
ON THE UNIQUENESS OF HAKOMI

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PART ONE: EFFORTING

Claims to uniqueness are not in themselves unique at all. In the late seventies, Katinka Matson created and published a book called, Two Hundred and Fifty New Psychotherapies. (It should have been subtitled, Count 'Em!) Hakomi wasn't even mentioned, making it unique in that way alone. It was a silly little book because two hundred and fifty is an absurdly big number when you are talking about "psychotherapies". Five. Maybe ten. Uniqueness is not so easily achieved. Hakomi has it. There are profound ways in which Hakomi is different from all other psychotherapies that I know about and these uniquenesses are at the very heart of what Hakomi is and how it works.

One of the ways Hakomi is unique, is in where it places the locus of control and healing, not just philosophically but methodologically. In connection with that, we must also think a little about efforting.

Here's a little story. I was doing a workshop. We were doing a small group exercise that often evokes strong emotions and processing. When things were well underway, I walked around and came to a woman working with expressions of resistance. She was lying down with several people gently restraining her arms and legs. She was pushing her arms and legs against the resistance of the others and pushing out some expressions of "No, I won't. You can't treat me this way."

Things like that. Another group member, a woman who had studied bioenergetics for several years, was acting as therapist. This person was holding the strugglers arms at the wrists and, with each movement and verbal expression, the therapist would say, "Good, good!" As soon as I saw this, I wasn't happy. I didn't know exactly why, but for me, something was wrong. I've thought about it since and it has stimulated this writing.

I sat down beside this little group and looked at the therapist. I told her that I would like to take over at this point and I invited her to watch my approach. She was agreeable to that. I didn't know what I was going to do; I only knew I didn't like what was going on. As I've thought about it since, I realized that it was the efforting I didn't like. I didn't like the sense I got of the client working at expression, pushing for it, struggling. And I didn't like seeing the therapist controlling the process with those reinforcing judgments, "good! good!", which only encouraged the efforting. I like to see the spontaneous happening.

Effort is an ego function. When one efforts, the act of efforting creates an I and a something the I struggles against (gravity, time, competitors ... the forces of change, the forces of inertia). In this drama of struggle and competition, the principal act is the creation and preservation of a separate self: an ego. Without the struggle

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there is no drama and no dramatis personae. With the spontaneous, effort evaporates and ego relaxes. This relaxation is essential to contact with realms of knowledge and control beyond the ego. In Hakomi Therapy, we deliberately evoke support from the larger selves, in both therapist and client. Our way of working shifts the locus of control and healing, away from the therapist and the limited conscious ego of the client.

Our present cultural myth is too much a celebration of the ego. Our notions of separate self are out of balance with all sorts of larger selves: family, community, the biological world and beyond to the universe and God. All too easily we feel ourselves to be separate from and not much supported by these larger selves. It is upon this fundamental image of isolation and struggle that we build identities, world pictures and psychotherapeutic method.

So, I asked the "client" to slow down and relax for a moment and with only a little reluctance she did that. I asked her to, "go inside and find what wants to happen. What kind of movement wants to happen, what kind of expression. And what kind of resistance from those holding you feels exactly right, feels the best". This one statement shifts the locus of control from the therapist to some unnamed intelligence inside the client. I didn't ask her what "she" wants, just "what" wants. I'm asking her to contact some larger self. Everything about this intervention asks for relaxation of struggle, awareness and a search for satisfaction. This is my way of doing things.

She began to adjust. She felt better with the legs and arms going slowly. As I supported this process, she became clearer and clearer that, at the level of bodily

wants, these movements were the "right" ones. The movements felt good. At that point I encouraged her to stay with them as long as they felt that way and to wait for anything else that wanted to happen.

The next step, after getting the feeling right, I imagined might be curiosity. I thought she might begin wondering, "why do these particular movements feel so good?" So, I was just sitting there and she was having a very pleasant time, playing you might say. Her expressions seemed to have a quality of delicious and righteous rebellion. These movements felt good. I wasn't directing her movements or even encouraging one over another. I had simply directed a shift from the external "good!, good!" reinforcements of the therapist to the internal authority of her own feelings.

Sure enough, she started to get curious. This happens quite naturally. We all want to understand. The significant thing here is that the need for understanding emerges after the experience, not before. To search for understanding without a feelingful, present experience is basically guesswork and tends more to substitute for feelings rather than make sense of them. So, in Hakomi, we establish present experience as our focus, support spontaneous feelings and expression and only then go for meaning. So, when her curiosity emerged, I asked some questions about meaning: what kind of movements were these?; what was her body saying?; what words go with this experience?

Well, she quite suddenly remembered that she had never been allowed to crawl and that's exactly what those movements looked like, crawling. From that point on I worked with helping her take in the knowledge that she didn't always have to fight for her freedom. I told her it's okay to crawl, that no one would interfere and someone might even want to help. All of that meant she could get support for what she naturally wanted and needed and wouldn't have to always fight bigger, stronger people and lose. And it turned out pretty good. She could see her way to dropping out of that whole drama of fighting for her freedom and simply realizing it was hers to own.

So, one of the aspects of Hakomi that is rare, if not unique, is this shifting of the locus of control and healing. Of course some other therapies do also do that, client centered therapy for example. However, we shift this locus even further, towards the larger self, a realm not of separation and struggle, but of the natural and spontaneous.

If you followed the broad flow of the process here, you will have gathered that it starts with helping the person to relax and turn their awareness inward towards present experience with a primary attitude of self study -- not self improvement or expression for expression's sake -- but an openness to the organizing sources of thoughts, feelings and actions. There is less doing here and more noticing. It is a backing away from action and direct control and a beginning of contact with the larger self of the unconscious.

Then we make ready for, notice, welcome and nurture some naturally unfolding process. Such processes, happening spontaneously, are a clear sign that the larger self is participating. This dropping back and letting things emerge sets the stage for the cooperation of the unconscious and is an example of nonviolence at its most effective. Here is where the therapist and the larger self of the client connect. Without this, therapy is almost always boring and trivial. With the cooperation of the unconscious, something authentic and powerful begins. Grace and mystery are there. Something wild and connected to the earth is possible. Of course it depends where your faith is -- in the rational, separate, controlling ego or in something beyond. Again, this approach is closer to being than doing, so special techniques and principles apply. The techniques and principles we use, as a complete, working whole, are unique to Hakomi.

So, when the time is ripe, we encourage an opening to memories and insights which give meaning to the already unfolded experience. The work is not complete until some change has taken place in the unconscious. A memory or a core belief which colors the sense of self is reexperienced and understood from a larger perspective. It is reevaluated by a more mature mind with as much love and

forgiveness as possible. Without meaning and change, the work is incomplete. Still, effort is not needed, for insight and integration are as spontaneous as any other process.

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It is as if a child inside wants terribly to know what happened and why, wants to know what is real and what to do, needs some way to make sense of past pain and chaos. The questioning face is there, the intensity of listening, too. The eyes widen with discovery and the head nods slowly. And so, when we are open to them, even these needs and opportunities emerge. So, finally, the client gathers in the fruit and flower of this very special process which is simply to know, from a deep place within, how one has come to this moment and how one can move on.

PART TWO: CONNECTING WITH THE UNCONSCIOUS¹

In this workshop, the first thing I hope to do is to teach you to use evoked experiences. Evoked experiences are created by one: being in an open, receptive mood; two: receiving an external input, like a statement, a touch or something visual; three: allowing the input to have an effect on you; and four: noticing the effects. In Hakomi, we call the mood mindfulness, and we use it to study how each of us is organized around core issues in our lives.

Mindfulness allows experiences to be evoked and noticed. It can be learned and developed as a skill. I think of our use of this skill as a way to communicate with the unconscious. Today, we will use mindfulness to study the basic emotional issues we each have seeing and being seen. Reading bodies requires clarity about what unconscious controls are effecting your ability to see or be seen.

There are two wholly different ways to approach body reading and those two ways embrace and reflect two wholly different ways

of being in the world, two different paradigms. When I first learned body reading, I learned both ways. One way was by reading books, mostly Lowen's books. I learned by reading about what body features meant what and why, part by part. That's one approach, linear and reductionistic, basically, a parts list. It's learning special knowledge. Some authority has some special knowledge, gained no doubt through hard work and experience, and that authority is conveying a condensed, linear version of that knowledge to you.

That's the model. It says, body structure, posture, the various parts and features, all have a set meaning, for everyone, and we should just learn those meanings. It implies that nothing more is needed. We just memorize the list and understand the reasons for each part meaning what it does and we can read bodies. It's like symptom analysis in medicine. It's all left brain and conscious. There's nothing in there about the observer. It's a list which anyone could learn and use. Nothing about skill or intentions or relationship.

I learned a whole other way to read bodies by studying directly with John Pierrakos. Pierrakos was famous for reading auras. I took lots of photographs of my clients. Then I'd bring them down to John's place in the country. We'd sit together and he would look at the images on the screen and say things like ... "the pools of stagnation."

These weren't categories from a list. It was as if he let the poet in him feel this person on the screen and resonate. Some deep issue in the person spoke to John and something in John, something intuitive and right brain, spoke back. That was his way and just

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being there and watching. I learned from it. Pierrakos taught me that it wasn't about

parts lists. Pierrakos had cultivated something inside which allowed him to see deeply and directly into people. He could have made a parts list anytime he wanted. But he really didn't need one.

John's work isn't about special knowledge. It's about his connection to his own unconscious gifts. You can learn to do what John does, maybe not as good, but far beyond anything most people know about. But to do so, you'll have to change the way you use your vision. You'll have to learn to connect what you're seeing to your intuitive mind. You'll have to learn to trust and use that part of you. You'll have to drop your attachments to the whole parts list approach. So, as you learn body reading here, you are learning something much bigger at the same time. You are learning a new way to be with yourself and others, based upon connecting to intuitive, participatory, and direct ways of knowing.

In this model, body reading is about how to be with yourself and the person you look at. It is about the natural, untapped ability to see more than just the obvious. There are patterns of feeling, attitude and beliefs which are also "seeable". I once looked at someone in a class I taught at the Rocky Mountain Healing Arts Institute and I said to him, "you look like mild mannered Clark Kent to me." He smiled, then slowly took off his shirt and underneath he was wearing a Superman t-shirt. I just had an impression from some knowing part of my unconscious and I spoke it. I also noticed that his body weight was distributed upwards, small pelvis, locked knees and I could add that up, too. The Clark Kent thing fit the general impression about character process I expected from my parts list experience. Still, there was something more and it is exactly that something which makes for contact with others and a solid, healing relationship.

So, this model is about relationship, which means honesty and integrity. Not parts lists, not special knowledge, but connection and direct ways of knowing. It's about using more of yourself than just left brain consciousness. This directness is something the old model doesn't allow, doesn't recognize. Intuitive knowing wasn't possible in the old

model. For me, the significance of our meeting here is in our attempts to go beyond the old model. Fritz Pearl said ..."learning is the discovery of the possible." I want to teach you what's possible in the realm of body reading and more importantly, in the realm of your own untapped natural gifts.

We're basically going to explore issues and learn skills. I'm not going to give you a parts list. You can find those in books. I wrote one myself. Ken Dychtwald wrote one. Lowen wrote a bunch. And Pierrakos has one coming out. This workshop is about your issues, your skills and what's possible. Rather than me standing people up and looking at them and saying this means this and that means that, let's tease out and connect to that old/young part of you that always knew how to read bodies. And as you learn, I'll coach. It's your talent, your courage, your effort and I know about bringing them out, so I get to coach.

My job as a teacher is to get you well started. If I can just get you started properly, then you can do the rest. I have four things that I'm going to get you well started in. One is the use of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the way we connect with the unconscious. We function in a way that connects conscious and unconscious. We learn to see and listen with our whole being. The use of mindfulness is the use of evoked experiences. First we get ready. We allow a mood in ourselves of receptivity, openness. In that mood, we allow some input, a statement or a visual image. We let this input have an effect upon us; we let it stir up things inside us; let it evoke whatever experience it will. The experience could be one of sensations, images, thoughts, feelings, memories, impulses or global impressions, or any combination. We let the experience emerge and we simply follow it and remember.

For example, you get ready and I say something to you and you notice what experience is evoked. You are alert and receptive. Your aggressive ego is relaxed, suspended, allowing the automatic or spontaneous to emerge and be studied. These automatic or spontaneous responses are messages from the unconscious. You are allowing yourself to be effected by words, sights, sounds, whatever.

Your unconscious takes this in and offers a reply in the form of a memory, a feeling, an image, etc. It allows the conscious mind to notice and study something. The first thing I need to get you well started in is mindfulness and the skill of using it to study evoked experiences. The first step in getting a good, solid conversational connection with your own unconscious is to practice working with mindfulness and evoked experiences.

The next thing we'll do is explore your issues around seeing and being seen. We'll study how you are organized around these issues. We'll evoke feelings, thoughts and memories that will help clarify how you may be limiting yourself in seeing and being seen. We use mindfulness to do that. Then we'll work with the material evoked. We'll process a little to get clearer and maybe get free of some of the limits. We'll work in pairs to help each other within a guided exercise for the whole group.

After the issues have been explored and worked with, the third thing will be building skills. We'll use the same method of evoked experience to begin reading bodies. As with exploring issues in yourself, you'll need the right mood and attitude to begin seeing others.

Let's talk about that. What's most needed is a willingness to be honest about oneself and others. That means courage and tolerance. You must be willing to look at someone and see whatever is there. That could be pain, fear, hate, joy, love, whatever. It's not always easy to look at such things. And, to see them in others, we have to be open to the same feelings in ourselves. So, if we want to see, we must be willing to accept what's there. And, if we want to accept others, we must first say yes to ourselves. This acceptance and willingness to be honest with ourselves and others is the ground of seeing. How can you see if you're not willing to accept what's there? How will you open your eyes?

As you build these skills, you also continue developing a working connection with your deeper self. If you are going to be powerful in this connection, one thing you'll

have to do is use it honestly. That means you'll have to take responsibility for your experiences. You mustn't be trying to make a case either for some theory of yours about the other person or for what they're doing to you. You'll have to be basically okay with who they are and with what experiences are evoked in you when you are seeing them. If they're in pain, you'll have to feel some of it. And you'll have to be okay with that pain and, therefore, with your own pain. The word for "feeling with" is compassion. So, besides honesty, you'll need compassion in order to use and build your skills.

If you create the wrong kind of feeling in the person you're looking at, you'll see that and not so much what their deeper self might like to show you. There will be confusion. You'll be seeing your own creations so to speak and may not know it. The other person's stuff will get mixed up with yours. It can be pretty scary for some people to let themselves be seen. If you are even the least bit indifferent, that will change the situation. You have to have compassion. Something about your spirit has to embrace what the other person is on all levels, and somehow, they have to know that. There is

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something about the other person that lets you see them. It's not just you. With compassion and honesty, you help set a mood in which the other can be honest with you and compassionate towards herself or himself. With that connection to others you can build your experiences, day by day, learning ever more.

As a teacher I'm trying to get you well started in all the ways I've already mentioned; evoked experiences, issues and skills. And there is a fourth way. We can

call it evoking wisdom. This new way of being with each other and working with each other invites the participation of the unconscious and beyond that, the spirit. And whatever invites the spirit, feeds the spirit. This feeding of the spirit is the true nature of psychotherapy. It is the wisdom within you that creates the skills of body reading. That same wisdom will tell you how fast to go and how slow to go and when to say certain things and when not to say certain things. It will guide the processes of learning and healing. You can use this wis-

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dom with the right attitudes and it responds by helping you build not just your skills but a healthy, loving way of being.

We evoke the wisdom by developing and using mindfulness, by exploring our own issues, by seeing others with compassion and by being honest and owning ourselves. That's what I want to get you well started with, all of that. I also want to help you build confidence, so I will pace this training to maximize gradual, step by step successes. I want to support your wisdom, honesty, compassion, confidence and skills every chance I get.

A few more words about evoking the wisdom within you. Why can't you do this already (if indeed you can't or think you can't)? How come John Pierrakos can do it and you can't do it? How come this supposedly natural ability in all of us is not operative right now in you? Is it something that you failed to learn, something you were talked out of? Was something wrong with it? When we explore the issues, we'll find some of this out. We might find out what happened when to stop you. There are cultural and

family taboos about really seeing and being seen by each other. There are family styles where honesty and directness is discouraged. And there is our cultural biases which neglect and subvert your intuitive talents.

Perhaps you knew how once and you put it aside at some point, accepting the taboos against it and the general low opinions of it. Perhaps you learned a whole other way of doing things, an active, physical way, full of competition and effort. In trying to see each other, most people simply try too hard. They seem to be saying to themselves ... I should be able to do this, if I just try hard enough I can do it. As if it were something like lifting weights. As if all we ever have to deal with in this life is matter, solid matter. As if minds had no reality or effect.

We also have psychological injunctions about doing things "right". We believe we should have a parts list and we should be able to see the "thing", the one thing, that's really there. Well, hard looks will just bog you down. When your efforting, when your attitude is one of taking rather than receiving, when you exert the power of your conscious, active ego, the other parts of you, the receptive, unconscious and spontaneous are all shut down. You're telling the unconscious.. "don't bug me now, I'm busy." So it's not playful, it's not spontaneous and it's very limited and uncreative because the unconscious isn't participating. If you try too hard, you definitely won't see.

When you relax, get playful, receptive (like a child seeing everything new, everything for the first time)+ ... when you put aside the attitude of having to find the one right answer because you're afraid to look stupid ... when you embrace the fun of it and your okay that it isn't all explainable or even acceptable ... when you can feel okay in yourself and compassionate towards others ... when you accept the gift, are grateful and willing to learn again ... willing to see whatever is there to see, the full range, pain, joy, all of it ..., then it will come, then it will be easy and fun and full of surprises and delight.

So now I'll review the structure. There is a little more to teach you about mindfulness. Let me give you a question to ponder for a bit. If you were in a state of mindfulness, that is being able to observe what is being spontaneously evoked -- thoughts, feelings etc. -- if you are using mindfulness, and I say to you ... "you're a good person"... what the hell do you think would happen? What kind of experience would be evoked? Do you have any idea? ... Please spend a few moments thinking about that and, when you're ready, talk to your neighbor about what you expect will happen if you're mindful and I say to you, "you're a good person".

Now, let's not just talk about our guesses. Let's actually do this experiment using mindfulness, noticing what is as it is evoked.

1 From a Portland Body Reading Workshop, January 1987

"Mind does not control functions. There is an intelligence that controls the mind and its functions, as well as functions of the body."

D.D. Palmer, Founder of Chiropractic
The Science, Art & Philosophy of Chiropractic

"Western physicians and scientists are trained as highly skilled and disciplined technicians, but not as multidimensional human beings. Thus we neglect our presence, which is subtly empowering everything we do."

Richard Moss, M.D.
The I That is We

"Quantum theory has abolished the notion of fundamentally separated objects, has introduced the concepts of the participant to replace that of the observer, and may even find it necessary to include the human consciousness in its description of the world."

Frijof Capra
The Tao of Physics