
STORYTELLING FOR HAKOMI THERAPISTS

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A STORY.

Do you know the story about Henry the strange kangaroo? He lived in China, in a town named Tsin Kiang, a big town with many people, dogs, cats, mice, and birds...but no other kangaroo. Now, that wouldn't have been a problem, one might think, but for Henry it was a big problem, because he knew he looked different and strange. And he knew the others felt he looked strange too. The mice would giggle when he hopped past, the birds would whistle after him, and the kids would say, "hey you, you are weird," laugh, and run away.

Henry was sad a lot. He would look at his tail that was supporting his weight and say to himself, "nobody has a huge tail like me, and nobody else jumps around like me instead of walking like the other creatures." So eventually he would only do very small jumps, pulling his tail in a little, trying to look like everybody else. For a time he also tried to walk on four legs like cats and dogs, but that looked even more strange, and he gave it up.

After some time, Henry became quite good at pulling his tail in and at taking tiny hopping steps. That felt awful and he couldn't breathe very well, but people and animals stopped noticing him so much. He knew though, that they still sneered at him, and every time he passed by a mirror, he wouldn't look, because it looked strange.

Henry was very unhappy.

One day, as he was sitting at the bank of his favorite river -- a place where he would spend many hours alone, thinking, crying, and dreaming of magical places -- he suddenly saw a golden fish trapped in a fisherman's trap. "Help me", said the golden fish, "help me, I want to live. I want to move. Please help me, Henry!"

"You know my name?" Henry replied, very surprised. "How?"

"I know what needs to be known," the fish answered. "Now help me!"

Henry felt sorry for the fish and opened trap. The fish darted from the trap, and in moments grew to be much bigger. Henry did see that it's skin was sparkling with many jewels. "Thank you", said the fish. "I'll help you, too." With these words, Henry saw three of the jewels from the golden fish's skin drop to the bottom of the river. "I'll give you these stones", the fish said, "the first will be a boat, the second a wind, the third you can keep. Trust the stones."

The fish had hardly finished its words, Henry dashed away and was gone. Henry was sad, waited a while in wonderment, and then slowly lowered his hand into the water and grasped the jewels. There was a red one,

a blue one, and a yellow one. Henry had studied them for a while, when suddenly, the blue one dissolved in a flash of light, and, at the same moment, a large blue, wonderful sailboat appeared before his eyes, anchored right next to him.

Without thinking much, Henry hopped right in, and immediately the second jewel, the yellow one, dissolved with a flash and a strong wind came up, the sails unfolded all by themselves, the boat started moving without Henry's help, and soon he was out on the river, sailing away at a fast pace.

Of course this was a magical boat, and it seemed to know where they were going, because it would take every bend of the river, heading down to the open sea, and once on the ocean it took a straight course south, never taking another turn again.

Well, the trip took quite some time. Henry found food and water on the boat, and enjoyed the ride, although now and then he would start worrying about his destination.

After about 30 days he finally sighted land in the distance, a beautiful shore with lots of trees and fruit everywhere. The boat landed, and Henry had hardly set foot on shore when the boat vanished in a flash of light and the wind that had been with them died down.

Henry was standing alone, clasping his last, red jewel, when a mouse walked by, casually greeting him, saying, "hello, kangaroo!" Just that, just, "hello, kangaroo!" No laughing, no giggling, no sneering. Another mouse came by, a horse, some animals that Henry didn't know, and some men and women. All of them were friendly and casual. Some even started little conversations. Henry had a wonderful time.

After talking with a little girl for a while, she said to Henry, "Henry, how come you are not over there, at the kangaroo party?"

"A kangaroo party?", Henry asked dumbfounded, "A kangaroo party? You mean, there are other kangaroos here?"

"Why certainly", the girl replied, "this is Australia, the place where all the kangaroos live, except the ones in the zoos." Henry was very excited, he took huge jumps over to the beach park the girl had pointed out, and he couldn't believe what he saw hundreds of kangaroos, just like him, dancing, singing, jumping and laughing all over the place a wonderful party with most of the guests being kangaroos.

Within a few seconds some other kangaroos had grasped him, swirling him around, and he was in the middle of them, jumping the highest jumps, and laughing in a way he had never laughed before.

Henry stayed through the whole party, and of course, he stayed in Australia. He made many friends, kangaroos and others, and he became a very happy kangaroo.

The red stone he put in his pocket, and I believe it is still there.

TELLERS AND TALES.

Often, when I meet people who have been to one of my workshops some time ago, they ask me for a story, "you know, the one with the purple rabbit who was lost on the moon?", or some other. And invariably I have to answer, "sorry, I don't really remember it. It was not an existing story. It was a story made up right then, just for you."

What is the power of a childish little story, which, if we had it in writing, would not seem special at all? What power does such a story have that people remember it long afterwards while the rest of the session has faded away? The story stays because it's like a picture or a riddle or a symbol. It is tight, compact, a seed that suggests it all.

Stories have probably been with us from the beginning of language. Stories transport our memories, our truths, our beliefs across the generations. Stories are in us and around us. They convey the myths we live by. Religions and the mythical foundations of civilizations are cast in stories.

Two examples of this come to mind from places where I've been. One is Iran, the ancient Persia from where some of the best known, internationally best selling stories of all time come. There the old and the new stories are told in the markets even today, by storytellers who keep large audiences entranced for hours; children, adults, and the aging; a variation of our TV and screen culture where the same myths of heroism and malice, good and bad, are repeated over and over again.

The other example is the Indonesian Hindu island of Bali, where there is ONE single saga, one of the great pieces of religious literature, the Ramayana-epos, which permeates the every day life of the Balinese. Paintings, dances, shadow-play, music, even children's comic books repeat the same story, or pieces of that story, the quest of Rama. The idea, the message of that epos, is in everybody's mind. It shapes the thinking, feeling and general outlook on life of every Balinese.

I suppose that's the role stories play for humankind; they reflect our anthropological heritage, or in Jung's words, the collective unconscious.

On an individual level, they guide our unconscious mind, help us be tuned into our cultural wisdom and into the consensus on reality that we share with the people around us. Stories do that long before our conscious, rational mind is able to put them together. They form our thinking long before we are aware of it.

These world views, these personal and cultural myths, are the background of our thinking, the basis of our behavior and the environment that colors our emotions and shapes our bodies.

People feel naturally attracted to stories, they are part of what our minds are set for: creating our personal myths in reasonable harmony with the collective myth around us. Society is built on this harmony.

Here, the overlap with what a therapist, specifically a Hakomi Therapist, is interested in becomes obvious. As Hakomi Thera-

pists we are dealing with the myths people live by, their beliefs, their world-view. And we are dealing with them on a level that is different from every day consciousness, different from intellectual opinion, from the normal, rational mind.

TRANSFORMATION AND INTEGRATION.

Among others, hypnotherapists have long used stories for psychotherapeutic purposes. It is their way of using them that is best known among therapists today. That is why I'd like to point out two ways in which they use them in order to contrast the use of stories in Hakomi Therapy.

First, both Milton Erickson, and Bandler/Grinder use them at the transformation stage of a psychotherapeutic session. Their story will be in contrast to an original myth/belief of the person they are working with. It's like sneaking a few new circuits into a computer when nobody is watching. Replacement of basic running parts. The therapist finds out which belief is disposing the client to get stuck, and then implants a new basic view, in it's ancient, anthropological form: a story.

Secondly, they do this when the conscious mind of the client is not fully available. Usually a hypnotherapist's point of view includes little appreciation for conscious awareness. To them, it stands in the way, it's an obstacle to overcome. So, creating a hypnotic state in the client is inviting consciousness to step out the door for a while, creating the opportunity to work on the unconscious mind while it is unguarded. And since the unconscious mind is really perceptive of mythical material (they are basically the same stuff), it works really well. It's like surgery: first the anesthesia, then the replacement of parts, one belief for another, and the whole machine works differently.

By now the reader will have a pretty good idea of what the point of view for a Hakomi Therapist will be.

Kurtz writes, "It isn't necessary to avoid consciousness to work deeply." Mindfulness, the state of consciousness we work

with, allows conscious understanding by the clients of what's happening, as well as the freedom to come up with their own new options, all the while supporting the clients' power to consciously accept a new belief or reject it.

The real danger that we see -- even in the way WE are telling stories -- lies in the fact that they are so powerful to the unconscious, and that they are largely created and directed by the therapist. So, we chose some conscious limitations in how we use them.

Most important, for us storytelling is an INTEGRATION TECHNIQUE. We do not come up with any ideas or suggestions on how to resolve the barriers people get in touch with. Hakomi principles guide us to treat those situations with great caution so as not to violate the client's self determination. Instead, we listen with our whole being for sings of the client's inner wisdom, for the spontaneous signals of organic resolution to shed the first light on the process. The spontaneous is then midwived with a lot of tracking and contact which can not be done well within the framework of telling a story. In Hakomi, the storyteller has to get the elements, the characters, and the story line from the client first. In a way, Hakomi therapists really don't invent any of it, but they translate into a story what has emerged consciously for the client in the session itself. The story is a confirmation, a repetition in an added dimension, nothing more.

Typically, in a transformational therapy session the client's belief changes as s/he lets down a barrier to a more realistic, nourishing core organizing belief. The change is from, "life is only like that" to, "life is sometimes like that, sometimes it is like this." The therapist needs to know exactly which belief a client started out with, and what the new life option/belief offers. The therapist cannot know beforehand, and even if a good guess is made, s/he must not force a specific solution.

Only at the end of a session, when the therapist knows precisely what the client went through, where s/he was and where s/he's going, is there a chance of telling a story

without violating the principles that honor a person as a living organic system.

A story will reconfirm what the client was experiencing. It will repeat the process on a level of psychological organization that stores away mythical and childlike knowledge of the world. It will validate in pictures and contextual information what the client just found out. This is, of course, integration. What a fun way of doing it that opens such an important dimension.

I personally like to tell stories in two cases: The first is in oral and hysteric-rigid processes, where telling a story, just any story, is nourishment in itself. For the oral process, it is a practical validation of what the person just learned: "You can have somebody take care of you. Just lie there and let it in. The teller is with you." For the hysteric-rigid process it is a confirmation that it's ok just to be there, that somebody is paying attention and staying with the client, even if s/he is not doing a thing.

The second case is after I worked with the child state of consciousness. Then the client is already in a state of mind that is receptive to stories, a state of mind where it is delightful to be told a story.

Telling a story also indicates that the end of the session approaches, just as a story before bed indicates the end of the day. There is a sense of completion, and from my experience, clients are always ready to let go of the session when the story is over -- without me indicating it in any other way. This of course is particularly useful in completion barrier processes.

HOW TO TELL A STORY.

1)) There are a couple of things to make sure of before one can start telling a story in a Hakomi session:

A. Did the client cross the nourishment barrier, and did transformation occur?

B. Did the therapist understand the process clearly?

2)) If that is the case the therapist will have to create a starting point for the

story in her/his mind. S/he needs to create a main character, a person, animal, or object that the client can identify with. This protagonist should clearly be related to the client, but be different enough as not to be banal. If the therapist worked with a child at an age of 5 and with the name Sarah, s/he shouldn't take a five year old girl named Sarah as a protagonist, but rather one that a 5 year old girl can relate to, a lioness for instance, if it was an angry process, or a princess if it was a tender process. If the child was one or two years old a cute little bunny is fine, and for a ten year old boy a star-traveller or a scout. There are as many possibilities as the therapist's imagination will allow.

In our story of the kangaroo for instance -- what kind of person was it told to? I would imagine a client who's child was old enough to know what a kangaroo is, maybe 2 or 3 years, and one that can still be excited about a kangaroo, probably not more than 8 or 9, if there is not a special interest in animals.

3)) As a next step, the therapist will have to invent a situation for the protagonist that embodies the same kind of dilemma the client was in as a child. The dilemma should be bottom line: loneliness for the oral process, no freedom for the masochistic process, humiliation for the psychopathic process, and the like. Our kangaroo? Sounds schizoid, doesn't it?

4)) At this point the storyteller should just start. S/he should trust that the story will develop. It is impossible to create a whole story in the mind while relating to a client. But when we start, events will just unfold, pieces will fall into place. If the therapist understands the process s/he just facilitated, s/he will have a general direction that the story has to follow. The storyteller should just allow him/herself to start talking about the protagonist and the terrible situation s/he was in. "Would you like me to tell you a story? Ok? ... Well, you know there was once this strange kangaroo...."

5)) The general outline of a story will lead the protagonist from a situation of lack

of some sort to a situation where s/he got what the client got in the process: From abandonment to being taken care of. From confusion to clarity. From loneliness to being with others, and so on. So, often there will be a quest, a search, a setting out for something else, something more, or a change that comes unexpectedly.

6)) For the transformation one usually needs a change agent. That's how stories are. Most often it's the archetype of the sage in Jung's terms. The agent stands for the inner knowledge that guided the client. In the kangaroo story it is the golden fish. But it could be a wise old person, a dwarf, all kinds of animals or plants. This agent can introduce knowledge, secret power, magic or any other dynamic force that can turn the sad story around.

There can be magical items like in the above story, or advice, or active help, or some awakening of the protagonist. The change agent will turn the story around. There should always be some building up of the story line, some climax, a development that keeps the listener engaged.

7)) At the end of the story there will be a solution, a happy ending that corresponds to what the client experienced. Again, as in all parts of the story, it is not good to be too obvious, though the client always knows it is their story. The general bottom line should be kept parallel. In our kangaroo story, an example for a schizoid process story, the final scene depicts a place of being welcome, fitting in.

8)) It is good to remember that a story gains its powerful qualities from within the context of the process and the miraculous events that just happened to the client in the therapy session. What is a perfect story in a session may seem boring when it is isolated from its context.

SOME HELPFUL RULES.

1)) There's a simple trick in Hakomi story telling, invented by Jon Eisman, that allows the client to control the story some, and that helps the therapist to check whether he or she is still in tune with the client's

experience. We like to stop a few times during the story, suspending it with an open ended question, like, "...and when he jumped off the boat...guess what he saw....?" or, "...she turned around and wanted to thank the wizard, and what do you think had happened?"

We like the child/client to have a chance for input, to check if s/he kept up with the proceeding part of the story, or whether other information needs to be considered. That allows us to shape the story to the precise needs of the client.

If transformation was not deep enough, it will show at these places. The client will not be able to go along, obstacles will appear, and we will have to explore the barrier again.

2)) Another means to keep the story closely tailored to the client is to track consistently and to respond with your story to what you track of the client's experience. For instance, we go into detail, when the client is enjoying, we vary if he or she is frowning, we check in with an opened ended "The frog really didn't like the idea of going in the cave, did he...?" and so on.

3)) A story that is too similar to the client's story will call up resistance, "that's not exactly how it was..." It is better to keep the story parallel but in a different realm. That allows the client to identify with the bottom line and to enjoy the details, without worrying about forcing them into exact correspondence with their particular experience.

4)) Because the storyteller is usually in the role of the "magical stranger", or is at least relating to a child consciousness, it is wise to use appropriate language. Words need to be simple and clear, no "hysterical laughter", "immanent problems", or "abdominal spasms". We invite a child to be there; to find its language is important.

5)) A storyteller should allow him/herself to use fantasy and imagination, even humor as much as s/he can. Children love colors, descriptions, names, pictures. They want details as long as the storyteller doesn't get carried away.

A pink crocodile is better than just a normal crocodile, and if the pink crocodile has purple ears -- that's even better. Children want to see things before their inner eyes.

6)) Some details used can be elements from the process. If a toy elephant was part of it, it's a good idea to have an elephant show up in the story. If the child knew a trustworthy person, a trustworthy person in the story bridges the gap between process and story.

7)) A good story is clear and to the point. A simple story line creates clarity. A storyteller shouldn't ramble. Even if there are a lot of details, the course of events should be concise. More than ten minutes for a story is too much to digest. The kangaroo story above takes about seven minutes. That's enough.

8)) If a storyteller doesn't feel comfortable with children or stories, or if s/he is lacking ideas, there are easy and fun ways to learn. One is to read children's books and fairy tales. In the waiting room of the dentist for instance. The other is to start telling stories to children. They will love it. Taking a little time for this will considerably improve skills of working with the child and doing the "magical stranger".

CONCLUSION.

Gregory Bateson writes of stories, "What is a story but that it may connect A's and B's, it's parts? And is it true that the general fact that parts are connected in this way is at the very root of what it is to be alive? I offer you the notion of CONTEXT, of PATTERN THROUGH TIME."

A story gives a pattern of understanding, an icon, a context in which you can place yourself, to know who you are. Integrating with a story reconfirms the clients new belief/understanding of WHO S/HE IS IN RELATION TO THIS WORLD, which is, as you will remember, what "Hakomi" means.

A story is a special and powerful tool to use, one that is deeply rooted in our evo-

lutionary heritage. The psychological structures in which we validate a new belief with the help of a story, is the realm of myths, archetypes, imagery and dreams, which are ill defended when accessed. It takes integrity and caution to deal with them.

On the other hand, and for the same reasons, we humans have this natural attraction to stories, they appear to be fun and entertainment. For the storyteller it's very rewarding to relate on such a deep level in a playful way. It's worth trying. They'll ask for more.

Consequently: he who wants to have right without wrong, order without disorder, does not understand the principles of heaven and earth. He does not know how things hang together.

-- Chuang Tzu, Great and Small

But the kind of activity which dominates the instability phase introduces a directedness, a vector which already indicates in which direction the new structure may be expected.

-- Erich Jantsch, The Self-Organizing Universe

A well-ordered humanism does not begin with itself, but puts things back in their place. It puts the world before life, life before man, and the respect of others before the love of self. This is the lesson that the people we call "savages" teach us: a lesson of modesty, decency and discretion in the face of a world that preceded our species and that will survive it.

-- Claude Levi-Strauss, (1972 interview)

This type of consciousness -- what I shall refer to in this book as "participatory consciousness" -- involves merger, or identification, with one's surroundings, and bespeaks a psychic wholeness that has long since passed from the scene.

-- Morris Berman, The Reenchantment Of The World

Then existence is not problematic. It is creative. It is a process of the confrontation of conditions, but it is humorous, already Enlightened. Nothing ultimate is at stake.

-- Da Free John, Talk: The Religious Ambivalence of Western Man

The ground of being is unconditioned good.

-- A tenet of Buddhism