EDITORIAL:

ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION

by Greg Johanson

All things arise from Tao.
They are nourished by Virtue.
They are formed from matter.
They are shaped by environment.
Thus the ten thousand things all respect Tao and honor Virtue.

Perpect of Tao and honor of Virtue are not decrease.

Respect of Tao and honor of Virtue are not demanded, But they are in the nature of things. (Tao-te ching, chapter 51; Feng & English)

Therapy and Cities in Flames

As I write this editorial Los Angeles is burning. Violence is spreading across America in reaction to the acquittal of four police officers of criminal charges in the videotaped beating of Rodney King. Plus, I just read the latest edition of the Yoga Journal which did a spread, as did New Age Journal, on whether psychotherapy is a waste of time. In particular, they interviewed James Hillman, the Jungian who has gone his own way on a number of subjects. Hillman argues that therapy can indeed divert us from what is needful in our relationship to society. This feels like an appropriate time to reflect on what we understand ourselves to be doing as Hakomi therapists, and how we relate to the ongoing dialogue on the place and value of psychotherapy.

A Search for Efficacy and Integration

I know that I was attracted to Ron Kurtz's work (before we ever had a name or an institute) because I was dissatisfied with psychotherapy as I knew it. I had benefited from interpersonal, psychoanalytically oriented therapy. I had been exposed to hereand-now body-centered therapies also. Still, therapy in general seemed long, ponderous, burdensome, inappropriately hierarchical and therapist-centered. I was also short on results as revealed in efficacy studies. I was in the market for increased freedom, efficacy, efficiency, fun, and empowerment. I'm happy to say that I have found a good measure of

that in Hakomi. At the same time, of course, we in Hakomi continue to learn as we discover our weak sides, are "bothered by our failures." and encounter the richness of other perspectives.

If a country is governed wisely....
People enjoy their food,
take pleasure in being with their families,
spend weekends working in their gardens,
delight in the doings of the neighborhood.
(Tao-te ching, chapter 80; Mitchell)

Most importantly, I needed and found in Hakomi a framework to work from that had a high degree of consistency with spiritual and scientific paradigms I valued. Theory, method, and technique gained a satisfying congruence. In addition, I was not sure that the triumph of the therapeutic in American culture that Phillip Reiff wrote about had led us to wholeness. Society didn't seem to be transforming as a select few graduated from the 10 year long average New York City psychoanalysis, while another group fostered the facilitation of dramatic experiences at the other end of the country. The principles of Hakomi offered a perspective on this dilemma as well. So, in the context of the contemporary discussion of therapy's relevance in a world faced with such formidable social issues related to economic imbalance, ecological disaster, militarism, sexism, and racism I would like to reflect a little on how Hakomi therapists might enter the dialogue through talking about what we do in relation to the principles in which we are grounded. I do this as one Hakomi therapist, as a way of stimulating reflection and comment in our greater community.

The Principles and the Self-In-Connection

To begin with, the principles of unity and organicity in Hakomi plant us firmly within the tradition of general systems theory. This perspective makes it clear that as persons we are organic living systems made up of sub-systems which participate in supra-

systems, where each systemic level has its own decider sub-system. Clearly, then, we welcome the contributions of feminist thought and cross-cultural studies which call for us to employ theories of the self-in-connection or-relation, as opposed to notions of the grand, autonomous self symbolized in the West by John Wayne.

Giving Up On Imperialism

It is not always easy to hold the line in maintaining the importance of every level of our interconnected lives. There are always forces arguing imperialistically in favor of one level of the system over another. Hegel was clear that there were individual, social, and spiritual dimensions of our lives. Since Hegel, existentialists have arisen who argue that authentic life happens within the realm of inwardness and is constituted by the free, individual decisions we make. Personalists have maintained that the authentic realm of life is that of intimacy where we encounter each other in dialogue. Socialists point to our social, political, economic context as constitutive of true selfhood, and therefore stress the importance of political action.

No Forced Choices

Who is right? Which option must we choose? In the words of Ron Kurtz, "Why can't we all be right?" Indeed, systems theory maintains that no level of an intertwined system can be ignored or devalued. As individuals, our decider sub-system generates core organizing beliefs which control the way we experience and express ourselves in life. This particular way of organizing our lives is affected by our metabolic sub-systems, and in turn affects the families, groups, neighborhoods, and communities in which we participate. Likewise, it is the intimate, personal relationships we participate in that profoundly affect the beliefs we come up with for making sense out of our world. And, the significant others relating to us in our families, schools, and communities are themselves formed in specific ways by the organization of the language, customs, morals, and institutions in which they participate.

Interdisciplinary Connections

As Hakomi practitioners, therefore, we are irrevocably disposed to work in an interdisciplinary way. We think of our task in terms of encouraging connections to, or communion with, as many levels of being as possible. That's because, as Gregory Bateson writes, a living organic system on any level

cannot demonstrate the characteristics of having a mind of its own, of being self-directing and self-correcting, unless the parts are communicating within the whole.

Mutual, Reciprocal Relations

All this implies a lot of people are right and a lot of people inappropriately try to limit the therapeutic task of negotiating barriers to increased connectedness. Yes, the relationship is crucial to therapy. No, the relationship isn't everything. There is a place for body work, nutrition, and movement that affect one's metabolic dispositions. There is a place for mindful, intrapsychic work that does not have immediate reference to the relationship with the therapist. Yes, family work is important. No, it doesn't mean that no good is being done at all unless the whole family is present. All levels of a system have a reciprocal influence on each other. An individual changing her way of perceiving and reacting affects the family and groups she participates in, just as a change in the family's way of operating affects her.

If a nation is centered in the Tao, if it nourishes its own people and doesn't meddle in the affairs of others, it will be a light to all nations of the world. (Tao-te ching, chapter 61; Mitchell)

Yes, a black man in Watts can be angry and distant because his feelings were used against him as a child and he developed a self-protective way of relatingan appropriate issue for personal therapy. He can also be angry because he has unequal access to the job market and promotions, he finds unequal treatment in the judicial system, and he sees an industry abandoning the city he lives in in favor of the suburbs, taking its jobs with it, as well as government on all levels being inattentive, unmotivated, and supposedly broke when it comes to doing anything about rapidly progressing urban decay. A Jewish person can be disposed to being withdrawn because she experienced some form of harsh treatment at an early age and concluded that she wasn't fully welcome in the world. She can also be withdrawn because she and her family were thrown into a concentration camp at a later age. A man could be upset and confused because he got mixed messages from his parents about what they wanted and didn't want from him when he was five to eight. He could also be upset and confused

because he was sent to Viet Nam at precisely the age Eric Erikson says is crucial to identity formation. Yes, early development is important. No, it's not everything. The world has a reality, an otherness to it that encounters the reality we have created.

All In This Together

Because we are all interconnected in one large organic body, what happens to one, affects everyone. The riots in LA tell us that if there isn't justice for all within the body politic, there will not be justice for anyone. The ear can't say to the eye, "I have no need of you." As the Hebrew Psalmist exclaimed, there will be no peace until the day that justice and peace embrace. That embrace can only flow from compassion, which Thomas Merton defined as an acute knowledge of the interconnectedness of all life. A.H. Almaas says that compassion is an essential aspect of Personal Essence which allows one to drop ego defenses in the face of suffering and to be who one is; a compassionate act toward oneself and toward all others. Likewise, the suffering that the Buddha said was inherent to life was precisely the suffering that comes from living the illusion that we are separate. As Simone Weill once put it, "Identify with the universe. Anything less is suffering." This philosophy is not just for books and people on retreats. It tells us why Americans have not been successful building a Honda. For all its problems, Japan has done a better job of attending to the value and interconnections of the parts within the whole. Labor and management have compromised for the good of the country. And on some levels at least, the country realized it must look out for the good of the international community.

Keeping the Connections in Mind

Back to therapy: As Hakomi therapists we always need to work with systemic factors in mind. When an individual who is in a long-term, committed relationship comes to me for therapy, I always invite him or her to bring their partner along. If they are not willing to come together to do conjoint therapy, I feel ethically obligated to inform the one who wants to continue of the implications. To affect the way he organizes his world will surely have uncontrollable affects on how the relationship is organized. If a woman comes to me wanting to work on her depression, there is another instant dilemma. If I simply say, "Sure, come on. Let's work," I have hypnotically communicated that I think that she is the one with the problem. This ignores the reality

Dorothy Smith points to in her book on feminist sociology The Everyday World as Problematic for Women. In other words, given the situation many women live in, they ought to be depressed. It is the healthy response. Although on one level it is theoretically and practically impossible, it is important to at least make an attempt to name the "reality" of a woman's world and differentiate that from the way she might be overlaying that reality with her own perception.

A Place for Therapy?

Is there a place for therapy in situations generated by strong political and economic forces? Or course. If we label ourselves as passive victims, we are condemned to misery. We always remain responsible for our experience of our experiences. Our strength and hope is in being creative beings living in communion with other creative beings as we all struggle with the paradox that we are absolutely dependent and totally responsible. This is a place we therapists need to take a chapter from Victor Frankl and Larry LeShan and address our work toward the horizon of the future where hope lies. That means we should not automatically begin by assuming there must be something wrong with a person who presents themselves to us, and that our job is to help them solve their problem by exploring their painful past.

Supporting Energy Wanting to Happen

LeShan discovered in his work with cancer patients that he needed to reverse the Freudian paradigm almost everyone has followed. He needed to become exquisitely aware of what was right with the person, where their energy was, what their strengths were, and what direction they wanted to go that would be satisfying to them. When these healthy impulses are supported, a person's immune system kicks in and transformations occur on both physical and psychic levels.

To know when you have enough is to be immune from disgrace.

To know when to stop is to be preserved from perils. Only thus can you endure long. (Tao-te ching, chapter 44; Wu)

Therefore, the contentment one has when he knows that he has enough,

is abiding contentment indeed.

(Tao-te ching, chapter 46; Henricks)

Of course, if a person could just gain insight into what they wanted, reach out for it, be nourished by it, and rest in satisfaction until the next organic need arose, they would have no need of therapists. Often, a person gets hung up on some part of what we call the sensitivity cycle. They get in their own way as they move toward what they need. Then, as hakomi therapists, we can help them befriend the barrier, discover the past pain that is keeping them from organizing themselves in such a way that moves them toward what is fulfilling, and help them reorganize around more open, nourishing possibilities. One of those possibilities might be that the person needs to get involved politically to help change the life of her community. In any case, the in-depth characterological work is not the focus. It is done when a person is blocked. It remains in the larger context of our learning to know and live the truth of our lives in relation to the truth of the world around us, as John Welwood suggests.

Many Levels

To get back to a woman who presents herself as depressed, perhaps it turns out that she was sexually molested as a child. It might be that she could well benefit from using a supportive therapeutic relationship to access the pain of that inner child who was abused. The point in doing so is not to infantilize her, say "poor baby." and collude with her status as a victim. It is to access the creative aspect of her imagination that organized her world for survival at that early age and to make it available for creating new possibilities in the now. The inner child does need to be contacted in the same compassionate, honest way any person does who needs acknowledgement of their hurt. The inner child also needs help in updating the files to realize that the "whole world" is no longer relating to her the way her partial world did when she was growing up. She now has adult strengths available, communal supports, and has much more freedom of options.

This entire process will be immeasurably strengthened and shortened, if the woman can get into a group of other childhood sexual abuse survivors. There is tremendous empowerment and validation from hearing a number of other people tell similar stories of how they were set up, abused, and then manipulated into protecting the offender. This is not self-indulgence. It is freeing, and can lead directly to involvement in political action that helps reduce the probability of sexual abuse.

When the world is governed according to Tao, Horses are used to work on the farm. When the world is not governed according to Tao, Horses and weapons are produced for the frontier. No crime is greater than that of ambition. No misfortune is greater than that of discontentment. No fault is greater than that of conquering. (Tao-te ching, chapter 46; Chang)

Being in group also validates our need for mutually supportive relationships. This is especially important in our western industrialized culture, which has encouraged us to be autonomous egos who could easily give up family and neighborhoods to move where a corporation needed us, to take a job in a hierarchy where we are expected to work as competitively as we do cooperatively. Not cooperating unquestionably with such a system is another level of intervention. Abused women are often isolated from as much outside community as possible by their abusers and need to maximize their relationship support.

At the same time all these actions are taking place, the woman could be well supported through appropriate metabolic work that strengthens her physically; learning aiki-do for movement, aerobic benefit, and self-confidence; having Rolfing or Trager sessions which free up the chronic muscular patterns which put the brakes on going in new directions mentally; and allowing herself the nurturance of such things as therapeutic massage.

Allowing Compassion

Another benefit from including personal psychotherapy and spiritual direction in a program of conscious living is the fostering of compassion. A competent therapist offers a graceful presence which is often more compassionate with a person than she is with herself. This in turn encourages the person to be more compassionate with herself and with the world. It is not true that compassion for the world needs to lead to "cheap grace" and the continuing indulgence of those who are doing harm. Compassion can include a paradoxically detached, though passionate, "Righteous anger". This warm anger which seeks to pull things together can protect the spirit. It is different than a cold hostility, which seeks to separate. Compassionate anger can fuel an awareness that allowing someone else, such as an alcoholic spouse, to continue in their illusion

without consequences is not the loving thing to do for them or anyone else involved. It can lead the way in resolving that the continued oppression of oneself or others should not go unchallenged. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were clear that the forces of anti-life needed to be resisted, even if non-violently. Taoistically speaking, it is what the system needs and wants at the deepest levels. Also, the forgiveness that compassion can engender through seeing the fear and innocence of the oppressors, as well as the oppressor within ourselves, can free us from the bondage of hate, and the obsession with the oppressor that short-circuits the enjoyment possible in our lives.

Non-Linear Living

What about timing and sequence? Does one have to get entirely out of self-alienation before they are ready to take action in the greater world? Absolutely not. We definitely need to divest ourselves of the illusion that we get into therapy to get ourselves together and then some day go out and begin living our lives for real. "Forget self-improvement," as Deepesh Faucheaux says. "It is a subtle form of oppression." This is especially so if it is held out as a way of improving our worth as human beings or getting fixed, as if we were faulty machines; all as a prerequisite to responsible engagement in all the aspects of our lives.

The greater confusion reigns in the realm...
The more articulate the laws and ordinances,
The more robbers and thieves arise.
(Tao-te ching, chapter 57; Wu)
When the country is governed through harshness and sharp investigation,
The people are more deceitful and dishonest.
(Tao-te ching, chapter 58; Chang)

Morita and Naikan therapy from Japan have many things to teach us, as David Reynolds suggests. It is good to go out and plant trees even if we might not be in the best mood that day. The world needs it and we are part of the world. We will undoubtedly feel better doing it than if we stayed home ruminating. Families are running, economies are functioning, elections are happening, and we remain in living relationship to them whether we feel confused, happy, depressed or enlightened. Life is multifaceted. We live it by putting one foot in front of the other as we engage and are encountered by the

simultaneous circularity of the personal, interpersonal, and social dimensions of it. Going to movies, reading the paper, meditating, getting our child off to school, voting, making a date, clocking in at work, offering a prayer of thanks, washing the dishes, writing a letter to the city council — through it all we make our unique and important contribution to a larger living organism whose life won't be put on hold until we reach some mythical status of "ready" or "mature".

A Straw Man

However, those who talk about therapy as being a self-indulgent, endless round of a high-priced, unacknowledged lover asking, "How do you feel about that?" are knocking down a stereotyped straw man. Certainly as a Hakomi Therapist I don't think I've asked anybody, "How do you feel about that?" in the last fifteen years. Feelings are nothing in themselves. They are simply one aspect of the bodymind that give a clue to how people are organizing their lives. As such, however, they do have their realm of importance. Here is where David Reynolds steps over the imperialistic line when he suggests they can be ignored as they simply come and go, rise and fall within the greater context of our lives. Yes, it's true that the reason people don't fly is not because they have a fear of flying. It is because they don't buy a ticket and get on the plane. No, this does not imply it is not helpful to go beyond simply acknowledging the feeling, to studying it as one aspect to how we are organizing our lives. We have the creative, human capacity to reorganize our lives. There is enough suffering built into life. There is no virtue in unnecessarily continuing in fear of our own making.

Time for All Things

As Bateson writes, the sciences of living systems teach us that the most important aspect of any living, organic system is the way it organizes itself to process information. It is important that individuals, families, communities, and nations take time out on occasion to take themselves under observation, and become witnesses to how their consciousness is organized. It makes a concrete, historical, passionate difference whether an individual sees a stranger and perceives that person as a threat to be avoided or a possible friend to be encountered. It makes a difference whether families organize around thinking there is only so much love to be had, or labor and management think there has to be a winlose war over only so much money to go around.

As Ken Wilber argues, it is not playing parlor games when individual therapy supports us in healing splits in consciousness; when one part of the mind becomes connected to another, when the mind becomes aware of its connection to the body, when the whole self begins to feel its connection to the world around it. It is no small thing when an assembly line reorganizes from having one person responsible for one task, to having every person on the line responsible for the finished product.

I like the way Marianne Williamson says it. She agrees it definitely can be self-indulgent to work on oneself and not be in service to the life around us, but she maintains, "there are a lot of hours in the day. You can go to therapy and you can serve and you can be a spiritual seeker. They all can go on at the same time."

Indeed, according to the unity and organicity principles in Hakomi, they should. Much of what is said here is expressed powerfully in Taoism as well as the other great religious traditions. Here is a final quote from Lao Tzu which underlines the wisdom of therapy, in the broadest sense, as encouraging communion among the parts of the whole.

Cultivate Virtue in your own person,
And it becomes a genuine part of you.
Cultivate it in the family,
And it will abide.
Cultivate it in the community,
And it will live and grow.
Cultivate it in the state,
And it will flourish abundantly.
Cultivate it in the world,
And it will become universal.
(Tao-te ching, chapter 54; Wu)

It is followed by the eloquent plea of Rodney King, voiced two days after the violence erupted in LA.

"I just want to say, you know, can we get along? Can we all get along? Can we stop making it horrible for the older people and the kids? I mean, we got enough smog in Los Angeles, let alone having to deal with setting these fires. It's just not right, it's not right, and it's not going to change anything.

"We'll get our justice. They've won the battle, but they haven't won the war. We'll have our day in court. That's all we want. "I love everyone as I love people of color....We've got to quit, we've got to quit. I could understand the first two hours after the verdict, but to keep on going like this and see the security guard shot on the ground, it's just not right, it's just not right, because those people will never go home to their families again.

"Please, we can get along here, we can all get along, I mean we're all stuck here for awhile. Let's try to work it out, let's try to work it out."