

# CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON HAKOMI TRAINING AND THERAPY ISSUES

by Cedar Barstow and Greg Johanson

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## TRANSFERENCE IN HAKOMI

While it wasn't obvious to many of the early trainers of experiential here and now methods in the '60s, it is now quite clear that the same dynamics go on within training groups as within individual or family therapy settings. Training group members will project or transfer unto the leader(s) and each other all kinds of memories from significant others such as parents, siblings, extended family members, neighbors, coaches, teachers, etc. Other systems of thought would add that we simply come into the world with certain issues to work through, and that we use whatever relationships we are involved with to do so. On a theoretical level, in Hakomi we have actually taken transference much more seriously than others trained exclusively in more traditional analytical schools. For instance, we have never engaged in debates over whether it would ruin the transference, and therefore the energy to carry a session, if we shook hands when a client came in the door, acknowledged them in the parking lot when we both drove up at the same time, or were self-revealing, honest and genuine. That kind of debate implies transference is a fragile flower indeed. We have always been clear that a person will habitually and automatically organize their experience according to core beliefs on multifaceted memory processes, no matter what we do. If someone shy and withdrawn comes into our office or group and we are outgoing and friendly, they will feel fearful of the interpersonal intensity coming their way. That is transference. If we are reserved, silent, and allow a lot of space, the

person will feel more at ease. That's transference. Either reaction can be tracked, contacted, and woven into the therapeutic process. It is grandiose to think we would have any real power or influence over someone being other than who they are.

## BOUNDARIES

In both our therapy and training groups, however, we need to strive for greater methodological congruence with our theory. This would happen if we got clearer about the interpersonal implications of our work. Boundaries for one thing. We need to keep it clear that both students and clients are paying the trainers *and* assistants to provide a container, womb, context, transitional space, or whatever we call it, within which it is safe for them to explore and give birth to new ways of being in the world.

## BEING FRIENDLY VS. BEING A FRIEND

One implication of this is that although we promote a partnership as opposed to a hierarchical model of therapy in which therapist/trainers seek to empower persons through helping them contact the wisdom of their own experience, and although we follow the humanistic-existential trail of believing therapist/trainers should reveal and model "full human-beingness" as Trungpa puts it— we also know that there is a big difference and boundary between being friendly, caring and self-revealing, and being a friend. The implication of someone being a friend is that there is a *mutuality* in relation to both our needs. While as thera-

pist/trainers we have needs that must be respected, we can never assume or imply that clients and students need to take as their task ministering to our needs. Our professional contract is that we will meet our needs elsewhere and focus our energies on the client/student. We do not ask for mutuality. We avoid dual relationships, sexual and otherwise, that bring our own needs to the forefront. Honoring these boundaries is an important part of providing the safe space within which the other may grow.

### ***INTRA AND INTER-PERSONAL PARALLEL PROCESSES***

Another interpersonal implication of our work is that we know that important aspects of someone's core organizing beliefs come out of memories of interactions with significant others in their past. We know that an idea, image, thought, or understanding is never powerful enough to counter or antidote such interactions. It takes new experiences to match an old experience. We know that that new experience must happen within the therapeutic context. Although we are helping people study themselves intrapsychically, we know they must build new ways of organizing their world around new interpersonal experiences with us as significant others in the form of therapists/trainers/fellow group members. Hakomi has always been clear about this within a given therapy session.

What has not always been spelled out as clearly is that parallel to the intrapsychic work is an interpersonal process. When someone reorganizes around a core issue that involves, for instance, the new belief that someone can tolerate them bringing their anger to the relationship, we know it takes time to integrate that belief. Integration can begin within an early therapy session that accesses the issue, but we know that, depending on the depth and strength of the belief and the memories it is based in, it can take months to years for the person to be able to look back and realize that the old belief no longer holds the sway over them it once did. During this time transference takes the form of the person experimenting with us as a new significant other in their lives. Unconsciously, the client/student will check us out. "Can this person really tolerate my anger?" This parallel process is normally quite subtle and beginning therapists often reveal in supervision that they miss it. They are working intrapsychically with the client. They are talking with the

person about how he or she is experimenting with the new belief in their everyday world. It all seems quite conscious and above board. When the person then appears somewhat unreasonably testy or provoking, the therapist is confused and misses that the client is trying to evoke some situation in which they can test out bringing their anger to *this new significant other* in their life. If the therapist simply ends up confronting and challenging the client's unreasonableness, or dealing with it intrapsychically without acknowledging the interpersonal context, a therapeutic disaster results in which the person's early characterological belief is confirmed rather than transformed.

### ***REPARING***

Another thing we need to be clear about as therapist/trainers then is that people need us to be available to project their stuff on, and work through new possibilities with, both interpersonally and intrapsychically. It is analogous to a reparing process. It goes on both within the therapeutic or training context and without. We can never assume mutuality outside the formal healing contexts. The boundaries extend to continuing contacts. New memories with significant others must be added to the client/student's data base, and they are pursuing them consciously and unconsciously at all times. So, we can never make a simple shift from being someone's projected parent, uncle, or scout leader to being a friend. As John Patton suggests, whatever our chronological age is as therapist/trainers, emotionally and spiritually we need to be available to others as "middle aged."

In relation to a child, a "middle aged" significant other provides both stable acceptance and boundaries. While it is never in question that the child is loved unconditionally, the "older," mature member of the relationship (whether chronological age is in fact reversed) offers the child boundaries to explore that teach it the limits it has to deal with in the world.

### ***GROUP FEEDBACK***

This same valuable function happens in group therapy settings as well as in our trainings which allow for group process times. The child, as Piaget says, grows through a dual process of accommodating and assimilating. To assimilate is to take in new input and make it fit with our preexisting beliefs, whether it is a good fit or not. To accom-

moderate is to enlarge or change our present beliefs so that they take in a wider range of new information. For a group to encourage assimilation of childish, omnipotent fantasies ("I *always* should be chosen and be first in line") is disastrous. A group that has the safety and trust to "speak the truth in love" can be a wonderful instrument for helping people accommodate to greater realities without calling into question their fundamental worth. Also, it is an affirmation of faith to offer direct, honest feedback. It assumes and implies that persons "have what it takes". They are not fragile victims, but creative, responsible beings. To withhold truthful mirrors is to withhold a caring gift, just as not confronting alcoholics with the consequences of their behavior is to withhold a loving, albeit sometimes difficult act. It is never helpful to reinforce someone's illusion about the world.

#### **MAINTAINING DUAL STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

A final implication of this discussion is that in both trainings and therapy settings we need to make sure that working with the child retains the qualities of a dual state of consciousness. The process should not be allowed to collapse into the childlike state alone. The adult must be kept on board as persons allow themselves to regress into the inner child. Talking exclusively to the child without the participation of the adult's reflective ego can lead to an unbalanced state of false expectations. Al and Diane Pesso's work with psychomotor structures is exemplary in this regard. Even when a person regresses into the womb, the Pesso's keep the adult talking to the child and monitoring what is going on. They also keep strict boundaries around group members who take over the voices of negative parents, ideal parents, etc. Whoever takes over a voice or enrolls to support someone in some way clearly derolls when the session is over. The point, of course, is that we don't want to promote the fiction of ideal parents being available in the outer world to minister to every need of the inner child, but to assist the person in claiming and integrating the masculine and feminine, parental, friendly and sane energies within in themselves through which they can minister to their own inner child. Since group members and leaders become much more compassionate and sensitive to a person's process and try to support it, this sometimes gets confusing. In the end we are not building an ideal world for a person that takes away suffering. We

are simply helping them jump out of dysfunctional systems in which they give themselves unnecessary suffering. We never take away memories or defenses. We simply open the possibility of a person adding new memories and new ways of being to their repertoire. We are expanding horizons or encouraging communion with a greater spectrum of reality.

G.J.

#### **SHADOW EXPECTATIONS**

I am curious and concerned about some issues which seem to develop in Training groups around teaching and learning the Hakomi Method.

It seems as if there is an implied promise and expectation that by embodying the Hakomi principles the atmosphere will be completely safe; no one will get hurt; everyone can get their needs met; and we can stop creating more suffering for each other. We will be able to learn to treat each other the way we wanted to be treated as children. Everything can be different now.

It makes sense to me how this expectation develops. The Hakomi Method, in its principals, techniques and theory offers revolutionary good news: non-violence is powerful and effective; organicity works; compassionate acceptance is healing. The inner child, so conditioned to being hurt, misunderstood, alone, de-valued takes in experiences of love and understanding previously considered impossible. In Hakomi therapy and Trainings, things *are* different. We *can* be different in the world by discovering and changing our habitual responses. It's *not* hopeless.

It also makes sense to me how the shadow side of this glorious new perspective develops. At the very heart of Hakomi's intrapersonal work, the magical stranger meets the inner child, and says, "no, wait, this isn't the way it has to be. There are other possibilities. I can offer you an experience of satisfaction, being respected, understanding" ... Its an extraordinary moment. The child has long ago decided how things are, and developed strategies for protecting its soul and avoiding pain. And the adult continues to live by these strategies in *this* kind of world. One actual conscious experience of being truly understood and accepted must shift a belief from impossible to possible. The belief must shift because one must maintain inner and outer coherence. What a wondrous idea — by studying

experience, one can gain choice over responses. By understanding the context in which the child map maker created core beliefs and strategies, the adult can find freedom from the prisons experienced in the past. This is a positive and transformational model which implies relief from pain, getting what you want, unconditional love and acceptance, special attention and empathy...

However, there are some special qualities to child consciousness — this level where most decisions and conclusions are made. One of these is a normal developmental self-centeredness. The child experiences him or herself as the center of the universe. This is expressed in a loving, generous way (for example, the child seeing itself as the central cause of mommy's unhappiness willingly gives up its freedom to make mommy happy); and in a natural, simplistic way (for example, the child wants *all* the toys, attention, cake). Another characteristic is simple, straightforward, two choice thinking. It's yes or no, mine or not mine, day or night, with little concept of maybe, or sometimes, or gray.

The child in Hakomi is offered the fundamental experiences important to the development of healthy potent full human-beingness — being safe, nourished, understood, loved, powerful. But, I have experienced in both therapy and trainings, the inner child becoming tyrannical — demanding attention, being self-righteous, selfishly disregarding others, sulking, throwing tantrums. I believe this tyrannical behavior happens because a core belief shifts first in the same consciousness from which it was made: self-centered, simplistic thinking. "I will *never* get what I need" shifts to "I will *always* get what I need". "I can't ever do what I want" to "I can always do what I want". "I'm not lovable because there's something wrong with me" to "Everyone will love me and there's nothing I need to change."

Met by someone and a context in which they are accepted, understood, loved — treated in the manner they have always longed for, clients and students naturally feel their longings as *rights*. They expect the child inside should now always be safe and happy. From self-centered, simplistic child-consciousness, it is difficult to understand that the magical stranger opens the door to what's possible, not what's constant truth. Experiencing hope and new possibilities, the child now relentlessly expects and demands safety and satisfaction in therapy, in the Hakomi Training.

I believe that another factor is involved in the development of this tyrannical shadow in Hakomi. Primary motivation for being a therapist or teacher/trainer is to help relieve suffering, to increase freedom of choice, to make the world a better place... Primary satisfaction in being a therapist or teacher/trainer is being there to provide a new possibility; modeling compassion, acceptance, understanding; opening the door to hope, heart, soul; being the messenger of the good news that the child is not bad or evil, or unlovable — just hurt and confused. It is a blessed role. With this kind of genuine satisfaction, it's very easy to get attached to being the magical stranger, ideal teacher who never hurts or judges, and is ever accepting and patient and to lose track of the reality of humanness which is about striving for what's ideal and not expecting or demanding to *be* it all the time.

Teachers, therapists, and students then all contribute to an atmosphere in therapy and trainings which I experience as marked by caution in relation to one another. Empathy for the pain which past insensitivity has caused is consciously developed in the training process. Conflict between wanting to tell the truth (i.e., I'm bored) and not wanting to cause pain or treat others in the ways that hurt them so much in the past causes lack of spontaneity, over-niceness, unwillingness to let an issue go unresolved, and perhaps over-attention to individual needs. It can be difficult to set limits and boundaries when teachers and therapists focus on creating conditions for freedom from limiting beliefs. Out of a heart-felt desire for things to be different — less painful and more loving (and this genuinely happens in Hakomi groups and sessions) — a tyranny of unrealistic expectations and demands may also result.

What's needed? A number of things, I believe, can help counteract the tendency to demand the ideal. I expect that none are new or outside the scope of the Hakomi Method, but it seems important to talk about them within this context.

First is to understand that although an extraordinarily powerful intrapsychic belief shift can take place within the space of a session, this shift requires a great deal of integration. The change happens in simplistic child consciousness and must, to become anything more than a tyrannical expectation of another betrayal (always is just as

dysfunctional in the world as never), be fine tuned with adult thinking capable of being affected by other's experience and able to respond to complex situations.

### **TIME TO SAVOR**

Students, teachers, and clients need time to savor the new experience of what has been longed for (being understood, being at peace, being good enough, etc.). They need to know the details of how it feels inside, so that they can recognize it and bridge back to it. When it's really right, it doesn't take long to feel satisfied. "When the shoe fits, the foot is forgotten". New beliefs are very vulnerable. Habits of a lifetime will continue to prove themselves until there's enough consistent new experience to stabilize the new idea. Getting what you want has to happen a certain number of times before the new belief begins to become new habit or new expectation.

### **SUFFERING**

Integration includes an acceptance of suffering as an unavoidable part of human experience. In a discussion Phil Del Prince put it this way, "You can't ever get what you really needed as a child because you aren't a child. You're a grown-up. And there is a suffering that we all bear. This experience of suffering is one of the things that belongs to our humanness. You *can*, however, share your suffering and have it understood and know some relief and comfort that wasn't available as a child". Suffering is normal and human and brings its own lessons about empathy, acceptance, not being a victim, and transcendence.

There is also grief that may accompany freedom from a limitation that a new belief brings. This is the grief of experiencing what was missed of the nourishment that was lost by believing it impossible. Freedom illuminates and is attended by painful, angry, and/or resentful awareness of loss. This grieving makes sense and has a different quality than the often hopeless anger and pain of a limiting belief. This grief just needs acknowledgment. It's part of the healing process.

### **GIFT IN THE WOUND**

Pollyanna aside, another aspect of integration and avoiding the tyrannical child, is understanding the gift that comes with the wound. Character,

personality, special abilities are born through suffering. There is a gift to be honored and reaped from the creativity, sensitivity, and precise development of each strategy that protects the soul from pain. The wound might come from the child being unpredictably yelled at and the gift might be the development of an exquisite sensitivity to energy and an ability to feel the energy in an interaction even before it is spoken. This sensitivity is a valuable tool and can serve well when it does not produce automatic shut down and override all other information. It can serve to protect when needed and to enhance the ability to communicate.

### **INTERPERSONAL FEEDBACK**

My colleague David Patterson once said, "The best use of a group is feedback" and the best use of feedback is clarification about how one is in relation to others. Authentic feedback is of great value to the integration process. New beliefs are tempered and owned through feedback. A new experience of being lovable must transmute from "Now I'll be loved no matter what" to "I am lovable no matter what the response". A new belief about being understood is refined by a group member saying truthfully, "I'm bored." Painful as it is to hear "I'm bored" when being understood is a new and fragile experience, it helps the client/student/teacher learn *how* to best be understood. With a new core belief that they *can* be understood, that they *are* understandable, feedback about *how* to be understood can become a creative process of interfacing with, affecting and being affected by other people's worlds.

Clients/therapists/students learn discrimination through feedback. It is necessary to use adult wisdom to discriminate, for example, kinds of touch; or which people are safe to be really vulnerable with and how you know this; or when it's possible and appropriate to be taken care of. The atmosphere of safety and acceptance in a training or therapy session can make adjusting and refining new strategies much easier and quicker. However, there must be room for and appreciation of the *value* of feedback in Hakomi Training groups to offset the shadow expectation that one must not say what might be painful or insensitive. In fact telling the truth and authentic interpersonal interactions are necessary for new beliefs and strategies to become expansive choices.

## **MAKING IT WORK**

A final piece of the integration process is learning to use the freedom, satisfaction and empowerment of new possibilities felt within out there in the world. As my friend Elizabeth Cogburn says, "if your insight or change doesn't grow corn, it's not worth anything". For clients/students/teachers there's a natural, organic need to try to make what's now possible inside, more possible outside in the family, friends, training group, earth community, world. Learning is truncated and the soul disempowered if it is not consistently put to use in a larger and active community framework. This requires complex, integrated adult *being* and *doing*. And this is one of the responsibilities that goes with more freedom. One of the joys, too.

In conclusion, it seems to me that intrapersonal therapy is superbly suited to the exploration and languaging of inner experience that leads to identifying, honoring, and changing core beliefs. There is also a shadow side to this process of creating experiences of longed for possibilities of fundamental love, acceptance, empowerment. This shadow is a tyranny of expectations and demands for an ideal and perfect world free of injustice and insensitivity.

In my experience what's needed to counteract tyranny is first, an increasingly full understanding of the shadow. Secondly, a rich understanding of the integration process which includes at least time to savor new experience, acknowledge suffering and grief, finding the gift in the wound, using interpersonal feedback, and making it work in the world. And third, an appreciation for the vital importance of *interpersonal* work to balance, fill out, and individuate *intrapersonal* transformation.

C.B.