

Five Recent Essays

Ron Kurtz

Editor's Note: In this contribution Hakomi Founder Ron Kurtz offers some of his latest reflections on the method in dialogue with a number of other creative thinkers.

Ron Kurtz is the Founder of the Hakomi Institute and the Director of Ron Kurtz Trainings. Author and co-author of three influential books (*Body-Centered Psychotherapy*, *The Body Reveals*, and *Grace Unfolding*), Ron has led hundreds of Hakomi trainings and Hakomi workshops around the world over the last quarter of a century. At present he is leading trainings in the USA, Japan and Mexico. He can be contacted through his website www.ronkurtz.com.

ABSTRACT: Hakomi Therapy founder Ron Kurtz offers a five part sequence of reflections on the method in dialogue with the concepts of unassimilated experiences, spacious silence, Porges' social engagement system and loving presence, Sterling's concept of allostasis, and being at one with the therapeutic situation.

1. Refuge

Buddhists perform a ceremony for newcomers to the path called "taking refuge." There are three things they take refuge in: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. (The Buddha, the teachings, and the community of seekers.) We can ask, what does it mean to take refuge? How does one do that? And refuge from what? I think it means taking refuge from the inevitable pain and suffering that comes with being in this world, *the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to*. It is in how we respond to these ordinary difficulties. In the excerpt below, Daniel Goleman (2003) mentions these difficulties: emotional distress, anxiety, anger, and depression. Here's the excerpt:

Dr. Davidson, in recent research using functional M.R.I. and advanced EEG analysis, has identified an index for the brain's set point for moods¹

The functional M.R.I. images reveal that when people are emotionally distressed— anxious, angry, depressed—the most active sites in the brain are circuitry converging on the amygdala, part of the brain's emotional centers, and the right prefrontal cortex, a brain region important for the hyper-vigilance typical of people under stress.

¹ The idea of a set point is discussed in Peter Sterling's (2004) landmark paper, *Principles of allostasis: optimal design, predictive regulation, pathophysiology and rational therapeutics*. He speaks of the adaptive nature of the physiology and its responsiveness to perceived demand, a process that includes the higher nervous system, images of and ideas about demand, rather than a homeostatic seeking of one particular level or set point. Found at: <http://retina.anatomy.upenn.edu/pdf/6277.pdf>

By contrast, when people are in positive moods— upbeat, enthusiastic and energized—those sites are quiet, with the heightened activity in the left prefrontal cortex.

Indeed, Dr. Davidson has discovered what he believes is a quick way to index a person's typical mood range, by reading the baseline levels of activity in these right and left prefrontal areas. That ratio predicts daily moods with surprising accuracy. The more the ratio tilts to the right, the more unhappy or distressed a person tends to be, while the more activity to the left, the more happy and enthusiastic.

By taking readings on hundreds of people, Dr. Davidson has established a bell curve distribution, with most people in the middle, having a mix of good and bad moods. Those relatively few people who are farthest to the right are most likely to have a clinical depression or anxiety disorder over the course of their lives. For those lucky few farthest to the left, troubling moods are rare and recovery from them is rapid.

This may explain other kinds of data suggesting a biologically determined set point for our emotional range. One finding, for instance, shows that both for people lucky enough to win a lottery and those unlucky souls who become paraplegic from an accident, by a year or so after the events their daily moods are about the same as before the momentous occurrences, indicating that the emotional set point changes little, if at all.

By chance, Dr. Davidson had the opportunity to test the left-right ratio on a senior Tibetan lama, who turned out to have the most extreme value to the left of the 175 people measured to that point.

We can assume the Tibetan lama had taking refuge. Is his "extreme value to left" on the bell curve distribution of

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moods a result? It sounds like it might be exactly that. Do those who take refuge develop an emotional “set point” that is inclined towards happiness and the positive? Do they minimize the activity of the amygdala and the right prefrontal cortex? Do they suffer less stress—and let’s say they do—then how do they do it?

Brains are complex systems for dealing with living as a complex activity. As Tolstoy wrote,² “*Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*” To make Tolstoy’s observation more general, we can say: “Every smoothly functioning complex system is functioning in the same way; every malfunctioning complex system is malfunctioning in its own way.” Or, there are many more ways a complex system can fail than there is where it functions well. What is happening when a person’s emotional set point inclines towards the negative? Has this person’s experience been one of stress that’s become a stabilized? Has this person’s perceptions of and ideas about what’s being demanded of them stabilized around the negative. Is it something like the character (who Shirley MacLean played in the movie *Steel Magnolias*) was describing when she said, “I’m not crazy; I’ve just been in a bad mood for forty years.”³

How is it that a person’s bad mood could last for forty years? How could it be so stable? Pierre Janet thought that some experiences overwhelm the system and do not get integrated.

At certain times—in childhood, for example—we tend to be emotionally vulnerable and easily overwhelmed; we can register the life experiences, but we cannot properly ‘digest’ them. When a person experiences a traumatic or strong emotional event during these [vulnerable] periods, the mind lacks its usual ability to make sense of it and fit it properly into a meaningful, secure whole. [When this happens . . .] The emotional experience floats in our unconscious, unassimilated, in effect, jamming the gears of the mind. Janet thought that these unassimilated experiences could become the seed of psychological or psycho-somatic illness, obsessive thought patterns, phobias—all sorts of behavioral problems. Many chronic problems, he believed, were the result of the mindbody’s continuing, frustrated effort to make sense of the original disturbing experience. (Rossi, 1996, p. 125)

Are these “unassimilated experiences” one of the things that keep a person stressed? I think they are. And I think, in the process of mindfulness based self-study (the most recent version of the Hakomi Method as I teach it now), as in all mindfulness practices, it is this kind of stress that is relieved by the process. It is the stress of unassimilated experiences.

² The famous first line of *Anna Karenina*.

³ Ouiser Boudreaux, played by Shirley MacClaine in the movie *Steel Magnolias*.

Instead of letting these experiences *float in the unconscious*, they are brought into consciousness where they finally can be made sense of and assimilated. While they remain unconscious, a person finds a way to escape *temporarily* from the stress in a myriad number of ways. Just as there are myriad ways an unhappy family can be unhappy, there are all kinds of addictions and distractions that keep a person from dealing directly with the causes of his or her stress. And, just as all happy families are happy in the same way, a long-term, stable positive mood is only possible when we have successfully dealt with these unassimilated, emotionally overwhelming experiences.

Of any person, we can ask: “What is this person’s most stable emotional mood?” Is it one that suggests that the person is stressed? And if it is, we can further ask: In which of the myriad ways possible is this person taking refuge? Is it in religious practices? Is it an addictive activity like gambling, exercise, or sex? Is it something healthy, like being in nature, say taking frequent, pleasurable walks in the woods? Meditation? Is it drugs or pornography? Or is it something very acceptable, like reading, art, drama, sports or going to a lot of movies? We call those who take refuge in activity *industrious*. Those that take refuge in distancing themselves from human contact and intimate relationships, we call *withdrawn*. There are also those who take refuge by clinging to someone and those who find others to dominate or exploit or abuse, taking refuge in feelings of power. Myriad ways. Myriad ways. And those who take refuge in irrational beliefs, like the beliefs held by religious fanatics are everywhere. Murder, mayhem, war and cruelty, the horrible and sick places of refuge for more than a few citizens of almost every country in the world. And each place of refuge offers the same as Buddhism, some kind of relief from the stress of being a vulnerable human. Except that in Buddhism, you get to be a lot happier and your world is sweeter with you in it.

Buddha taught that the way to the end of this suffering is to extinguish the reliance on these other ways of taking refuge, to sever ones attachments to them. Instead, take refuge in the recognition that you and everything else is *impermanent*, everything but consciousness itself. That this *you* you’re so worried about, this self that you’ve created to deal with the world you’ve either made or only found yourself in, is a fiction and as *impermanent* as everything else.

Instead, the Buddhists say, take refuge in the Buddha, by emulating his example of equanimity, loving kindness and sympathetic joy; in the Dharma, by studying the teachings, learning to make wise decisions; and in the Sangha, by keeping company with those who are seeking the same things and following the path that will lead to relief and happiness. Buddhism teaches that there is such a path. Along that path, you will discover and digest the unassimilated painful events that bring so much stress into your life. You will drop your attachments to the negative. You will learn to remain calm in the face of what once

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pushed you into fear, anger and desire. You will feel a love for all life and feel what Mary Oliver has called, “the perfect, stone-hard beauty of everything.” You will not need to be anything special. You will feel love and joy and freedom. You will be released from ignorance and you will find the refuge that you have always sought.

To follow the Buddha Way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

*To forget the self is to be enlightened
by the ten thousand things.*

—Master Dogen

2. Silence & Following

The best leader follows. —Lao Tzu

To a great extent, the Hakomi method helps people discover important things about themselves. The method is called *The Process of Assisted Self Discovery*. At certain points in the process, information emerges spontaneously from the client’s unconscious, a long forgotten memory or the realization of a deeply held, implicit belief. These events are surprising to the client. They’re often quite different from what the client expected. At these moments, when the client is dealing with something new and surprising, and often emotional, the client needs time to feel and think. This is a time when being silent is the most helpful thing a therapist can do. There are other times, but this one is probably the most important. The client simply needs time to think and feel. Something unexpected has happened. Something meaningful. Maybe something painful and incomplete that has long lain out of reach of the consciousness.

It is easy to notice when clients need time. Typically, they close their eyes and tip their heads forward a little. There are signs in their faces that they are thinking and discovering and making connections. They are integrating the new information. After being surprised, that’s natural. And that’s when it is most important to be silent. It allows the client to do what he or she needs to do most. And being sensitive to the client’s needs at such important moments, helps to gain the cooperation of the adaptive unconscious.

A second time when silence is important is after a contact statement or an acknowledgement. This time, however, it’s about *following*. We wait silently at these times in order to let the client’s adaptive unconscious to lead us. When something emerges spontaneously out of an intervention or an experiment in mindfulness, an impulse or a thought or image “popping into consciousness,” it’s time for us to follow. These spontaneously emergent experiences are signposts along the path that’s leading to the buried experience that needs integration and healing. And, as we

follow, so the adaptive unconscious begins more and more to lead.

Our whole purpose is to help client’s discover normally non-conscious beliefs and memories. We need unconscious cooperation for that. We need to be the kind of context and environment that signals safety and intelligence. That’s how cooperation is gained. And that’s why we need to follow. When we get the signals, the unconscious leads. It leads us by providing ideas, emotions, impulses, memories, images, gestures, facial expressions and movements—all in reaction or response to our comments, experiments and contact statements. It “gives” us these things as stepping stones to deeper material. We need to take the steps it makes possible.

Here’s an example: I did an experiment in awareness, a verbal probe, and the client moved as if to collapse; she leaned a little to her left and dropped her head. She said, “I feel like collapsing and falling to the floor.” When she said this, I suggested that she go ahead and collapse and notice what came up. While she did this, I remained silent. I waited for the unconscious to give us the next thing. It was a memory with a strong feeling of sadness to it. I contacted the sadness and waited in silence. I had an assistant sit next to her and put a hand on her shoulder. Again, I waited for the next spontaneous thing to happen. The emotion deepened.

And so it went, from one spontaneous change to another, until the final release of grief and the understanding that allowed the process to complete. It completes when the client understands and integrates the long buried painful experience and comes up with new, more useful and accurate beliefs about what it all meant. In addition, I support whatever the client spontaneously does to manage his or her emotional process, like postural changes, muscle tensions or covering the eyes or face. When that’s been arranged, again I wait for what will emerge out of this change.

All through the process, once things begin to move, the unconscious leads and I follow. Appropriate silence supports following as it gives control to the client’s unconscious and it allows the therapist time to notice where the process wants to go. When I’m silent, I’m waiting for what the unconscious will give me next. At these moments, I am not trying to make things happen. I am letting them happen. At the beginning I am active, making contact statements, setting up and doing experiments. But once the process begins to unfold, once new thoughts and feelings begin to emerge spontaneously, I switch to silence and following. When the unconscious leads, I am quiet and I follow.

3. On Being A Portal

Portal (noun). An entrance or a means of entrance: *the local library, a portal of knowledge (American Heritage, 2000).*

He who wants to do good, knocks at the gate; he who loves finds the gates open.

—Sir Rabindranath Tagore Thakur (1861-1941)

Where love rules, there is no will to power and where power predominates, there love is lacking. The one is the shadow of the other. —Carl Jung

The detection of a person as safe or dangerous triggers neurobiologically determined prosocial or defensive behaviors. —Stephen Porges (2004)

Porges (2004) uses music—played through headphones and limited in frequency range to the range of the human voice—to evoke a particular state of the nervous system. He’s named this state, *The Social Engagement System* (SES). In normal, everyday situations, the SES functions to enhance human-to-human communication. This complex neurobiological system activates when the situation calls for such communication and when the situation is perceived as being safe.

The reason the SES can be triggered by range-limited music is that listening to such music causes the middle ear to narrow a person’s range of hearing to the same frequencies of the human voice. This action of the middle ear is just one of the functions of the (SES). (Others include smiling and looking directly at someone, regulation of the larger nervous system in support of all prosocial behaviors.) Porges talks about how the middle ear functions as “a portal to the system.” It is a gateway to a state of mind, based upon a specific configuration of the entire nervous system, a state of mind that is prosocial and not defensive.

Porges treats autistic children by triggering their social engagement systems through stimulation of the middle ear that helps them attune to human voice frequencies with which they often have difficulty. His intent is to bring the SES on line. It’s waiting to happen; it just needs to be activated. Often, in only a few sessions of forty-five minutes with the music is enough. The autistic child’s behavior changes, from distant and defensive to relaxed and social.

I watched as Porges worked with a woman who was being stimulated by his range limited music equipment. She had a spastic voice box and her speech sounds were harsh, scratchy and she spoke with great difficulty. She’d had this problem for thirteen years and everything she’d tried to change had failed. After less than a half hour listening on Porges’ headphones, there was noticeable improvement. Not a lot—her speech was still very difficult and harsh—but there was some improvement. When the woman took the headphones off, I put them on and listened to the same music she had. I felt the changes it produced in me: a very

loving feeling for everyone in the room. After about ten minutes, I took the headphones off.

When I watched her and listened to her while she spoke to Porges and while she was on the headphones, I noticed all the signs of a deep sadness, the kind that often shows up in therapy. So, I went over to her and offered to do some Hakomi work with her. I had a strong sense of compassion for her painful difficulties and her sadness. We worked for about ten or fifteen minutes, a very intense time with powerful, emotional moments for both of us. Towards the end, her feelings changed from her usual sadness, her terrible feeling of isolation and loneliness, anger and hopelessness through a sense of connection and caring—a warm, appreciative and nourishing state: We were socially engaged. In this state, she experienced what were, for her, new positive feelings and hope. Porges, who’d watched the whole thing, said to me afterwards, something like, “You’re a portal.” I must have looked puzzled, because he elaborated, “Just like the music and the middle ear.”

He meant that my behavior brought the woman’s SES on line. My behaviors; tone of voice, facial expressions, pace, attitude, my entire presence with her, the fact that my attention never wavered, the constant kindness that I felt and demonstrated—all these were such that she changed her state of mind. I like to call this kind of engagement: *Loving presence*. Maintaining a constant feeling of compassion for her captured her attention, triggered her SES and brought it on line. So I learned, loving presence can be a portal.

I happened to see her six months later. She came to a workshop I did in the Bay Area. When she spoke to me upon our meeting, her voice was perfectly normal. She sounded just like everyone else. No harshness. No strain. I was astonished. I asked her about it. She said it was the result of the work we did in our few minutes together. She said I was the first person she’d ever felt really cared about her. She told me it was a miracle. I was surprised and as happy as I could be.

It’s nothing new that we trigger one another, that emotions are communicable. Fear or rage can spread through a crowd or escalate in an exchange between two people. There’s nothing new about this. Nor is it new that psychotherapy can be such a powerful force for change. What is new and important to recognize is that loving presence alone can have that power. A therapist who is present and loving offers his clients a portal, an invitation to join in a close, caring human to human exchange. It’s not doing this or talking about anything. It’s a joining. If you like, it’s a joining of souls. It’s not technique or method, not confrontation or interpretation, neither cognition nor conditioning. The important thing is what it has always been, an opening of one’s being to include the being and well being of another. The important thing, the effective thing, is to be a portal through which the love that is present can welcome the love that has been waiting.

Smile at each other; smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other—it doesn't matter who it is—and that will help you to grow up in greater love for each other.
—Mother Teresa

I want to start with the most important thing I have to say: The essence of working with another person is to be present as a living being. And this is lucky, because if we had to be smart, or good, or mature, or wise, then we would probably be in trouble. But, what matters is not that. What matters is to be a human being with another human being, to recognize the other person as another being in there. Even if it is a cat or a bird, if you are trying to help a wounded bird, the first thing you have to know is that there is somebody in there, and that you have to wait for that “person,” that being

in there, to be in contact with you. That seems to me to be the most important thing. --Gendlin (1990)

4. The Anticipation of Demand

... the goal of regulation is not constancy, but rather, fitness under natural selection. Fitness constrains regulation to be efficient, which implies preventing errors and minimizing costs. Both needs are best accomplished by using prior information to predict demand and then adjusting all parameters to meet it.
—Peter Sterling (2004)

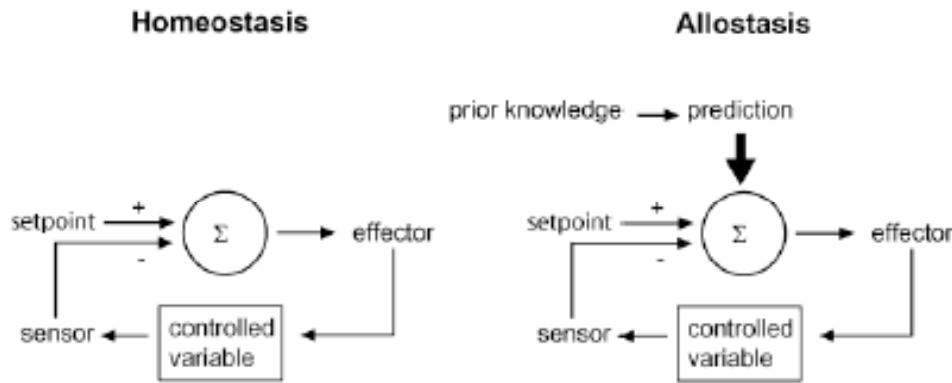


Figure 1

In Figure 1, we could justifiably replace “prior knowledge” with the word, “belief”. A belief that implies the expectation of a specific demand. Beliefs: “That’s a wild bear over there. We may have to run for it. Prepare for an all out energy expenditure and possible harm to the body.” The body responds with all kinds of physiological changes. And, of course, this happens whether there is a real bear over there or there isn’t. It happens because you believe there’s a bear over there. It wouldn’t happen if you didn’t.

For every emotion that you are capable of feeling, there is surely a belief that could invoke it in a matter of moments.
—Sam Harris

It seems possible that the dawn phenomenon (increased glucose production and insulin resistance brought on by the release of counter-regulatory hormones in the early morning hours near waking. It happens in normal people as well as in diabetics.) is an example of a nonconscious *expectation of demand*, a nonconscious prediction, if you will, or an

implicit belief about what’s going to be needed—like more sugar in the blood—to meet the demands of simply getting up and facing the day’s tasks. And how about the tasks that go into survival and being a self in a community of selves?

Here’s what a great neurologist has to say about prediction, what’s known as *the binding problem* and the origins of the self:

Given that prediction is the ultimate and most pervasive of all brain functions, one may ask how this function is grounded so that there evolved only one predictive organ. Intuitively, one can imagine the timing mismatches that would occur if there were more than one seat of prediction making judgment calls for a given organism's interaction with the world; it would be most disadvantageous for the head to predict one thing and the tail to predict another! For optimum efficiency it would seem that prediction must function to provide an unwavering residency and functional connectedness: it must somehow be centralized to the myriad interplays of the brain's strategies of interaction with the external world. We know this centralization of

prediction as the abstraction we call the “self.” (Linas, 2001)

And here’s the great psychologist, Pierre Janet: “Among all these influences I should like to note in particular one that seems to me important, although little known . . . namely, the nervous and mental stimulation induced in an individual by the part he has to play.” (Janet, 1924)

All of this—prior knowledge, prediction, nonconscious expectations—implies that implicit beliefs control states of the body-mind. And, conversely, that states of the body-mind imply beliefs (possibly nonconscious) about what can be expected. Let’s look at a few examples:

A person with a habit of speaking very softly may be holding an implicit belief that it’s wise to preserve one’s energy, as there may not be enough. The nonconscious prediction is that there won’t be enough. This is possibly a reflection of either a present physiological state of low blood sugar or the like, or it could be a reflection of a history of “not-enough” experiences. A good probe in this case might be, “You can have all you need.” Or, “all you want”. Or, if you want to take a long-shot guess, “I have time for you”. The latter, especially if the person talks quickly as well as softly. Another possible experiment, a nonverbal one, is to take over the weight of the shoulders.

Another example would be: A person habitually sits with arms crossed, jaw tight and face stiff. The prediction might be an expectation that others will try to control or manipulate him. Again, you can imagine a history that makes sense of this habit: A very controlling parent who had to be resisted. The implicit belief could be: “Other people won’t let me do what I want” or something like that. For this person, a patient, non-directive approach is going to work best. Always ask permission for anything you’re suggesting.

When you learn to think this way—about habitual behaviors as a signs of implicit beliefs and predictions of demands upon the organism—the transition from noticing such signs and having good ideas about experiments in awareness to evoke the beliefs becomes natural and easy.

In systems like the human organism, where nonconscious predictions are the norm and where such predictions can lead to emotional states which in turn effect the predictions themselves, we have the common problem of reinforcing feedback. For example, a person who relaxes and calms down by eating the sweet and fatty foods, and who generally experiences stress, is likely to gain weight. The additional weight itself becomes a source of stress when the additional physical effort and the worry about health consequences come into play. If this additional stress is cause for more eating in order to calm down, the process has become self-reinforcing. This cyclical process and many others like it are all based on perceptions of demand that have become part of a reinforcement process.

A particular perception of demand that often involves this kind of process is, what Janet has called, *the nervous and mental stimulation induced in an individual by the part he has to play*. What we might call, the effort to maintain a self that works, a story about ourselves that we’d like to proclaim. The ways in which we handle this effort often involve addictions of one sort or another. The lesson to learned is this:

*Easy is right.
Begin right and you are easy.
Continue easy and you are right.
The right way to go easy
Is to forget the right way
And forget that the going is easy.
—Chuang Tzu*

To predict that the demand will be minimal, that the “going will be easy”, is to have confidence. To forget that the “going is easy”, is to make a habit of confidence, to actually and unconsciously *be* confident. When this confidence is reinforced, when the action proves successful, over and over again, the work becomes pleasurable and playful. Easy, as Chuang Tzu would say. There’s a rule for developing the level of skill that reinforces confidence: *Learn simple things first and learn them to perfection!* (Kelly, 1995) In learning this work, it’s a good rule to follow.

Bring confidence to your work. Lower the pressure of expected demand. You will minimize the stress you bring to your work. Your mind will be quieter. Your perceptions, clearer. Your presence, more complete. Your effectiveness will improve and your satisfaction greater. The prediction of demand is a thing of the mind: Have confidence and put your mind at ease.

5. “If You Has to Ask...”

When asked by a society matron what swing was, the great jazz pianist Fats Waller replied, *Lady, if you has to ask—you ain’t got it.*

... he [Brian Arthur] linked these to a different way in which action arises, through a process he called a “different sort of knowing.” “You observe and observe and let this experience well up into something appropriate. In a sense, there’s no decision making, he said. “What to do just becomes obvious. You can’t rush it. Much of it depends on where you’re coming from and who you are as a person. All you can do is position yourself according to your unfolding vision of what is coming. A totally different set of rules applies. You need to ‘feel out’ what to do. You hang back, you observe. You’re more like a surfer or a really good race car driver. You don’t act out of deduction, you act out of an inner feel, making sense as you go.

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You're not even thinking. You're at one with the situation. (Senge, 2005, p. 84)

Once in a while, I tell people that I don't think when I'm working. What I'm doing has, until now, been hard for me to describe. The above passage from the book *Presence* has helped me get clearer. In the way Arthur describes, I become *one with the situation*. In sports, it's called, *being in the zone*. It was described beautifully by the great Celtics center, Bill Russell. Here's what he said it was like. He's playing and he sees everything in slow motion. He sees everything that's going on at once, without effort. (That's a key, no effort.) He knows what will work and what won't. He knows he can do whatever he has to do. If he has to pass the ball or shoot the ball or run, it is a foregone conclusion that he will do it successfully. He feels a kind of ecstasy. Nothing goes wrong, everything goes right. It's beyond winning and losing. It's beyond competition. It's just this kind of joyous dance. He's not thinking about winning very much, it doesn't matter. I think Russell might have said he was *at one with the situation*.

I have been arguing this week with some of the trainers from the Hakomi Institute. It isn't satisfying. Arguments are, by their very nature, about winning and losing. But, in the process, I had to think and feel. In doing that, I was made ready for something. Last night, when I read the passage quoted above, something clicked. The trainers and I had been arguing about whether my work had changed enough to require that our two separate organizations stop using the same name. I thought my work had changed, the others argued that it hadn't.

I had argued from the standpoint that people the Institute had trained were not doing the work as I now teach it. The whole argument was couched in terms of method and technique. What I realized last night was that it's not really about those things. It's not even about the changes I've made. It is precisely about what Brian Arthur has described; it's about *being at one with the situation*. It's about *a different way in which action arises*. It's about *where you're coming from and who you are as a person*. These things are a big part of how I've been judging the people I supervise. All the criterion mentioned in the various documents that describe the qualifications for certification only vaguely approach these ideas. They seem not to know how *action can arise from a different kind of knowing*. Of course people have to know the method. They have to know how to implement the techniques. Bill Russell had to know basketball's method and techniques. For Pete's sake, he's in the Basketball Hall of Fame. But, he's not in there because he knew the techniques. Lots of people do. He's in there because sometimes he became one with the situation using them.

That's what I'm really looking for when I'm supervising someone. I hadn't realized it until now. It's what I'm trying to teach my students. *Position yourself! Feel out*

what to do! Hang back! Observe and observe and let that experience well up into something appropriate. Don't always control! Don't be asking one question after another! Become one with the situation! That's what I love seeing. On some level, my students get that. They see/feel me doing it and then they get it. Some of them even come in with it.

As a youngster, four years old, I was at one with the math problems my mother gave me, to keep me occupied while she cooked dinner. I never had to think. Somehow, my mind entered into the problems and "gave" me the answer. It was like that all the way through high school where I got nearly perfect grades in math. I could watch the teacher put a problem on the board and at the same time, feel my mind doing it and getting the answer. It wasn't a step by step thinking process. It wasn't controlled. My mind did it for me. My mind *became one with the problem*. It was effortless. I knew I could *do what I had to do*. If there is a 'math zone,' I was in it.

So, what does it mean for a psychotherapist to be at one with the situation. Well, what I see in someone doing the work that way are these things: Great patience. Perfect timing. Intuitive understanding. Moving effortlessly with the unfolding situation. Most important, a kind of openness to the client that allows all of the above. Hearing the whole person, not just words and ideas. There's a way in which a good therapist gets in close, without losing the larger field; can be part of everything the client is doing and feeling moment by moment and, at the same time, is still able to sense the wider context. A good therapist, shares control with the everything present, sometimes moving deeply into to the unfolding action, sometimes waiting silently, while the client does her inner work, surfing gracefully the changing amplitudes of intimacy.

I love it when I see action arise this way. I rejoice in those sessions where the therapist is one with the client, when what happens seems magical, when it seems the therapist is *in the zone*. But, let's be clear. It isn't magic, though it may sometimes seem so. It's just what it was for Bill Russell: Talent, practice, attitude. Confidence, patience, presence and a relaxation of the conscious will. It's *where you're coming from and who you are as a person*. It's the opposite of doubt and fear, the monsters of grim prospects.

Fear changes who you are. It changes what your adaptive unconscious focuses on. Fear narrows your field and makes you want to change things. It makes you want to hurry and to hold on tight. When being supervised makes people anxious, it changes who they are. Then, doing good work becomes almost impossible. Often, I can see that some people are going to be anxious, even before it's their time to be supervised. I can see that they won't be comfortable or able to enjoy themselves.

Ron Kurtz

Other people are just the opposite. They have something. I know it, but I don't know what the hell to call it? I want a word or phrase that will make it simple and clear for those people I've been arguing with. Words like *presence* or *the zone*. I also don't want to imply that it's something I've got and they don't. Frankly, I don't know what they have. But I do know that it happens often when I do therapy. That something made me the kind of therapist I've become. I know it, but it's hard to name. It's more something you can sense, more a different way of being than a nameable thing. This is exactly the problem Fats Waller had.

Charlie Mingus was, in the words of jazz critic Nat Hentoff, "a prodigious base player who could have played with any symphony orchestra in the world." Hentoff tells that Mingus considered joining a symphony orchestra once, then realized that he didn't want to spend his life, "playing other people's music." When I supervise people, a part of me—maybe the same part that used to sit at bars and stare in happy wonder at Mingus or Miles or Dizzy—is feeling for that quality those jazz greats had of *being one with it*. I can recognize when students have it. I can't always put words to it, but I can tell. Either it *swings* or it's just *playing other people's music*. If they were still with us and they watched a Hakomi session, I would just bet Fats could tell, and Charlie too!



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