
A CURIOUS FORM OF THERAPY: HAKOMI

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The majority of psychotherapists I know claim they learned most of what was useful to them in their practices after they left school. The theoretical and practical don't always have a happy marriage in academic settings. However, once in awhile there are those wondrous unpredictable moments when it all comes together. The results from the rat lab lead to remarkably creative insight into how to better carry on what is sometimes the rat race within centers for therapeutic change.

I had at least one such revelatory experience that I think is worth sharing. I was back in school again taking a doctoral course in personality theory. The inevitable term paper came up. Dreading to do still another paper on the influence of sex or hunger in personality development, I reluctantly took the topic of curiosity as the least of available evils. It turned out to be a very interesting topic to explore; especially so, since I was studying at the same time with a gifted therapist named Ron Kurtz who seemed to integrate many of the insights and implications of curiosity research in his work.

I would like to offer in this article a brief overview of the results of curiosity research, and then outline the general approach of Ron Kurtz's Hakomi Therapy which honors and applies those results in a powerful way for those seeking characterological change.

SOME CURIOUS FACTS

1. Curiosity has to do with playfully exploring, seeking out, responding to, and processing information, especially new information; the changing, the novel, the surprising, the uncertain; information with a quality of mystery to it, which means it can teach us, because we don't know all there is to know about it. It is a biggie in life. It is pervasive, independent, self-motivating, and self-reinforcing. It is so pervasive that it is hard to research. It is hard to isolate out from everything else. *

Rats, the heroes of the psych lab, are so gung-ho on curiosity that they will cross an electrified grid simply for the privilege of exploring new territory. Monkeys will learn discrimination tasks simply for the privilege of looking through a window viewing the entrance room of a lab, or simply for the sake of working the problem itself. But maybe these furry ones are only hungry, thirsty, or feeling sexy? No, these needs were sated before the experiment. Within normal limits, animals will choose the path in a T or Y maze that leads to new territory over the one leading to food.

And sex--that wonderful, primal motivator that insures the continuation of the species and plenty of work for psychotherapists: When a male white rat stops copulating with

his partner, should we conclude that his sex drive has been exhausted? No, just change his partner to someone new, and he demonstrates the same Biblical craving for strange flesh that we all have, resuming mating with full vigor even if he doesn't have it in him to ejaculate again.

Curiosity is a powerful, self-rewarding, intrinsically valuable behavior. Anyone who has a child knows it is an all consuming force to deal with, which leads to point two.

2. Child's play is very serious work, crucial for child development. We can understand its importance under the general principle of "cumulative learning." Robert White has said, "If the infant did not while away his time pulling strings, shaking rattles, examining wooden parrots, dropping pieces of bread and celluloid swans, when would he learn to discriminate visual patterns, to catch and throw, and to build up the concept of the object?" Piaget would chime in, that this concept of the object will be necessary for the concepts of space, time, and causality to follow.

3. There is a biological significance to these many behaviors which can not be conceptualized in terms of primary drive reductions; these behaviors that go on spontaneously, independently, for no good, logical, goal-directed reason. They form part of a process whereby the youngsters (and hopefully the oldsters as well) learn to interact effectively with their environment, that is, to gain competence. White notes that the human being's huge cortical association area might have been a suicidal piece of specialization if it had come without an accompanying steady, persistent inclination toward interacting with the environment, toward being curious about what effects are likely to follow upon this or that behavior.

The development of success and competence is crucial. It is this, and not frustration and failure, as some theories have held, that leads to increased learning, mastery, and the

* The experimental references behind the statements made in this paper are available upon request.

building of a good sense of self which becomes the foundation for later purposeful, productive activity. It is not the people who lack self confidence who go for new job interviews and are willing to experiment with new things.

One other experimental note on the empowerment of organisms through exploratory behavior: It has to be their idea to try something. Studies show that forced no choice exposure to novel or variable stimulation reduces responsiveness to exploratory situations, puts the brakes on it. It has to be the rat's idea, the monkey's, the child's.

4. It might seem paradoxical that the important evolutionary need of developing high competence has been entrusted to times of play and leisurely exploration. However, when the studies are consulted, it becomes clear that strong drive and motivation is precisely the wrong arrangement for securing a flexible, knowledgeable competence for interacting with the world.

Maximum motivation does not lead to the most rapid solving of problems. Strong motivation sometimes speeds up particular kinds of learning, but usually at the expense of narrowing it. In high states of motivation the cognitive maps we develop become limited by the limited range of cues we are attending to. For instance, if I'm driving between Chiloquin and Beatty, Oregon on a winter's day trying to get to a meeting on time, my attention is intensely focused on the road; looking for icy spots and how fast I can go, what speed I can do a corner in. I lose a veritable wealth of information in the process. I don't see the hawk on the telephone pole, the animals in the woods, how high the snow is on the fences, what the cloud formations are doing, etc.

Also, when there is too much need and motivation, a person can't objectively separate out the environment from their own needs and fears. If I am totally hungry, I don't really appreciate the tree at all, because it doesn't have Big Macs growing on it. Some folks never learn to enjoy their sexuality for what it is in itself. They might be using it for some other purpose, like feeding their longings for nurture, closeness, or touching.

In summary, the greatest capacity for effective navigating in life comes from learning that has happened in quiet, non-agended, self-motivated times.

5. Curiosity occurs or is acted upon within a range of perceived safe limits. Some researchers have checked out the notion that curiosity is motivated by fear. Not at all. Aversive pretest stimulation reduces the choices of novel alternatives. Inducing fear while an animal is exploring also reduces the behavior. Fear is related to fearful responses strangely enough; to freezing, avoiding, and seeking the security of no changes.

In general, humans and animals experience small discrepancies between expectation and reality as pleasurable. If a discrepancy is too large, too much too fast, the experience becomes distressing and unpleasant. If a clay model of a human head, or the anesthetized body of a fellow chimp is placed in their cage, the other chimps do not become curious. They become terrified; cringe, cling, hide, and hold back. Again, curiosity happens best when the explorer is in control of how, where, and when.

6. A final note. Many researchers put curiosity in a polar relationship with boredom. Boredom is the enemy. It is awful. Within normal limits, animals always choose the route of increased drive and stimulation, not decreased. This finding blows out of the water all notions that propose drive reductions as the ultimate motivator. Yankelovich and Barret put it this way in their 1970 book Ego and Instinct:

Does it seem at all plausible that the extraordinary process of organic evolution that developed the more complex and higher nervous systems took place merely to find a more elaborate means of escaping stimuli? If Freud had pursued the evolutionary point of view that he had borrowed from Darwin, Haeckel, and others, and explored that in connection with the instincts, he would certainly have questioned this Nirvana-like view of the nervous system. Does it not seem that the more complex and higher nervous system of man may even be involved in a restless search for stimuli?...Human mobility

and restlessness are blazoned on the pages of history, and it is hard to see how they could be the product of a nervous system whose essential function is to diminish stimuli, and if possible to eliminate them altogether.

A Curious Way of Non-Working: The Hakomi Therapy of Ron Kurtz

If curiosity is so powerful and pervasive, wouldn't it be nice to find a way to use it as we help people explore their inner world in psychotherapy? And is there a way to do so that is consistent with the experimental findings cited above? Let me say "yes" and save the reader the trouble and obligation. Actually, a number of methods attempt it. The work of Ron Kurtz which has taken the name of Hakomi Therapy does so as well as any approach I'm aware of. Kurtz is an experimental psychologist who went to do his doctoral work at Indiana with Estes, and then gravitated into psychotherapy by studying with some of the finest therapists in the country. Studying therapy experientially and eclectically while carrying with him the broad background of general experimental psychology, physics, general systems theory, and Eastern religious studies, led to a remarkably unencumbered openness to integrate many findings around the empirical center of what proved effective.

Therapy: An Inner Exploration

Kurtz considers therapy an exploration of inner experience leading naturally and organically to core organizing beliefs which determine both experience and expression, plus the transformation of those beliefs into ones that open the possibility of more realistic, nourishing living. This as opposed to advice giving or problem solving, though those have their place in other settings.

To accomplish this worthy goal that many therapists hold in common, he has devised a number of ways to hook people's curiosity, to get them exploring their own experience on behalf of their own learning. When it happens, the client is off doing all manner of creative exploring while the therapist simply tries to keep up, stay out of the way, and foster the conditions necessary for this curious undertaking.

Sometimes a little white magic can hook the unconscious at the beginning of a process. A person comes in whose body reveals a conforming-burdened character structure, someone who looks like they are physically mobilizing around resisting being pushed from behind by some force moving them in directions and at speeds they are not wanting to go. (Confir, The Body Reveals by Ron Kurtz and Hector Prestera on how to read bodies for psychological information.) While working with the person Kurtz might say, "take your time." All of a sudden he has the interest of the unconscious. It doesn't believe it. "He doesn't really mean that does he?" So, it is curious. It listens. It wants to play. "Prove it to me."

That is a bit on the sneaky side. Hakomi works more fundamentally through giving people conscious playgrounds to explore. The main tool employed, which is also a principle that informs the entire process, is mindfulness. Whatever people presented, Kurtz found that he could help them most by turning their awareness inward toward present experience. Present experience is both live and has a quality of mystery to it. It is pre-conceptual, pre-verbal, so it is something that people can get curious about, if they become a witness to their experience without too quickly imposing their standard notions of meaning and value on it. If people don't know all there is to know about something, then there is the possibility of learning, the possibility of discovery and surprise that evokes curious exploration.

If a therapist doesn't simply teach a client how to be mindful, s/he promotes the process through asking questions that are right brain questions, questions that drive clients to their own experience as the only possible source of wisdom for answering.

C. I haven't felt much like doing anything lately.

T. A little depressed, huh?

C. Yah, I guess.

T. What's the quality of the depression((?))

C. Oh, I don't know, a little unmotivated.

T. Unmotivated((?)) How about hanging out with yourself a little bit and seeing if that sense of being unmotivated will tell you more about itself. How are you experiencing that in your body?

C. My body?

T. Yah. Where are you getting your information from? How do you know you are unmotivated? What signals are you getting? A little tension in your stomach maybe? Why don't you close your eyes and check it out.

C. OK....ah....a little nauseating feeling in my throat.

T. Good. Let's just stay with that nausea for awhile. You don't need to break contact with it to come out and tell me about it. See if you can keep your awareness with your own experience and comment on it without losing it, so I can just overhear what's going on. Is the nausea located at a particular point or does it extend towards the stomach((?))

At this point the client has begun to access, to turn his awareness inward to explore what wisdom his experience might contain. The therapist is invoking a value judgment at this point that the client is indeed the world's greatest authority on what is going on inside him, and that whatever behavior he is manifesting will lead toward the core of how he organizes his experience in life, how he processes information that comes to him for good or ill. The therapist has shifted the therapeutic exchange from an interpersonal dialogue to an intrapersonal one in which the therapist overhears and stays in contact with what is discovered in order to follow as well as guide. The client has been invited to get curious about his depression as opposed to pulling it out for the therapist to fix.

In this interchange the therapist does a lot of verbal teaching about the process as it is going on since it is a new client unfamiliar with the method. The client is trusting the process and going with it. The symbol ((?)) at the end of some questions signifies a slight inflexion in the therapist's voice

meant to take the emphasis off the client simply finding the answer for the sake of satisfying the therapist's curiosity, and to invite the person into his own curiosity. The voice implies "Oh isn't that curious and aren't you curious about that? Why don't you explore that a little more?"

The therapist's voice has also slowed down, become soft, and somewhat meditative. If the client is being encouraged to slow down, to simply explore in a curious non-aggended fashion, the therapist must model this in her own approach and demeanor. Mindfulness is not a hypnotic state of consciousness since the person is always consciously aware of what is happening, but it is out of the rush and goal directedness of ordinary consciousness, and a normal sense of time and space is often suspended. Hakomi might be thought of as a type of guided meditation.

Now that the client has displayed a willingness to get curious about his presenting issue and begun to access, the therapist starts to think in terms of "how can I keep this person curious and deepen the level of exploration?" There is no right or wrong answer to the question about the nausea being centered in one place or extending to the stomach, and the therapist doesn't have any magic procedure to pull out if the answer is one way or another. The question simply requires that the person stay with his experience and explore it further to find an authentic response. The underlying faith of the therapist is that by deepening the experience, the process of "cumulative learning" will be in effect, and it will eventually lead to what core issues and beliefs are producing the experience.

C. Well, it does go toward the stomach a bit...it is mostly in the throat and I'm aware of my jaw being slightly tense and not tense. A little confusing.

T. Yah, and I notice your head is coming slightly forward as you talk, like it must be taking more and more energy to hold it up?

C. Yah, it feels heavy.

T. How about letting me take some of the strain off your head by holding it up for you

with my hand. Would that be OK?

C. Well, yah.

T. (Picks up some hesitation in the client's voice) Does that seem like a strange thing to do?

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C. A little, but it's OK.

T. OK. Well, I'll support the weight of your head a little bit and as I do it, see if you can stay with your experience, and notice if my supporting you here makes any difference one way or another with what is going on.

C. OK...(Client stays inside, focusing awareness of his experience in an open ended way. His eyes flutter slightly signaling that he is in a meditative or witnessing state of consciousness.)

T. (Notices a slight squinting around the eyes and slight lowering of the jaw.) Experiencing some emotion, huh((?))

C. Yah...(slight tear forms at outside of each eye).

T. A little sadness((?))

C. Yah....(Client quietly sobs a couple of times, involuntarily, while choking them back and restraining them.)

T. Do you have a sense about what the tears mean? Is there like a quality of grief to them((?))

C. Yes....like something I've wanted and can't quite believe someone would give me.

T. Yah.

A number of things are happening here. The therapist is closely tracking the client's body for any spontaneous movement connected to the process. Here she notices the head coming forward slightly. By making contact with it, calling conscious attention to it, something on the edge of consciousness is brought more fully into consciousness.

Then she proposes an experiment in awareness that takes the physical form of supporting the weight of the head. Exploring the mind-body interface provides a whole new playground for curiosity. It is normally a strange, novel, unexplored area for most people. And whether we are familiar with our own bodies or not, they are a reflection of, and an avenue of access to, what is going on in our minds.

Client's Competence as Foremost

Notice the therapist is not just taking over the weight of the head to be a nice person, though her goodwill and gracefulness is a part of what is happening. She invites the client to be mindful. She is talking to the unconscious with her hands and wants the client to explore and be sensitive to what meaning it stirs up. And the client goes along. He wants to do this also.

Almost all the techniques Kurtz has developed in Hakomi Therapy take the form of an experiment in awareness. Any word, touch, or movement that we experience rattles our consciousness. Normally we unconsciously, automatically, take these inputs and process them through the filters of our imagination which are based upon our core beliefs about the world.

The therapist of course knows this. In Hakomi, as in other approaches, the therapist carefully studies the client's reactions and mannerisms to get clues about what programs the person's inner computer is running that are determining everything else. But as the curiosity research shows, it is no good to force the person to be exposed to and explore new areas until their own curiosity leads them to do so. The point of therapy for Kurtz is to empower people through contacting the reality and wisdom of their own experience. The knowledge of the therapist means little to the client in the long run. So, though the therapist could have done so by this point, she refrains from making any brilliant interpretation that would only call attention to her own brilliance, and set up a process of having to defend the interpretation and convince the client of its correctness. "So, what I'm seeing is that you

are in an oral process of believing nobody is ever there for you, and that you have some unexpressed anger about people only giving you strokes when you jump through their hoops. Your depression is both sadness for what you didn't get, and anger turned inward since you are afraid of people abandoning you if you get mad at them."

The beauty of mindfulness, Kurtz discovered through integrating the practice of Buddhist insight meditation, is that the person can get out of the trancelike state of ordinary consciousness ruled by automatic habit patterns and discover what is going on for themselves. In good cybernetic fashion, they can become aware of how they process information, how they organize their experience. They can take one step back and automatically witness how they take in a particular stimulus and organize around it to tense up, relax, get suspicious, or whatever.

This awareness identifies them with the observing, witnessing self as opposed to the normal reactions and responses that make up the general sense of self. Though the experience is live, present, and spontaneous, there is a distance interposed between the person and their action which begins to allow for the possibility of new choices. They are being empowered.

Already, to this point in the example, the person has become aware of some bodily components of his initial awareness of not feeling like doing much, and he has let himself down into a genuine sense of sadness and grief. He has been actively employing his awareness to get to this point and can legitimately claim the accomplishment of the discoveries so far as his own (though of course what has made the process possible to this point is that there is no ego investment on anybody's part in making claims).

The therapist has been engaged in a paradoxical process of activity and passivity. She is not giving advice, problem solving, or offering interpretation. She is taking what the client presents, and helping the client find ways to get curious about it and explore it himself. She is active in offering a structure and a number of suggestions for how the person can do this. Every step of the

way she is sensitive to monitor that the client is on board, that they are both rowing in the same direction. When she notices hesitation at the point of suggesting the support of the head, she stops and checks to make sure it is OK. She doesn't want to force anything for "the client's own good" and doesn't want the focus to shift from a mutual shared curiosity to an emphasis on the therapist's curiosity alone. If that happened, the process would step over into a medical "white knight" model where the doctor would simply be gathering information for diagnostic purposes with the implied assumption s/he would then do something about it. The prejudice here is that the client will lead himself to what is needful for his own healing if the therapist can both provide the support and assistance of a guide without imposing from without the direction and destination of the journey.

When the therapist in this example suggests that the person is experiencing emotion, maybe sadness, possibly some grief, she 1) is making contact with the person's live, present reality, letting him know she is on board, paying attention, with him; 2) deepening and encouraging the process by giving attention and importance to at first subtle, momentary aspects of the person's experience he might normally gloss over, not notice, and leave if by himself; and 3) putting a slight question mark at the end of a suggestion that serves to let the client know she is not invested in being right about her observations, and inviting him to either confirm the observations or modify them to make them more correct or precise, through checking with his actual experience.

When she took over the weight of the head a number of things were also in play. 1) She was doing for the client something he was already doing for himself, fitting into the organic process already unfolding. 2) On a physical level she was taking some noise out of the system. Muscular tension such as holding up the head with the neck muscles, especially when the head is out of peace with gravity in relation to the rest of the body, functions to mask feeling. With the therapist holding up the head physically, the client could relax some tension and allow the underlying signals related to the sadness to come through. 3) The therapist knew the act

of supporting the client through touch would have some meaning also, though she couldn't predict exactly what, or if it would even be an issue to pursue further.

When the tears started to form, were acknowledged, and the crying happened, it was within the realm of spontaneity. It was not forced. The therapist acknowledged the tears, the reality of what was authentically unfolding. She did not make any special deal about them, and certainly didn't call any attention to herself as if she had accomplished something.

Emotional discharge is not purposefully sought out or artificially encouraged in Hakomi as being significant in and of itself. It is supported when it arises organically. Though a session could be dramatic, filled with emotion and discharge, Kurtz is quite clear that the therapy does not follow the bias of a hydraulic, energy model, but an information processing model. Transformation happens when people change the way they pattern their experience and expression, not when they uncover and emote a certain amount of physical charge. So, when the crying emerged, in addition to being supported, the therapist encouraged mindfulness; exploring more about the meaning of the tears. She continues down this track, doing a balancing act between having the person experience his feelings, and having him reflect on what he has experienced. Kurtz believes significant learning happens when the person is both in the experience of the present moment, and is able to study it and comment on it without losing contact with it.

T. And what you can't quite believe is that I'd be willing to give...what, precisely?

C. Give support instead of...ah, instead of telling me to get my act together.

T. Uh huh. OK. I'd like to propose another experiment. How about if I put into verbal form what my hands seem to be saying? I'll say the words and you simply be aware of what you experience in relation to them. OK?

C. Sure. Go ahead.

T. OK. So, notice what you witness, what

happens automatically, whatever that may be, when you hear me say the words...you don't have to do it all by yourself...(notices the eyebrows furrow.) So, a little reaction huh?

C. Yes...a little bit confused.

T. Confused((?))

C. Yah, like...it feels good, and I'm grateful and want to melt into it on the one hand, but then...

T. Uh huh((?))

C. There is some kind of agitation.

T. Agitation((?)) Like resistance to it((?))

C. Yah, of some kind.

T. Are you aware of what your hand is doing? (Hand is clenched slightly and arm is doing a slight up and down motion.)

C. Oh, yah. I guess it wants to do something or is expressing something.

T. Yah, it's like there is a charge there for something and it's being held back somehow. How about if I take over the holding back for you, and you can explore whatever else wants to happen. I'll let go of your head, and contain the arm movement, and you notice whatever else you experience. OK?

C. (nods)

T. (shifts to put firm hold on arm with both her hands and arms.) OK. What is that like for you((?))

C. (Client attempts to move arm in tentative, experimental manner. Therapist increases pressure even more to keep hand immobile. Client puts more effort into the movement, feels the therapist's counterhold, makes a short strong effort to push hand forward, then breaks into an angry cry that he attempts to choke back at the same time. His arm goes limp when the crying starts. The therapist releases his arm, he covers his eyes with both hands and the therapist puts

one hand over his hands and the other on his back.)

T. (When the sob subsides) So, something angry and scary going on at the same time, huh?

C. Yes. (Cries a few deeper cries and then recovers.)

T. Do you have a sense about the anger, what your arm was wanting to do?

C. Push away! You only come to me when you want to, and I'm angry about the times I wanted you to, and you told me to grow up and quit clinging!

T. Oh. OK. Push away. Who is the "you" here? You and I have known each other only a short while. Are you having some old memories come up?

C. Oh... ah, yah. I kind of meant you for a flash. But, yah...

T. It's not an unfamiliar feeling, huh? Is there somebody you associate all this with, in particular? Why don't you notice if anybody or any memory emerges for you. No rush. We don't need to hurry. Let it come to mind by itself if anything wants to.

THE CRUCIAL FACTOR OF SAFETY

Fear is antithetical to curiosity as the research indicates. Change happens most easily, with the least effort, where people feel maximum safety for exploring openly and freely. Providing a safe environment free from visual or auditory eavesdropping is one obvious implication for psychotherapists. Another implication that Kurtz speaks about extensively and eloquently is the need for the therapist herself or himself to be a safe place, a safe presence. (For in-depth reading confirm Hakomi Therapy by Ron Kurtz, available through the Hakomi Institute, P.O. Box 1873, Boulder, CO 80306.)

In the previous section of the session, as before, the therapist continually asks the client to focus his awareness inward; to notice what he witnesses in relation to the

verbal probe, to clarify his confusion, to experiment with his arm being contained, and so forth. This would be very difficult, clumsy, or not possible at all if he didn't feel safe, if he felt the need to keep one eye out, figuratively or literally, for what the therapist was up to.

What is making the progress of this clinical vignette so smooth and fast is the graceful presence of the therapist. It is not communicating any need on the therapist's part to do something or accomplish something using the client as a vehicle. Rather there is a good will present that 1) does not need the client to be any different than he now is in the ultimate sense, and 2) is willing to explore what the client is concerned about, to help him find a more pleasurable level of functioning.

While the therapist has a definite opinion about how that is best accomplished, she communicates a genuine sense of working without preferences. She is careful to check with the client every step of the way to assure that they are both affirming the same direction. She would be willing to drop the procedure and switch to something else if that became needful for the client. She is committed, caring, skillful, and unattached to any particular results. She highly honors the integrity of the client's experience and takes her clues from it. She is serving as a faith agent in the sense of trusting the organicity of the client's functioning and in not being afraid of anything that might come up. Undoubtedly, she has more faith in the client's resources than he has himself at this point. That, plus the assurance that she is not going to do anything tricky or surprising without his knowledge, enables him to focus his concentration on his inner world. The outer world is safe and being minded by this trustworthy other.

It should be noted that with minor hesitations, this particular client perceives the therapist as a graceful person worthy of trust. Another client's suspicion might go deeper and that would have to be acknowledged and worked through. Safety issues must come first or the next step will be accomplished in a burdensome, hard, way; if at all.

Kurtz integrates the basic thrust of Taoism into Hakomi in relation to the issue of safety. He chooses to go with the flow of a person's experience as it presents itself; this, as opposed to going against it, as in confronting defenses, attempting to break through them, stripping a person of their armor in an effort to uncover what is underneath.

This attitude demonstrates itself in practice most noticeably at the point where resistance appears. He has developed a number of "taking over" techniques that non-violently honor, respect, and literally support a defense system as opposed to attacking it.

In the present example, the client can't quite identify the source of his agitation. He is neurotically, defensively, bleeding off energy with his arm, protecting himself from the clear knowledge of his underlying anger and fear. One choice would be to confront him with that interpretation and perhaps if he didn't buy it, to have him exaggerate the motion, and if that didn't work, maybe have him beat on a pillow until the message came through. All these methods have been used before with varying degrees of success. They are inevitably effortful and sometimes dramatic, both common values in our Western world. The therapist, however, chose to go with the flow. The client was organizing himself to hold back the impulse to push away, so, she volunteered to hold back the impulse for him. She did it well enough--strongly, tightly, convincingly--that he felt safe enough about the store (defense) being minded, that his awareness could drop from the level of defense to the level of what was being defended against, the pushing away impulse.

Likewise, when he cried angrily and fearfully, putting his hands over his eyes to cover some sense of embarrassment and/or shock, she went with the flow and immediately helped him cover his eyes by adding her hand on top of his. Her hand communicated "it is OK to hide, to not look, if that's what you need to do. I'll help you not look." This as opposed to somehow going against the behavior by saying something like, "Come on now. You are real close to something. You don't need to hide. You can face it. Let's keep on

track and not cop out on yourself." Paradoxically, as was the case with supporting the holding back, when a person feels they are being supported in their need to defend, the need goes away and the exploration continues.

On the other side, when the therapist simultaneously put her hand on his back, she was not patting it reassuringly and saying "there, there, don't be worried. Everything will be OK." The hand simply communicated the reassurance that what was happening was real, human, and that she was there with him as he was going through it. There was no need to make the reality different or better. Fear is also aroused if the client either picks up that the therapist is afraid of spontaneous emotion erupting, or is on some kind of condescending, egocentric, caretaking plane.

Again, it could be that another client would misinterpret the touch as in some way invasive, condescending, or sexual. Hakomi therapists are constantly tracking the effects of what they do and say, being sensitive to the little signs that flash by in a quarter of a second indicating one reaction or another. If the therapist had seen something that indicated a misinterpretation, she would have immediately made contact with it in some appropriate way. "A little startled by my hand?" Or, "what does it mean to you that I'm touching you like this now?" The intervention would simply become a new experiment in awareness, though a different one than the therapist originally intended. The process would become self-correcting. If the therapist missed the early clues that the client had misinterpreted her touch, it would come up later and be contacted at that point. "We seem to have lost the thread of what we were exploring. What are you aware of now? Did something come up?" Contact with what is happening in the present reestablishes safety and the conditions for further exploration.

The client clearly does misinterpret the therapist at the point where he says "you only come to me when you want to." In addition to the normal transference we all carry with us, that is an example of a radical, intense transference reaction that spontaneously overflows. The therapist does not

accuse the client or justify herself. She keeps the process on track by redirecting his awareness in an intrapersonal as opposed to interpersonal way. "Who is the 'you' here?"

C. ...I'm not getting a particular memory but some sense of family is coming up.

T. Family((?)) Mother, father, sisters, brothers?

C. All of them I think...

T. OK. Just keep hanging out with your experience. We're doing fine. All of them, huh?

C. Yah...You know,...I don't know why, but I'm aware of smelling fresh air...even though we're indoors.

T. Fresh air((?)) Is it like dry or wet, hot or cold? Maybe it will tell you more about itself.

C. There is something about it I don't like sea.

T. A memory is starting to come?

C. Yah I don't like the ocean, haven't for years...There was a time a long time ago when we went to the beach and I remember not liking it.

T. Yes. You're starting to look a little despondent, a little crushed or something.

C. Uh huh. Well, I'm not sure what it was.

T. Do you have a sense of how old you are starting to feel?

C. Young.

T. Before school age?

C. Yes. It is starting to come to me...We have this green '54 Plymouth I always liked and I was excited about going to the beach and seeing the waves.

T. Who else is along with you on the trip? Are you alone with your folks?

C. No, dad is driving and wearing his

sunglasses. Mom is in the front seat and I'm in the back on dad's side by the window and my two older brothers are in the back with me, giving me a bad time, but mom tells them to leave me alone once in awhile.

T. Uh huh, and you're about five?

C. Maybe four... And we have never been to the beach by the ocean before and it is special and...and...(client's body starts to curl up and he cries a young bitter, betrayed type of cry).

T. (Supports the curling up and slight rocking with one hand on his back and keeps the other hand over the client's who is again covering his eyes. After a pause in the intensity...) So, little Stevie is really upset and unhappy.

C. (cries with renewed intensity that overpowers the concomitant effort to choke back the cry.)

T. It seems like you are trying to cry and not cry at the same time.

C. They told me I was a sissy and too small and they wouldn't take me with them!

T. And they were going where you wanted to go too?

C. Yes, they were going out on the rocks where the waves were crashing against them and I wanted to go too, but I was scared and I wanted them to hold my hands and they laughed at me and ran off without me.

T. And you were really hurt and disappointed.

C. And then...(goes into more uncontrolled sobbing and choking)

T. (Therapist simply supports the spontaneous movement and motion with her hands until there is a lull). And then something worse happened?

C. Yes. I was crying and went to tell my mommy they weren't being nice and they left me behind and...(more intensified crying)...and then my daddy grabbed my arm

and yanked me and said "Don't go crying to your mother! Quit being a sissy and grow up or nobody is ever going...(more tears)...to want to take you anywhere. If you want to go to the rocks bad enough, you can just go, you spoiled brat."

T. Oh, I see. You really felt awful. You wanted to go on the rocks with your brothers and they wouldn't help you when you were scared, and you cried, and then your daddy told you not to cry even!

C. Yes.

T. And so you tried to choke back your crying, but you couldn't.

C. Yes.

T. And you were embarrassed and hurt, and I bet you went away to find a place to hide till you could stop crying, huh?

C. Yes, I went to go behind a sand dune and I could hear them laughing and I heard my daddy say, "I don't think he is ever going to grow up."

T. Oh. And I bet that made you mad and you wanted to show him he was wrong but you had a real hard time trying to stop crying.

C. Yes. (A defeated kind of cry.)

T. And I bet that memory stayed with you a long time and your brothers kept teasing you, and you began to think you never would be as grown up as them and your daddy, but you didn't let them know that.

C. (nods)

T. And how did you feel about going to your mother after that and letting her know when you were being picked on or were scared?

C. I didn't want to get laughed at and my daddy told her not to pamper me.

T. Yah. So, you probably felt bad a lot of the time, especially when something new and scary came up that you were afraid to do alone, and you were afraid to tell anybody you were scared.

C. Yah, I remember telling people I just didn't like to do things and would go do something by myself.

T. So, I can see why you would be surprised that I would be willing to help you hold your head up when you got a little older, and that you would feel mad at me or your family for not being willing to do it earlier when you needed it the most, and scared too, because you thought I might laugh at you for needing it.

C. Yes. (Lets out a deep breath.)

T. So let me tell you something. I'm me. I'm not your mother or father or brother or any part of your family. And I want you to know that I don't think it is silly or sissy for you to want support sometimes. Sometimes people need it. Sometimes they don't. Either way is OK at the time. And I'm sorry you learned at such an early age that there was something terribly wrong with wanting help, and something wrong with crying when you felt hurt, so that you went away by yourself more than you wanted.

C. Uh huh. (Is listening, quietly, openly, curiously considering this information.)

T. And I can understand why the ocean has not been one of your favorite places.

C. Yes! A lot of things fall in place from that.

T. Uh huh. And now you are coming back to 38 year old Steve, huh?

OPTIMAL LEVELS

To be creatively, actively curious requires an optimal level of motivation; neither too much nor too little. In Hakomi there are two processes that help make self-exploration most feasible and productive.

The first task the therapist attends to is calming things down, getting people out of the ordinary goal-directed consciousness that says "we have to accomplish something par-

ticular now." The general goal is to get to those levels of organization that are there before we mobilize ourselves, the program that is running the computer. Being tense and organized around certain goals is already a mobilization. So, the therapist encourages the state of mindfulness that temporarily suspends judgments, gives up attachments to immediate outcomes, and opens a receptiveness to whatever exploring immediate experience might bring; all the while, going along with the client's presenting concern. With the background noise lowered, there is a better possibility for the signals that are within us to guide us, to come through.

The second task then becomes raising the energy level, naturally, organically, in a now hopefully mindful context. Issues begin to heat up as we provide new unexplored places to venture in that get closer and closer to core memories and beliefs.

In our case study, things began to heat up extensively through the holding back experiment. That then moved into accessing the core memory of the beach scene, which did not literally determine the child's character, but did function as a symbolic lightning rod for the child's belief about not being grown up enough, etc.

Notice that when there is a creative state of mindfulness in place, the therapist has great faith that little details which spontaneously come into awareness can lead to significant areas. The client becomes aware of a sense of fresh air. It might seem like wandering in the wilderness, but the therapist supports the curious open exploration of this unique manifestation of consciousness. Again, the question of hot or cold, wet or dry has no importance other than encouraging the client to explore his experience more deeply.

While the quiet, gentle, open state of mindfulness is what made possible the accessing of the important memory, once it emerged into consciousness, the energy level went through the roof. The client entered a state of consciousness Kurtz describes as "riding the rapids." There is the spontaneous overflow of uncontrolled feeling. Mindful exploration or reflection is not possible/useful in this state. The therapist simply

supports the spontaneous outpouring non-verbally with her hands and presence. It is only when there is an appropriate lull in the process that the therapist guides things back to a mindful state for further exploration.

To repeat, emotional discharge for its own sake is not the object. Trying to drum up dramatic emotional experience for the sake of drama is boring. Talking about once important historical experience in the past tense, even when that history was moments before, is boring. Optimal exploration happens when experience is live, present, and the person can witness it, learn from it, and comment on it while still being in it, and not losing contact with it.

The client in this example ends up in another state of consciousness that Kurtz considers most optimal of all for exploring therapeutic change. He designates it "child consciousness."

The mindful exploration of "not feeling motivated to do much" led through various byways to an intense childhood memory. The child who experienced that event and made some decisions about what the world was like was still in the client, and when the therapist heard the young cry, she addressed the child directly. "So little Stevie is really upset and unhappy."

Before that she primed the pump by suggesting the possibility of memories, and then when he got involved in one, asking him how old he was beginning to feel. In talking with the child, who revealed himself in more childish mannerisms, simplified speech, etc., (all the while retaining an adult consciousness of what was happening), the therapist was not condescending and did not engage in baby talk, though communication did become more simple, direct, and appropriate to the child's age.

Curiosity about some presenting predicament here has led back to the stage where core organizing beliefs were formed. It is a tremendously creative space for looking at those beliefs again and possibly transforming them into more nourishing, realistic ones. The therapist at this point abandons the normal pattern for working with adults and

takes on the characteristics of a "magical stranger." Various traumas affect children continuously. Children do not need therapists. All they normally require is a compassionate adult who will talk with them, acknowledge their reality help them understand what is happening, and assess the situation realistically.

When someone enters the child state of consciousness, the missed opportunity of yesteryear becomes available again as the therapist becomes a stranger who magically happens upon the troubled child and supports its through its hurtful situation in a healing way. Telling the child that it is not silly or sissy to need support can be quite powerful and lead to significant change. To tell an adult the same thing in ordinary consciousness would generally have little or no effect.

If the client had not entered the child state of consciousness through an early memory, there would have been other processes for becoming aware of the fear and anger associated with taking in support, exploring those barriers, and reorienting around new beliefs. Plus, there is more to the session than is being presented which has to do with integration and completion issues. More details about the entire process of this exploratory approach can be read in Hakomi Therapy referenced above.

SUMMARY

Enough has been said to outline how Kurtz has utilized the results of curiosity research on behalf of psychotherapy, though obviously he has also integrated much more from other disciplines as well. (There has been no attempt here to reference similar techniques from other modalities. The emphasis is on the overall integration of Kurtz's work.)

A person is invited to get curious about themselves in a special state of consciousness called mindfulness which provides a virtually unlimited inner world to explore. A precondition for this exploration is a setting of safety.

The therapist does a number of things to keep

the person's curiosity going and not prematurely impose judgments, explanations, or justifications on the experience being explored. There is a strong underlying faith in the unity and organicity of the person's system, that it is self-directing and self-correcting when all the parts are communicating within the whole. The therapist honors, respects, and makes contact with the various expressions of the total system as they appear. She encourages the connections as in the mind talking with split-off sections of itself, and the mind talking with the body. She takes special care to treat non-violently and support barriers to communication within the whole; to explore them for their nature and for what would allow them to safely let down. The therapist is committed to the integrity and empowerment of the person, going with the flow of the person's process, resisting interventions that would call attention to the therapist, or impose the therapist's agenda on an unwilling client for "the client's own good."

All the while, the therapist monitors energy levels, facilitating exploration of new avenues when things slow down, providing compassionate, realistic support when things cross the threshold of too much fear and intensity.

When core organizing beliefs are discovered which provide barriers to effective, satisfying living, these also become objects for curious exploration. What is the nature of the barriers and what do they need to be able to let down when appropriate? When the child state of consciousness is accessed, the reality of the child's world is explored along with what that child would need to make him/her feel better.

In general, the innate capacities and resources of the person for self-exploration and healing are mobilized and enhanced in a graceful, non-violent, paradoxically powerful way.