel in your hara and solar plexus? Do you have a feeling of emptiness or fullness that relates to these needs you described as being met or not met?

These last two questions of #7 are just for those who have not yet gotten to the awareness of their feelings in their hara and solar plexus. Often people do not get in touch with their gut feelings until the earliest remembered experience in childhood. Until that time they may only be able to center their awareness on emotional feelings like guilt or fear.

8. Are there external judgments placed upon you at this time around this experience from authorities and other significant people in your life —parents, teachers? What do you decide about yourself from these judgments? How does this feel in your body? Are you aware of your inner needs at this time concerning this issue? What do you decide about why you have these needs and feelings? From an awareness of your inner needs, do you have a different view of yourself now in reflection than you did then?

9. Now come back up in time and remember the original unresolved issue with which you began the process. Ask yourself if the awareness of seeing the past issue applies to this situation in any way. Can you see a similarity in terms of an inner awareness of needs? Can you see a relationship between this earliest feeling experience and the one in the present? Does it help to look at the present situation from the view of your inner needs from the past experience?

10. Can you describe how you feel now in your gut.

Cooking with the Somatic Reflection Process

A few years ago, I tried to make a fresh coconut cake using my late grandmother's old family favorite recipe. When I finished the baking process, my cake looked pretty much like I remember hers to have looked. But as I closed my eyes and sank into tasting the first bite, I realized something was missing. It just wasn't quite like hers and I was sure that she had forgotten to write something vital down in the recipe. Later I was talking to my mother (who was 83 at the time) and she informed me that I had done everything essential in baking it, but that granny's

many successfully delicious cakes were all in the way she whipped it up and had an unusually light-handed touch in cooking. This advice seemed vague to me and although no one has complained about my cakes, I've never been able to quite replicate hers.

It has occurred to me that following a protocol to engage in a process that is fluid, intangible, and feeling oriented like the Somatic Reflection Process, poses many of the same challenges as my cake-baking experience following my granny's recipe. While I am sure that through experience each of us develops our own "light-handed touch" for success in somatic work, a few insights on how to use the Somatic Reflection Process and elaborations of the technique might be found useful, and I would like to share some with you from my experience as a facilitator.

Identifying the Unresolved Issue and Feeling

It is often necessary for the facilitator to take some time with questions #1 through #4 in the protocol. If people do not have an unresolved issue that they become aware of quickly, the facilitator needs to define for them what is meant by the term *an unresolved issue*. The facilitator might say, "It is an issue that is getting in the way of living your life fully and happily, and if this one thing could be resolved, life would be much better, much easier." Or it might be easy enough to identify an unresolved issue as one that the person holds difficult or confusing feelings around.

The facilitator asks the reflector to identify the unresolved issue and hold the awareness of the people and the situation in the reflector's own mind. The facilitator asks the reflector to center on just the feeling that arises as this issue or situation is thought about. If there has been no engagement in previous body/mind awareness depth-work and if there is no conscious emotional disturbance, the reflector may not have an accurate idea about what is meant by the word *feelings*. When many people are asked to describe the feelings that accompany an issue, they often will describe the story or details or a logical assessment of the value of the experience. It is important to spend some time assisting the reflector to find what the impact of the issue is and how it feels in the body. The facilitator needs to ask the reflector often, "Where do you feel this in your body?" The facilitator needs to have the reflector both say in words and point to the area of the body where the feeling occurs. Once the reflector understands that feelings are located in the body, thinking is experienced in the mind and the details of a story are what is happening outside of one's body, somatic reflection on body felt senses and feelings may begin.

I have found that there are some people who are immediately aware of their instinctual feelings of emptiness and fullness in the gut area, but the majority of people I have worked with are first aware of emotions that are located in the upper region of the gut and chest area. There is no need for the facilitator to worry about what feeling responses the reflector begins the process with. Often emotions like fear, anger, and guilt must be dealt with first, and they eventually lead the reflector to the awareness of a deeper level of instinctual feelings. As in question #4, it is helpful for the facilitator to often ask people what they feel in their gut area. But many times they will not be aware of those instinctual level responses and will wish to stay working on the awareness of emotional responses. It is always important to work with the feelings that the reflector is drawn to work with and to allow the reflector to feel in control of the reflection process, rather than to feel controlled by the facilitator.

It is also important to make a special note here that although a majority of people that we have worked with described the somatic feelings in the gut as “empty-full” feelings, other descriptive words may emerge from the reflector. I have had several people say that it feels like “yes” and “no” in the gut. We always respect the person’s preferred way of naming feelings. It is, after all, the awareness of the feelings that is important, not the name.

Reflecting Backwards in Time with Feelings

Questions #5 through #7 in the protocol are designed to assist the facilitator in reflecting backwards in time with the reflector. After the reflector has located the feeling and personal impact of the issue, the facilitator asks the reflector to go back in time to an earlier period when the feeling was the same. The facilitator tells the reflector that it is necessary to only center on the feelings in the body and that the details of the experience they find in the past will probably be different from the original experience in the present.

The reflector is only looking for an earlier time when there was the same feeling, not necessarily the same details. The facilitator tells the reflector that it is not necessary to go back in time very far. I have found that for many people, it is easier to get in touch with more recent feeling experiences first and then slowly make their way back to childhood feeling memories.

Once the reflector has found an example of a similar feeling experience that is in an earlier time in life, the facilitator has the reflector restate the feelings in that earlier experience. Again, it is important to have people keep the details of the story to themselves in their own minds and not

speak the details. This helps the reflector get to the feelings by separating the impact of the experience from what was going on in the world around the person — the sensory data.

Sometimes, the restated feelings in this earlier childhood experience are perceived by the reflector as different from the original feelings expressed in the beginning of the session. In this case, it is generally because they have become aware of another feeling that is stronger than the first feeling stated in the beginning of the session. For example, a person may start out the session with the feeling of fear and anxiety in the present unresolved issue. The person may become aware in reflection on an earlier time when these feelings were felt that there is also a feeling of guilt accompanying the fear. The guilt may seem stronger than the fear. In that case, the *facilitator* goes with what seems to be the strongest emotion. The *facilitator* has the reflector restate the feeling and reflect further back in time to an earlier experience of that same feeling. In the example cited, the *facilitator* would ask the reflector to go back in time with the feeling of guilt, rather than the initial feeling of fear.

After the reflector has restated the emotional feeling that is being reflected upon, it is also important that the *facilitator* ask the reflector to be aware of any gut level feelings of emptiness or fullness. This is only to help bring the awareness of the reflector to those instinctual feelings. If the reflector is not able to become aware of these feelings, the *facilitator* continues working with the emotional feelings of which the reflector is aware.

The *facilitator* continues to assist the reflector in going back in time with the same feeling until the reflector gets back in awareness to the earliest felt experience that can be remembered. Each time the reflector expresses finding another experience of that same feeling, the *facilitator* asks the reflector to restate the feeling.

Occasionally, people will go back immediately in this initial somatic reflection to the awareness of an early childhood experience. If they do, it is best for the *facilitator* to keep them reflecting in childhood, and it is certainly not necessary to jump back up to later life experiences to find missed examples of these same feelings. Eventually, it will be beneficial for the reflector to look at later life experiences with these same feelings and issues. That will help the reflector make sense of later experiences from an internal point of view. However initially, it is important to extensively explore early childhood where the feelings were first experienced.

Finding the Awareness of the Rejection of Inner Feelings and Needs

Questions in #8 in the protocol are designed to assist the facilitator in helping the reflector discover the inner needs experienced in childhood and the experience of rejecting the inner feelings concerning these needs. Once the reflector has a keen understanding of how to be aware of the felt experience, it can be helpful to begin to talk a little more about the details of the experience. The facilitator can judge whether the person can keep the thread of feeling awareness and still talk about the details.

We found that most people do this well once they are reflecting upon felt experiences that happened to them before age six — prior to going to first grade. Most of the details are simple and revolve around memories of the presence or absence of the main caregiver. Because the reflector has the mind of an adult, it is a common experience to evaluate the situation differently than as a child.

The facilitator is always listening and *somatically gauging* how the reflector is feeling. It may be the first time anyone has ever listened and understood how the reflector felt. Because the facilitator is *somatically gauging*, experiencing empathic listening and allowing themselves to have the feelings that they imagine the reflector to be having, the facilitator will seem very present to the reflector. And, in fact, the facilitator will be very present. The facilitator makes statements about how the experience feels and these statements are made as if the facilitator is speaking as the reflector. For example, if the facilitator understands through *somatic gauging* that the reflector is feeling alone and empty, the facilitator states, “It feels so alone and empty.”

Of course, it is reasonable to assume that the facilitator will occasionally not gauge the reflectors feelings correctly as *somatic gauging* is a projection method, but the reflector is encouraged to make corrections and restate feelings as this occurs. At least, this has always been my experience. If the facilitator is aware that a feeling response cannot be clearly understood through gauging, the statement becomes a question, “How does it feel?” It is just as important for the facilitator to somatically understand how the client feels as the client; and without that empathetic understanding, I have found that little healing can take place for the client.

While reflecting on their feelings in childhood with the mind of an adult, people usually understand and identify their inner needs as children. They also can begin to see the decisions that they made as children to accept externalized thinking judgments (viewing themselves from the outside) that identified and then dismissed their own inner feelings and needs as being

unimportant. It is therefore important that the facilitator often restate the needs of the reflector as they are expressed. It is helpful for the facilitator to ask the reflector to identify the needs and take notice of whether these needs were met or not. The facilitator asks the reflector what they decided about themselves when these needs were not met. Often the reflector will express a personal core belief about themselves that was formed in childhood around an event in which these needs were not met. It is important for the reflector to talk about this core belief and to identify the feelings that accompany it. It is also important to identify how the reflector originally came to decide this core belief. Was this a belief that the mind of a child decided about itself as it tried to figure out why it was not getting what it needed, or why it was behaving in a certain way to try to get what it needed?

I have often found that people can get in touch with their instinctual somatic feelings of emptiness at this early time of their lives even if they have not been able to do so previously. It is important that the reflector has a chance to feel into the depth of the empty feelings experienced at this early time. The facilitator assists the reflector in staying aware of this feeling in the body as long as needed for the reflector to feel validated that another human being understands that this is a perfectly human response and a perfectly human need. Allowing the awareness of this deep feeling of emptiness with the presence of another human being brings about a feeling of acceptance for the authentic Self or the core of our being.

Connecting the Feelings of the Past to the Present Life Issue

Questions in #9 and #10 in the protocol are designed to assist the facilitator in helping the reflector discover how the feeling awareness of the past felt experience relates to the feeling awareness of the present issue.

People can usually see for themselves the patterns of life experiences revolving around whether their inner needs and feelings were met and accepted. It is usually helpful for the facilitator to discuss the awareness of these needs and feelings in terms of acceptance and control/freedom of one's own responses. This concept of the felt experience of holding the tension of opposites around the need for acceptance and feeling in control of one's own responses provides a useful model to help people to understand themselves. If the facilitator has not talked about this model by now, it would be useful to do so at this closing experience of the process. It is important for the reflector not only to access inner instinctual feelings but also to

have a way of thinking about these feelings that brings awareness and validation to what it means to experience the authentic Self. We might say that this helps link the head and gut brains in a cooperative association, and it is my experience that intuition and creativity flow at their peak when this link is finally made.

Research on the Personal Value of the Somatic Reflection Process

In 2005, I explored the Somatic Reflection Process using a depth inquiry with five research participants who volunteered from the graduate department of psychology at Sonoma State University (Love, 2005). Three were females and two were males, with a variety of age levels represented.

The research participants were asked to identify an unresolved issue in their lives, upon which the Somatic Reflection Process was focused, leading the reflector back into the awareness of childhood unresolved feelings. Acting as the facilitator, I followed the Somatic Reflection Process Protocol, and then conducted a tape-recorded interview to the participants designed to explore the personal value of the process to the participants. All interviews began with the following questions: How would you express the impact of this experience upon you? Did this process help you see anything new about yourself that you did not already know?

Three main themes emerged from the responses of the research participants to the interview questions. These were: increased somatic awareness; increased insights and new perspectives concerning inner needs and unresolved issues; and increased self-acceptance.

Increased Somatic Awareness

Several participants reported having an increase in somatic awareness. This included sub themes of feeling better in their bodies as a result of the reflection work and being more aware than before of what their bodily feelings were.

Feeling better. One female participant, Cindy (all participants were given pseudo names to protect their privacy), reported that she “felt better” and had “slept better” the night following her participation with the Somatic Reflection Process than she had in a long time. She indicated that she experienced “a lessening of the original fear” in the unresolved issue due to the new understanding that it was an old issue and feeling. The following is an excerpt from the tape recorded interview:

The feeling—I didn't connect it to the longer view. And so that was the impact of this process; seeing that this wasn't a new feeling — that this was a very old feeling. The issue isn't as life or death [as I felt], knowing that it has happened again and again and again. So, there's a lot of lessening of the fear around it.

Another participant, Steven expressed that he felt “lighter” and “really good” after the reflection process. He also indicated that the process “relieved tension.” Similarly, Clea, a young female in her 20s, expressed a sense of “comfort” from the experience of the Somatic Reflection Process.

Increase of awareness of feelings in the body. Another female participant, Sara, indicated that she experienced her feelings in her body while engaged in the Somatic Reflection Process. “It reached deep emotionally in my body.” In an informal communication two weeks after the process, she volunteered that she continued the process automatically with an *inner facilitator*. She found further examples in early childhood of experiences of deep feelings, as well as somatic awareness of aloneness and emptiness concerning the issues of acceptance.

Bill, a male participant in his forties, indicated that the process had a “healing quality” and that he became aware of himself in his body on levels that he had not experienced using other “less body and feeling awareness processes” in the past.

It helped me understand things in degrees. Like seeing the degree and depth and amount of things [in myself] — it is one thing to say, oh my life has had such trauma; it is another to actually feel it in an embodied and conscious way so there is new — like fresh eyes experiencing....

Clea indicated that the Somatic Reflection Process helped her “understand how to identify feelings and resistance to being aware of them.”

Increased Self-Awareness

All five participants reported greater self-awareness. They reported increased insight into the issues they were dealing with, as well as increased awareness of their own inner needs.

Increased insight. Participants said that the Somatic Reflection Process gave them a new way to view the problem or inner issue they were struggling with in the present.

Cindy reported that she felt the process was leading her to new ways of solving her problem with “a new perspective.”

Sara commented, “It definitely gave me a new perspective that I think will help me toward resolving the issue. It helped me identify the dynamics and what my abilities are in solving the issue.”

Steven expressed that the internal conflict he was having “got clearer” and that the Somatic Reflection Process gave him “a new direction.” Steven further explained that it was helpful to see where the inner conflicts originated in childhood and how they had repeated throughout his life. “I never realized before where the conflict was coming from and how what I was feeling was really old.” He expressed a deeper awareness of his psyche. “All of these voices are parts of me, and even if they are imposed on me and how I am supposed to be— at least now I know where they are coming from.”

Bill indicated that the process was “very useful” in understanding the painful feelings he was having in the present. He expressed the insights he had as he reflected upon childhood from the view of an adult observer.

The best part was seeing it with the eyes of an adult rather than a child. I thought at one moment — God, people should do this regularly because I was visiting stuff that had frozen me. I had no idea as a child what or why these things happened to me, but now I’m an adult, and it’s remarkable to sit with that contrast. It has a remarkable healing quality.

Clea indicated that it was a helpful new perspective to identify a pattern of behavior that originated in early childhood experiences and has repeated in the unresolved issue in her present life.

It [The Somatic Reflection Process] did give me a new perspective about withholding communications. It’s something that I have been realizing but I didn’t realize what a pattern it was. I would pretend or deny [my feelings] and basically lie to myself and then to others. I was trying not to feel. So I couldn’t tell others. [The Somatic Reflection Process] made me see the history of the pattern [of how I withdraw my feelings]. I see that I have done this pattern before and that is something that I hadn’t clearly looked at. So to see the pattern is helpful.

Increased Awareness of Inner Needs. The five participants also expressed that the Somatic Reflection Process helped them in identifying inner needs and awareness.

Cindy reported that by participating in the Somatic Reflection Process she was able to become aware of her inner feelings. “It allowed me to feel how it had been so long since I had been truly authentic”

Sara expressed, “I understand more where I am coming from. I see myself located in the issue now. Before, it was just happening to me, I now see myself internally.”

Steven reported that he could see that often he did not experience a sense of acceptance from others for his feelings. He expressed this awareness when he said, “My whole life I have been expected to feel a certain way.” He indicated that he was not able to feel the way people expected him to feel; he often thought he was judged for intentions and feelings that he did not have.

Bill indicated that he understood through the experience of Somatic Reflection Process that he had a greater need for freedom than he did for acceptance. “I think I’ve always gone for the freedom and ended up needing acceptance. An outsider would say I’m digging my heels in foolishly. Loss of freedom is the worse for me. I’ll always show that in unconscious ways.” He also found that attention to, and acceptance of, inner feelings from another human being is a basic need that he experienced during the Somatic reflection Process. When speaking about the impact of the process he said, “This was so personal and I think this is what human beings basically need and deserve.”

Clea indicated that she learned to accept her inner feeling responses as valid indications of needs:

I think that it emphasized to honor that I am sensitive. And I don't want to pretend and feel guilty and think that I am unfriendly or [have] a bad quality. I think this helped me know my boundaries and respect them. I use to think I had to change that, but maybe I don't. Acceptance is the biggest thing I feel coming out of this.

Increased Self-Acceptance

Three of the five participants reported increased feelings of self-acceptance.

Cindy communicated that the day following her participation in the Somatic Reflection Process, she awoke “feeling happy” about herself. She reported that she continued the process automatically with an *inner facilitator*; she had found further examples of how she dealt with her fears successfully.

Sara stated that the process helped her accept her needs in relationship with others. “I need to feel loved for who I am genuinely instead of what I can do for them.”

Clea expressed gaining increased compassion for herself and acceptance of her feelings. She pointed out a benefit of her experience with the Somatic Reflection Process: “I think I’m getting on my own side and [being] supportive of myself.” She indicated that the experience of the Somatic Reflection Process helped her “feel validated.” Clea further expressed feelings of self-acceptance when she stated that, “It is comforting that my feelings were real and natural and not a product of being odd. I did feel odd — like an oddball. I feel more okay and accepting about being odd.”

Concluding Remarks

The Somatic Reflection Process warrants much more study as a somatic, depth psychology process that could be used to assist people in returning to an awareness of the authentic Self and finding the strength within toward healing the trauma of the body/mind split. This process seems particularly useful as a depth method because it engages both the body and mind, focusing on body awareness. It is also a process that once learned somatically, may be used as a daily practice for dealing with life traumas and unsettling experiences. Both the clinical experiences and research my colleague and I have done with this process supports the idea that it may be valuable in healing people experiencing trauma caused by both emotional and physical conditions. For this reason, the range of trauma that this process is successful in dealing with may well include the large amount of returning veterans of the Iraqi War who are experiencing severe trauma and PTSD, as well as the uncomfortable feelings of accumulated trauma experienced by the common everyday hero living in our constantly-changing, anxiety-ridden, modern world.

The Somatic Reflection Process both encourages and gives support to understanding the authentic Self as we open the mysterious doors of our unconscious. Having a theoretical model and process of understanding our human inner needs and instinctual feelings makes it possible to integrate what we learn somatically about ourselves, thus supporting the communication and integration of the body/mind. As Gershon (1998) might suggest, it enhances the communication between the head brain and the gut brain and thus stimulates the intuition. I have found that the Somatic Reflection Process is a technique for safely walking consciously into the awareness of one’s unconscious somatic awareness. It’s exploration as a tool is for anyone who is interested in recognizing and identifying the field of consciousness that is calling from deep within all of us,

beaconing us to know ourselves as both individuals and as a human family, each with a human body with universal human needs and instincts that are at the core both caring for and connected to all of life.

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