
HAKOMI IN THE TRENCHES

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"Let's forget about hakomi and just do good therapy."-Ron Kurtz

The trenches are those places people go home to work in after attending hakomi-gestalt-psychodrama, etc. workshops. The people found there are civilians, the ones who are not necessarily the open, motivated, growth-oriented, touchy-feely, hot-tubbing, brown rice-eating, card-carrying meditators who show up at seminars. How does hakomi work with them? Can you use hakomi in settings where more traditional, confrontational, non-mindful methods are the norm? "I feel guilty in the midst of this hakomi training when my clients come in and I end up doing problem-solving things with them instead of pure hakomi sessions. What do I do?"

These questions commonly come up in the context of hakomi trainings. This paper represents my personal response to the issue as a hakomi therapist who does work in certifiable trenches, and as one of the trainers of the institute.

Letting Go of Purism

My most basic word of wisdom on the whole subject is that we can avoid a lot of trouble and grief by letting go of being purists. Purism or "ideal-hakomiism" is an understandably easy trap to fall into. One who goes through some 400 hours of nuts and bolts hakomi training is taught a particular way of working, that in its clearest, purist form has to do with non-violently turning the awareness of an individual mindfully inward toward the reality of their immediate experience. It is a lesson that is well taught and well learned.

The lesson has been tragically perverted however, if the learner goes away with the notion that hakomi is the, or the one best way of working; that it is an ism, a particular rigid set of techniques to be applied in contradistinction to other sets of techniques running around loose in the therapeutic world. This perversion is an insult to the creative, open-ended spirit of Ron Kurtz, the originator of hakomi therapy, and to the universal principles upon which he has based the therapy.

Hakomi in Relation to Other Therapies

So, here is another instance of the oft heard saying in hakomi trainings, "when in doubt, go back to the principles."¹

The most basic principle of hakomi, from which all the others fall out, is the unity principle. No amount of thinking or writing will ever exhaust the implications of unity. One implication helpful for this discussion is that everything is connected to everything else. We like to quote John Muir at this point: "When you go to pick up one thing, you find that it is hitched to everything else in the universe."

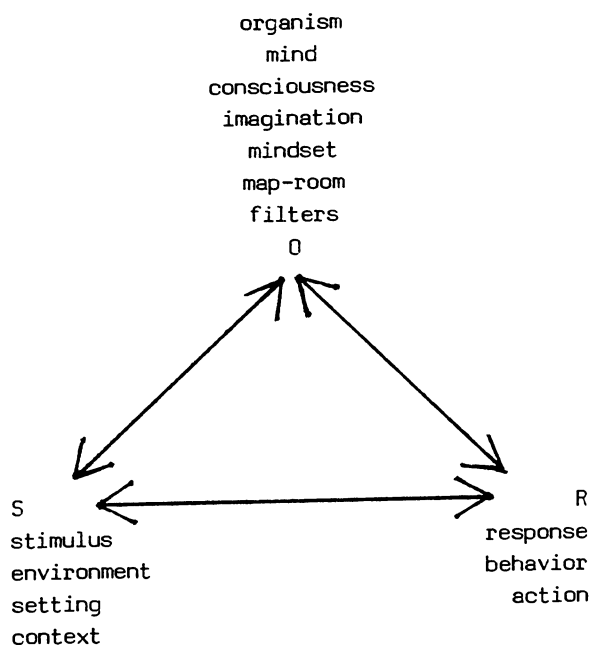
I would like to take this principle back to good old experimental rat psychology to offer a model for understanding how hakomi is related to the wide gamut of other therapies currently available to us.

A lot of psychological research energy in the first part of the 20th century went into attempting to understand and explain behavior in terms of stimulus (S) - response (R) reflexes. But when it turned out that S₁ (big Scottish Deerhound dog) didn't always lead to R₁ (me climbing the nearest tree),

but sometimes led to R_2 (you reaching out to pet the enormous critter), and even R_3 (the four year old neighbor kid terrorizing the poor beast, chasing him through the park), researchers had to give up and admit to an $S - O$ (organismic variable) - R psychology.

A lot of people were and are unhappy with the introduction of the infamous "black box" into the nice, tidy $S - R$ equation. But, no matter how much we debate about the essence of the black box being connected to classic conditioning variables, the collective unconscious, early interpersonal encounter, metabolism, or astrological conditions, it remains undeniably present. No stimulus gets into our consciousness and effects a response without first going through the interpretive, formative filters of our mind, imagination, or whatever we want to call our O variable.

What I like to do is take the linear $S - O - R$ and put it in the two dimensional design of a triangle. Here we can get a graphic representation of how each of the elements is in a mutually reciprocal relationship with each of the other elements, and how a change in any one can have effects on the others. Unity. Everything is connected to everything else.



For example, I see someone I don't know coming down the sidewalk toward me (S). I

automatically organize around thinking the person will not like me (O). I direct my gaze toward the lawn or the bird in the tree, as if I am preoccupied, so that I can avoid the other's gaze in a socially acceptable manner (R).

A number of things can effect this scenario. If the other person (S) begins to look away, looks at me harshly, or begins to smile broadly in anticipation of a friendly greeting, these environmental changes will all effect my own disposition to respond.

It is also possible that I could catch myself mobilizing around avoiding eye contact, and in a brief moment of awareness, confirm to myself, "Yes, you are basically a person nobody would want to pay any attention to," or "wait a minute, we are all in this together. Nobody is better than anybody else," or "I'm not going to let anybody intimidate me." All these O possibilities could change what happens.

Or a different behavioral response could affect things. I could decide to smile at the other person, even though I'm scared. I could self-consciously go with looking mean and staring the other person down.

If I decided to smile, it is possible that this would evoke a smile in the other person and change my mindset to a degree. "Oh, some people do smile back. Maybe other people are anxious too, or maybe I'm more appealing than I think." This change in mindset could change the way I view the next person I meet. Instead of mobilizing around the notion that this person will not like me, I might have a more open, though still cautious, mobilization around the possibility that this person might or might not like me - I wonder which way it will be? If I initiate a more hopeful possibility in my own eye contact, I will be paving the way for more friendly confirmations from others.

Clearly, various schools of therapy have grown up around emphasizing the importance of the S , O , or R variable. Psychoanalysis, hakomi, and rational-emotive emphasize change in the O . Glasser's reality therapy and behavioral management of consequences, are working on the external environmental stim-

ulus variable. Rolfers and nutritionists are working the internal environmental stimulus variable. A lot of others encourage and teach various forms of behavioral change.

Sadly, at least in the early days, and still too often today, the schools were invariably imperialistic in claiming that their emphasis was indeed the most important, crucial, deserving of study, funding, etc. We have all spent a lot of time, hope, and energy searching for that one, most right way. It was a wonderful relief for me, personally, to hear Kurtz say in various contexts, "Why can't we all be right?" Why can't there be room for all kinds of approaches and interventions? Hakomi clearly honors the unity principle in being more than just happy to work in an interdisciplinary way.

Beyond being happy to work interdisciplinarily, referring clients to body workers, metabolic technicians, etc., I also hope for and encourage hakomi therapists to choose from and employ a wide range of methods and techniques. We don't have to forget what we already know when we walk through hakomi's front door and take off our shoes. And we shouldn't.

We are all, hopefully, on the side of healing, not taking sides in disputes over therapeutic territories. We want to promote and encourage what is needful for a person's well-being and wholeness. Being grounded in the unity principle and affirming the interconnectedness of all things gives one a heck of a large license to do what is needful in a particular instance. And, to do so not with the constraints of some dogmatic therapeutic notion of what is called for in any and all situations (what Greer Boyce calls a universal specific) but with the blessing of knowing we are contributing to wholeness, unity, the spontaneous movement of separated, alienated parts into wholes through a wide range of techniques that might be directed toward the S, O, or R variable.

That statement raises the question, of course, of whether hakomi is anything in particular if it is everything in general. I'll struggle with that a bit more in a number of the following examples. For now, it is fair to say that a wide range of tech-

niques are acceptable if used within the framework of the principles - unity, organicity, mind-body holism, non-violence, and mindfulness.

Breaking Illusory Rules

One person's rules are another's choice or option, notes Kurtz. In hakomi we teach an identifiable method with specific guidelines and procedures. Behind the careful, methodical teaching there is the hope and belief that once trainees have learned the scales, they will be enabled, through personal and professional grounding in the principles, to do jazz, to improvise the necessary variations, to be in good tune with the live melody being played in front of them.

One of the first things we teach is that hakomi is an intrapsychic as opposed to interpersonal therapy. We move as quickly as possible to getting out of a normal conversational mode that would give people the idea that we were going to just talk. We encourage mindfulness right from the start which lets people know that we are about the business of helping them study the organization of their own experience. We don't get caught up in the content of stories people tell. We might contact them in the midst of a story by saying "a little anxious, huh?" in order to perhaps encourage them hanging out a little longer with the anxiousness so that they can learn from it. But never, "so tell me more about times and places you have been uneasy." We don't value chit chat.

So, one of the things I find myself doing a lot in the setting I work in is engaging in what I call "conversational chit chat," (CCC). I see a number of rural people who are unfamiliar with and basically suspicious of therapy. It feels like a failure of some sort to them when they feel forced to make an appointment at my agency. But they finally do.

A farmer comes in whose son is acting out in school and with his friends. He is mad at his wife for not taking care of the family at home. She is mad at him for being in the fields all the time and not giving his son the fathering he needs. The kid has been picked up for minor theft. The wife is

broaching the subject of divorce. He is devastated because he feels he has been doing his part in bringing home the bacon, and he desperately needs and values his family though he can't express that to them well.

So, when he comes in nervous, out of his element, hat in hand, field clothes on, I say "hayng today, huh?" He says, "yah." I get chit chatty. "You worried about getting it all in before the next rain?" He responds and we start talking about farming. I show a lot of interest and ask a lot of questions about farming which is his area of expertise and daily life.

In terms of hakomi, I am breaking the rules. But more fundamentally, I'm promoting safety, the first rule. I'm making genuine human contact that he can relate to. I'm letting him know that I'm interested in him as a person and not just a thing, a therapeutic problem. I'm communicating in between the lines that I'm happy to join him in his normal, healthy life as well as in places of pain, that doing therapy is optional for me.

If I strike up CCC with someone, I then have to invent additional transition techniques not found in the HT manual. When I feel the timing is right, I say something like,

T: You know, I'd be interested in talking with you all afternoon about this stuff, but I'm starting to feel a little guilty about taking up your time when I understand you had some concerns that led you here today. Was it something about the family you wanted to explore?

C: Yah, its not going too good with the family.

T: Uh huh. So, it sounds like a little hopelessness in your voice as you say that?

C: (nods)

T: And a little confusion too?

C: Yah.

T: Well, I could guess a little bit about that, but you know, you are the world's expert on what's going on with you, and I kind of like to help a person mine his own wisdom. How would it be if you just hung out for awhile with that sense of hopelessness, and see if it will tell us more about itself? Maybe more about the confusion will come out in the wash too. Is that OK?

C: Uh, yah.

T: OK. So let's just notice how your body is experiencing the hopelessness, by simply hanging out with it like you might hang out with an experience of a sunrise on the horizon. Notice anything else there might be about the quality of the hopelessness ... hopeless about being able to do what?

In addition to promoting mindfulness in this example, I am also establishing a contract. Transactional Analysis people teach explicit contract-making right from the start. It is not explicitly taught in hakomi. Implicitly, it has to be there. A lot of attempts at accessing fail because the client has not agreed to that agenda. Here I am telling my farmer what I propose, and getting him to sign the dotted line of agreeing to explore his present experience. He goes along with it. He might not have. Then, I would have had to let go of my game plan and found another one.

Difficult Individual Clients

"Can hakomi work with any kind of client?" is a common question in the trainings. On one level the answer is obviously no, if hakomi is thought of as a specific bag of therapeutic tricks. Then a person has to go from one bag of tricks to another to find the one that fits best for bed-wetting, sexual dysfunctions, recurring nightmares, relational problems, eating disorders, etc. On another level the answer is a non-macho yes, if hakomi is thought of as a framework within which a wide range of techniques can be integrated around a central core of universal principles.

Trungpa says² the best thing we can do for some people who are unsteady and almost lost in the chaos of their lives is to provide them with a nice orderly, hospitable place to be, and cook them some nice, orderly, nutritious meals. Is that doing hakomi? Absolutely. It is doing what is needful. It is entering into the organic flow of what is healing. It is supporting the need for order the person is so desperately and unsuccessfully trying to provide for themselves. It is promoting safety, helping get someone out of the thunderstorm, which is a prerequisite for mindfulness down the track.

With some of the people I work with, we have to hang out with the contact stage of the process dealing with safety issues for months on end. With one woman who has overwhelming, undifferentiated tears and sadness at the slightest beginning of turning awareness inward, I have simply been offering an interpersonal relationship that majors in honesty, no tricks, compassion with no physical touching as yet, clarity and realism; all those things that Carl Rogers and Harry Stack Sullivan have taught us so well. My faith is that we are accomplishing something in between the lines that has to do with safety, trust, and hope that will one day lead to the possibility of more mindful self explorations on her part.

With another woman who would have a DSM III diagnosis of mixed atypical personality disorder, mostly avoidant with a lot of dependency, I likewise have not pushed mindfulness as an agenda. The woman grasps and fearfully clings to the very few relationships she trusts, and spends a lot of her energy majoring in her children, and shoring up what little self-image she has. She has a long history of being hospitalized and in therapy. My first objective with her was simply to offer a relational anchor that would keep her from being hospitalized. She claimed that she needed emotional nourishment from people, and that when she got it she could lower her medications. She was going through a very shaky period because of disruptions with her children leaving the nest as well as formerly close friends leaving town.

A number of therapists would have gotten in a power struggle with her, saying she didn't need to be close and nourished by others; that would enhance dependency. She needed to get in touch with her own power, stand on her own feet, analytically understand where her need for warmth was coming from, and be independent, which of course would scare her and mobilize her defensively.

In good hakomi fashion I went with the flow, saying it was fine with me for us to be close and nourishing with each other within the limits of our situation. I hope she will eventually learn there is not a conflict between being needy and being independent. They can both be true. Neither has to be sacrificed.

We experimented with touch. She held herself in so much that her body was often trembling and in mini-spasms. First, just a hand on the back, asking for meaning, what that was like for her, what the hand seemed to be saying. Then the sorting out of sexual issues, affirming the OKness of feelings, which is a different issue than how one acts out the feeling. Then a hug standing up. Then a hug sitting on the same couch with her twisting awkwardly to insure minimal contact. Finally after many months, her being able to let me hold her in my lap as a child.

Then some processing about the issue of whether I would drop her if she were to become stronger and more independent. Finally, some actual accessing of core material while I held her in my lap after a disturbing incident in her life. We were able to contact a very bright, precocious child who at age three got the very clear message that her developing potential threatened the parents, was not welcome, and would be squashed in no uncertain terms if it became too obvious. The possibility of more "pure" hakomi exploration had arisen.

Are there people we shouldn't try to do hakomi mindfulness with at all? Of course. I don't try to do therapy with a wet alcoholic. I do all the interpersonal, compassionate, confronting, reality-oriented work I can, to get them into whatever program they

need to dry out. I then consider treating whatever is left over.

I'm very cautious about getting mindful with an anti-social personality who comes through the legal system. I don't want to produce a more psychologically-enlightened, therapy-wise, anti-social personality. I follow the rule of thumb that insists we are not going to do anything at all together until his or her report of what happened matches the victim's report which I make sure I have available.

Emotionally disturbed children basically need compassionate, genuine, realistic adult relationships with a large measure of structure, clarity, and consistency provided. Painfully shy people can and should be taught basic social skills and given the opportunity to try them out in the market place with the therapist right along with them, as well as looking into character derivations of the shyness. The greatest benefit to people who have experienced traumatic events who have not been able to debrief them with anybody - Vietnam vets, adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse - derives from being able to tell their story in a group with others who have gone through the same trauma. Character work should come later, not sooner. Adult survivors are routinely mis-diagnosed as histrionic or borderline personalities.

I never have figured out what to do with a seriously paranoid person who has framed me as one of the bad guys. Nor do we want to relax a person with a schizoid process too quickly, either through hakomi, meditation, bio-feedback, or stress reduction exercises, etc. All the standard cautions in the literature should be taken into account when working with specific clinical syndromes.

In general, hakomi is wonderful for slowing people down and giving them an opportunity to sort out the confusion that comes from normal life stresses. It is ideal for working with neurotic clients who are distressed by some aspect of their behavior. Hakomi also can be usefully employed with those who have personality disorders, though here it is trickier, since these people are placing the blame for their problems on external causes beyond their control. Psy-

chotic folks are still struggling with getting a firm sense of differentiation between me and you, and have no room for re-arranging intra-psychic furniture. Here hakomi therapists have to major in interpersonal contact that will help them become real to the person, as well as pay a lot of attention to concrete matters of daily life in the patient's world. The compassion and respect of hakomi's style is helpful here, echoing the wisdom of Harry Stack Sullivan, M.D., who spent a lifetime convincing his psychiatric colleagues that they were more like their schizophrenic patients than different from them.

With many specific disorders (such as sexual dysfunctions, sexual offenders, eating disorders, etc.) hakomi therapists should familiarize themselves, if they have not already, with the known dynamics and general treatment approaches, and make decisions about how hakomi's refined emphasis on mindful exploration of the organization of experience can most usefully fit in. Some hints about that are included in examples below.

What Form Non-Violence?

Some trainees struggle with the issue of what it means to be non-violent, one of the main principles from which hakomi works. "I work in a methadone clinic and we lower a client's methadone dosage if they don't comply with the program." "I work with anorectics and sometimes have to hospitalize them against their will." "I work in a graduated hospital unit where patients have to meet specific requirements to graduate from a restrictive unit to a less restrictive one." What to do, what to think?

An important thing to note about non-violence is that it has little to do with trying to be a nice, sweet, understanding, gentle person. It has to do with going with the flow of healing, those movements which are persuading things toward wholeness, that which the person wants at the deepest levels.

Sometimes the person is not mindful and conscious of what is in the best interests of his or her own healing. I sometimes have to make humble (it is dangerous of course) but

firm leaps of faith in assuming and carrying through with what is best. I routinely counsel spouses and employers of alcoholics that the most caring, compassionate, loving, healing thing they can do, is to not rescue the alcoholic but to let him or her bump up against the reality of his/her situation. People who are acting out-of-control, trying to break windows on an in-patient unit, are not amenable to mindfulness or any kind of talk in general. Structure is called for. The more they can participate in and understand structuring interventions the better, but sometimes they can't participate at all.

In general, hakomi is on the side of healing, and therapists should not be squeamish about using whatever methods seem to be in its best interest. More specifically, hakomi majors in accessing the O variable through mindfulness. I'm always looking for opportunities to do that, even while employing other methods that address the S or R variable.

Anorectics

Let's take working with anorectics for example. Sometimes they have to be hospitalized because they simply do not comprehend how closely they are flirting with death. I would do it in a second on the assumption that there is a part of them, the most important part, that wants life and life more abundant.

It would be best, if I were the primary therapist, that I work with an M.D. colleague who could play the heavy role and do the hospitalizing. Then, in good hakomi fashion, I could consider the hospitalizing act as a life-probe that is reverberating through the person's consciousness. I could use that in exploring the O dimension.

T: "So, your parents thought you should come see me," or "So, Dr. M decided to hospitalize you, even though you didn't think it was a good idea yourself, huh?"

C: Yah. I don't know why they did that.

T: Uh huh. What is that like for you to have someone else make a decision about your life? A little anger maybe, ... con-

fusion? You know best, I'm sure. How would it be if you just hung out with yourself for a few moments to notice what your own experience is telling you?

Here there is the possibility of taking radical control of an anorectic's life, and then using that act as a way of accessing the control issue within the anorectic that is thought to give rise to the whole syndrome.

A Behavioral Contract Group for Adolescents

In general then, one of the good things hakomi training can add to the repertoire of people trained in other methods is that sensitivity to how the person's programs seem to be organizing them around various inputs, and a good ability to access that O material when the opportunity presents. Obviously, there is the prerequisite here of not buying into S or R approaches as the only thing worth doing, the prejudice that exploring the O can only amount to navel gazing. There must be an openness to various roads to healing and a willingness to transcend the dogmatism of colleagues or teachers.

I do some contract work with public schools. Often this takes the form of doing behavioral contract groups with students. I have them do a vocational interest inventory, look at what careers they are wanting and what the prerequisites are. Then I ask them to identify how they are getting in the way of their own desire for success, do a contract around something they can change for their own benefit, do a force field analysis of factors for and against the change, and finally a strategic plan that addresses the factors identified in the force field analysis. Sounds just like your average hakomi training, right?

I use hakomi every step of the way, operating within the structure of the group, always on the alert for opportunities to promote self-awareness. While discussing with one student the ways he gets in the way of his own progress with grades, he mentioned that he will just blank out in class and stare out the window looking nowhere. So I asked:

T: Do you understand the blanking out? Do you know when it most commonly occurs?

C: No.

T: Well, let me give you two possibilities and you check with your own experience to see which one seems most right. OK?

C: OK.

T: Alright. Does your inner wisdom tell you it is a better hunch that you blank out when things get simpler and boring, or harder and more complex?

C: Harder and more complex.

T: OK. And in the same way, does your inner sense tell you that it is OK with you to do as well as you're able, or that you should be doing really well in school?

C: I should be doing really well.

All this confirmed for me the observation that while this was a kid who looked laid back on the surface, underneath there was a lot of tension and drive. He had been talking of how high-powered and successful both his father and grandfather were, and how much he admired them. On a hunch, I asked him whether he thought his dad would tell him 1) "It's OK with me for you to simply do as well as is right for you," or 2) "You have to do better than I did even." He answered, "better than me even."

I didn't think that was right. I encouraged him to have an actual conversation with his father about it, and let his mother in on that idea. He reported back that yes, his dad did want him to do better than he himself had done. The reason, however, didn't turn out to be that dad had done well and wanted his son to do even better. It turned out dad had been a flake, even though he was successful later, and wanted his son to get on board at the start. The student was able to relax more and blank out less.

That is an example of accessing some O stuff, encouraging some new behavior R (talking to father), and changing the environment S (parents now being more aware of

the pressure son was feeling that was getting in his way).

Family Therapy

I have done a number of multiple impact family therapy sessions for the Children's Services Division of the state. This means spending all day with a family with as many therapists as there are family members.

It is sometimes hard for me to function with the team because some members have been so rigidly trained in structural and strategic methods that they believe the family system is the all-controlling reality and that any individual, intra-psychic work with a particular family member is worse than useless. From a hakomi point of view this is poor general systems theory. A system is a whole that is made up of parts. Any system is part of a larger supra-system and composed of smaller sub-systems. What some, not all, family systems people don't buy is that each sub-system has a relative amount of autonomy in relation to the supra-system, and that changes in the components of a system can affect the system as a whole.

I do buy that, and I'm looking for ways to act on it during a family session, at the same time that I'm participating in the other techniques of family work. One family we met had multiple problems, with acting-out kids and a single mother. In the initial joining part of the all-day impact session, I made contact with the mother by telling her that she evoked in me the image of a person burdened by a pile of bricks weighing her down. "It seems like the juvenile authorities are piling bricks, CSD, the schools, etc., and you are feeling overloaded." She confirmed that as a good image.

The children had come from various fathers. At one point one of the team members suggested that the youngest boy had a need to talk with his mother about his father whom he had never known and knew nothing about. So, we arranged the chairs for a talk. I shadowed the mother.

The boy said, "Yah, what about my dad?" Immediately the mother stiffened and went into a defensive justification about "Well,

that was a long time ago, and he was the manager of this motel I was working at, and..."

I interrupted immediately and said to the mother, "Slow down for just a moment. How did you experience and interpret his question about his father?" She wasn't a very articulate, intelligent person so I volunteered, "It looked to me like you experienced his question as if he were putting one more brick on the pile, like he was asking you to justify yourself somehow?" "Yah. That's right. That's how it felt."

So, I then suggested that he might not have intended it like that and that she might check it out with him. She looked at the boy and said, "Were you wanting me to defend what I did with your father?" The boy replied, "No, I just wanted to know about my dad", and they went on to have a nice healing conversation.

After it was over I turned to the oldest boy and said,

T: Did you notice how your mother stiffened up and got defensive when he first asked about his dad?

C: Yah.

T: Have you ever seen her do that before?

C: Sure.

T: Does the conversation ever go any place when she gets that way?

C: Not a chance.

T: OK. So, I think one thing you could do in the family as the oldest, and the one who seems to be basically out of the house and most of the conflicts, is to track that in your mother. When you see it happening you can contact it by saying, "Looks like you think you got another brick mom. We better back off for a minute and get clear." Do you think you can spot it and do that when it happens again in the future?

C: Yah, I can do that.

T: Good. That might be more helpful than just yelling at both of them when they get into it.

C: Right.

T: But, if they want to go ahead and fight with each other anyway, just to have fun, you can let them. You are not responsible for solving the whole thing. Just call it by name maybe.

C: Gotcha.

Here I am again encouraging self-awareness in mother, O; encouraging her to try a new behavior, R (checking out her assumptions about people's intentions); and mobilizing the environment, S, to encourage the new behavior (teaching the older son a little tracking and contact skill).

I am also not going along with the common family therapy practice of intentionally leading a family into one of their normal impasses. In hakomi fashion, I am orienting things toward satisfaction, helping them work through mini-impasses as they arise.

At the end of an all-day impact session we all share appreciations. It was gratifying to me to have this poor, welfare mother say to me that she appreciated that I had a way of encouraging the best in people, and not provoking the worst. Two points for hakomi! Not because we have a mill turning out nice people therapists, however. Non-violence and gracefulness simply get the job done objectively better, with less commotion and drama, and with more effortlessness and efficiency.

Vietnam Vets

When I was first asked to lead a therapy group of Vietnam veterans I was specifically told that this was not a subtle group you could be graceful and gentle with, doing cutesy, mindful things. They were tough, hardened, reclusive, and needed a lot of confrontation, encounter, reality testing, behavioral contracts, rage reduction, etc. That is true in a way. These persons do respond to clarity, honesty, no games, and interpersonal support from other vets.

I also found that they were relieved and curious when I told them that I didn't like to work by giving a lot of advice and solving problems. I had great faith that each person had within him or her (some nurses) the wisdom to direct their own healing if we could support them in tapping it. Being in the military they had had enough of others directing their lives. They appreciated that approach, even while wondering about it.

Before I arrived, the group had developed a common practice of putting tense people on a mat and holding them down while they struggled to reduce rage and relieve pressure. A number of them were relieved and appreciative when I introduced the hakomi experience of creative struggling; having the struggler direct the struggle creatively by checking inside themselves to see how it felt most satisfying to struggle, with what kind of resistance provided by the others. That way is empowering, and encourages mutual, negotiated control as well as mindfulness.

One night a guy was there who had a habit of coming to group every four weeks or so when he felt the tension rising within him, and struggling on the mat to let off the steam. He had repeated the procedure for a long time. This night it was my judgment, though the group did not agree, that he was tense but not so much that he couldn't be mindful. So, I suggested that instead of going automatically for physical release, that he turn his awareness inward to check out more precisely what he, himself, thought was needful at the moment.

T: What is the tension like in your body?
Is it located any particular place?

C: Yah, right here (pointing to his solar plexus.)

T: OK. Hang out with that spot for a moment and see if it will tell you anything more about itself. What is the quality of the tension?

C: Its like a bright white burning light.

T: Good. Hang out with the light then awhile in the same way.

He had his eyes closed. At this point a group member signaled me and I motioned for him to do his thing. He put his hand on the guy's solar plexus and said:

V: So you can visualize this tension as a bright white light, huh?

C: Yah.

V: OK. Now just let your mind go blank and not see anything, OK?

C: OK.

V: Now, are you blank?

C: Yah.

V: Now just let the first thing you see come into your mind ... Do you see it?

C: Yah.

V: A fire fight?

C: Yah.

V: White phosphorus shot?

C: Yah.

Then he went on to describe a memory of an attack in which his squad was pinned down and about to be shot out by the enemy, where he had rescued the radio pack and called in support fire to save the unit, only to have one of our own phosphorus shots kill his remaining buddies. After relating this the other vet looked at me like, "what next?". I commented to the guy:

T: It looks like that hand on your solar plexus is somehow relieving?

C: Yah. It's like the tension is just flowing out through it.

T: Well, if it feels good, let's just hang out with it awhile and let it feel good. OK?

C: OK.

Enough Said

T: (After a pause.) Maybe we can do a little translation here. If that hand was using words, what would it be saying to you?

C: It is saying, "It's OK to feel the terror."

That was it. We then learned that he had a lot of people around him who got uptight when he started to get uptight. He would still involuntarily hit the deck when a car backfired unexpectedly. They were telling him, "It is not OK to feel the terror. You have to control it so we will feel better."

So, we processed that and helped him know that at least those people in the group with him were OK with him feeling terror, and that it was good for them too to know it is OK. The more this guy integrates that message, the less the steam builds up and needs mechanical release. Vets, like anybody else, are not machines. They are human beings who have this marvelous capacity that other animals don't, to be mindful, to be able to witness the way they organize their experience, and not simply be caught in the organization.

Enough said. Hakomi's non-violent, non-warfare continues in the trenches. It proceeds in an open-ended, curious way, grounded in faith in the ultimate unity of things, even while we wander around in our dualities. What modalities integrate naturally with each other?⁴ What encourages things toward wholeness with people?⁵

Hakomi will deepen and broaden as more people work in more settings with more client populations, and share the results with the rest of us. But it will only proceed as there is faith in the underlying principles, which transcend the dogmatism of a particular set of techniques or methodologies, and hakomi is prevented from becoming another thing or ism.

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1. See my editorial by the same name in the second edition of the Hakomi Forum, Winter, 1985.
 2. "Becoming A Full Human Being" by Chogyama Trungpa, Hakomi Forum, Summer, 1985, pp 19ff.
 3. Cf. "Intensive Family Services" by Greg Johanson, Hakomi Forum, Summer, 1984, p.39ff.
 4. Cf. my articles on psychodrama and biofeedback in the Winter, 1985 edition of the Hakomi Forum.
 5. Cf. "The Hakomi Method and Couples" by Devi Records-Benz in Hakomi Forum, Summer, 1984.

'ORGANIZATION' MEANS THAT IF NATURE PUTS TWO THINGS TOGETHER IN A MEANINGFUL WAY, SOMETHING NEW IS GENERATED WHICH CANNOT BE DESCRIBED, ANYMORE, IN THE TERMS OF THE QUALITIES OF ITS CONSTITUENTS. THIS IS TRUE THROUGH THE WHOLE GAMUT OF COMPLEXITY, FROM ATOMIC NUCLEI AND ELECTRONS UP TO MACROMOLECULES OR A COMPLEX INDIVIDUAL. NATURE IS NOT ADDITIVE. IF THIS IS TRUE, THEN THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE, AND WHEN I TAKE TWO THINGS APART I HAVE THROWN AWAY SOMETHING, SOMETHING WHICH HAS BEEN THE VERY ESSENCE OF THAT SYSTEM, OF THAT LEVEL OF ORGANIZATION.

ALBERT SZENT-GYORGI
NOBEL PEACE-WINNING BIOCHEMIST