

Describing the Method

Science, Spirit, Psychotherapy

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My goal here is to place the Hakomi method within three different disciplines: scientific, spiritual and psychotherapeutic. Describing the work has been an ongoing problem. Any one-way description is never enough. The work is inspired and shaped by all three of the dimensions mentioned in the title. This short article is an attempt at a three dimensional description. First, looking at the work as science, two quotes from a Nobel winning physicist and one of the greatest teachers of science.

Observation, reason and experiment make up what we call the scientific method.

What is the fundamental hypothesis of science, the fundamental philosophy? the sole test of the validity of any idea is experiment. We just have to take what we see, and then formulate all the rest of our ideas in terms of our actual experience.

The principle of science, the definition, almost, is the following: The test of all knowledge is experiment. Experiment is the sole judge of scientific "truth." But what is the source of knowledge? Where do the laws that are to be tested come from? Experiment, itself, helps to produce these laws, in the sense that it gives us hints. But also needed is imagination to create from these hints the great generalizations--to guess at the wonderful, simple, but very strange patterns beneath them all, and then to experiment to check again whether we have made the right guess. This imagining process is so difficult that there is a division of labor in physics: there are theoretical physicists who imagine, deduce and guess at new laws, but do not experiment; and then there are experimental physicists who experiment, imagine, deduce and guess.

-- Richard Feynman, Six Easy Pieces

I saw a video tape once of Feynman lecturing at Esalen. He said there that the scientific method involved three basic steps: make a guess; calculate the implications of your guess; do an experiment to test those implications.

Do we do something similar in the work? We certainly do! Here's how. These three steps — observe/guess, reason/calculate, test/experiment describe — in a very simple way, exactly what the Hakomi method is about. Step one, observe! We call that tracking. We make a lot of observations, a lot of looking and listening for the signs of experience, the unusual and the characteristic. We make a specialty of looking for and listening for the indirect signs of beliefs and emotional attitudes. We observe in order to get ideas about a person, ideas about what inner models of self, other and world they are operating out of. In other words, step two, we guess. We make educated guesses.

Guess is just another word for hypothesizing. We generate hypotheses about the person -- a creative process, requiring a good imagination. We think about what beliefs are influencing the organization of this person's experiences and behavior. We think about what could have created this way of organizing experience. We think about what childhood experiences lead to what inner models. We hypothesize about what core beliefs are part of this way of being in the world. Our reasoning process is based on the idea that experience is organized by habits of thought, perception and the assignment of meanings. We can observe the experiences. We have to think about the organizing habits?

A second kind of reasoning we have to do is about testing the ideas, hypotheses and guesses we've come up with. "What is the fundamental hypothesis of science, the fundamental philosophy? the sole test of the validity of any idea is experiment." We do experiments. Albeit they're only "little" experiments. Still, it's the method we're interested in and not the size of the damn thing. We test. We experiment. And we have to come up with those experiments all the time. Whether it's a probe or some other little experiment, we are doing something in order to test our ideas. It is all based on observable experiences. That's scientific method. It is significant here that we focus on experience. Feynman says, ".... in terms of our actual experience." That's science.

All of this is creative. It's a process that requires imagination and one that can be full of surprises and even delight. Towards the end of this paper, in appendix one, Getting a Fix, I give some examples.

The second aspect of the method I want to talk about is the spiritual one. I want to touch upon how this method is a reflection of spiritual principles and practices? To begin, let's simply state that the work is spiritually informed. Literally, it has information about spirit. Such as the following: there are subtle dimensions beyond the four that are space and time; there are relationships that make us more than separate selves; wisdom and inspiration can be found in spiritual experiences; love and consciousness are as real as mass and energy; some aspect of ourselves survives physical death; and more.

The work takes place within a spiritually informed emotional/attitudinal container. The work is "held" by that container and rests within it in a very palpable way. The emotional attitude is warmth and kindness and the ability to put one's own agendas and internal chatter aside and be with another. "Warmth and wakefulness," Chogyam Trungpa called it, when he wrote about the basic task of psychotherapists, in a book called *Awakening the Heart*. In some Tibetan Buddhist literature, it's called *Wisdom and Compassion*, which is also the title of a beautiful book of Tibetan Buddhist art.

A basic part of this method is learning and using this emotional attitude. I teach it as "loving presence." I teach it as method and practice. There are exercises and talks and we practice it every day of the training. There are definite skills and experiences involved. And there are patterns of thinking and doing that can get in the way. The belief that effort must be involved or that we are essentially on our own in all things, these kinds of beliefs amongst others get in the way. So, we have to examine ourselves, which is also spiritual work. And we have to experience this particular way of being and doing.

It's not just pretty talk. It's real, solid, experiential work. One learns to rest in it, with patience and faith and good humor. We learn to find inspiration and love within the process of helping others, so that we too are restored and nourished. It is knowledge, technical knowledge, about being nourished by a source that does not fail, and the experiences that remind us, again and again, it works! It feels right and good and, it works!

Here's Ken Wilber: "I rise to taste the dawn, and find that love alone will shine today. And the shining says: to love it all, and love it madly, and always endlessly, and ever fiercely, to love without choice and enter the All, to love it mindlessly and thus be the All, embracing the only and radiant Divine: now as Emptiness, now as Form, together and forever, the Godless search undone, and love alone will shine today."¹

About the method as psychotherapy: First, it's this container, full of compassion, patience and encouragement. It's this that makes the method "error tolerant." It is exactly because the precise and scientific steps we take are all suspended in this spiritual container, that they are effective. The guesses, the experiments, they're all happening within a relationship filled with good will and kindness. The atmosphere is open, creative and full of hope. This atmosphere is the most significant aspect of the whole endeavor. It sustains both client and therapist through the difficult work of feeling what is at times deeply painful. Let's not make the mistake of believing that the method works because of any technique or group of techniques. It works because the people doing it are inspired. Unlike Thomas Edison's well known description of genius², the work is more inspiration than anything else. It all takes place within this special atmosphere.

As psychotherapy, there are these things. First, there is a clean and simple logic to the method. For more on this, I refer you to the article on *Experiential Method* (also on this web site.) Second, there's something about how this work is relatively quick and easy. Here are a few ideas about that:

Item 1. The Client's Commitment to Self-study³

Here's a problem that psychotherapy has had all along. When therapist and client are both operating out of a model (the allopathic, medical model) in which the client's task is to present "data" (symptoms, history, dreams!) and the therapist's tasks are to diagnose an illness and to provide treatment (insight, drugs, recommended actions, etc.), when this is the model, then methods of self-study, like meditation, the use of mindfulness and little experiments are not used or valued. Methods based on a medical model, lean towards questions (by the therapist) and answers (by the client). This tends to draw the client away from his or her own direction. It tends to arrest the unconsciously directed unfolding processes of healing.

¹ From *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*.

² "Genius is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration."

³ There's more about this below.

Working within this model often leads to analysis, interpretation, excessive explanation and sometimes arguments. These reflect what Francisco Varela⁴ called "the abstract attitude." By which he meant the attitude that keeps out of their experience and into their abstract thoughts.

The signs of this particular behavior are: questions, often "'why" questions, lots of "because" answers, an unconscious need to justify, a strong tendency to explain things, discomfort with uncertainty and a wish to fit the world to a desired vision. All this slows psychotherapy down by keeping the spontaneous from happening, minimizing emotional expression, avoiding experiences which could reveal and relieve, and by keeping the client from participating fully in his or her own process.

The Hakomi method presupposes that the client's main task is self-study and that the therapist's task is to assist in that, by creating ways in which the client may discover herself or himself. Questions and explanations are replaced by tracking and little experiments. The allopathic medical model is replaced by one in which the primary responsibility is upon the "student-client" for the effort to understand himself or herself, and the therapist is a kind teacher who helps the client to look into the mirror of experience carefully observed. With the client taking responsibility (which often means that the therapist waits for the client to take the lead), the healing process goes where it has to go, not where the therapist thinks it should. This engages the cooperation of the client's unconscious mind, producing support for the process, rather than resistance. Self study is the task and not surprisingly, it is also the path of the spiritual seeker.

Item 2. The Use of Mindfulness

This method places the direct observation of present experience above discussion and speculation. As a result, self-observation, or mindfulness, is present in almost all aspects of the work. Without mindfulness, the discovery of what's really going on within a person, all the habits and beliefs that are the causes of unnecessary suffering, is very much harder. With mindfulness, core beliefs and the emotions associated with them become obvious quickly. The most deeply held beliefs and powerful memories are reached by studying reactions evoked in mindfulness. All reactions are easily observed when in mindfulness and the beliefs, emotions, inner models and memories that help create and organize those reactions often become consciousness along with them. When they don't, they are only a step or two from becoming conscious. In addition, the sensitivity, vulnerability and surrender that are essential to mindfulness is being developed and practiced throughout the process. As a result, self-awareness is importantly enhanced.

Item 3. Experiential

When present experiences are noticed and attended to, many opportunities for understanding and growth present themselves. The signs of present experience can be read by the therapist. (We call this tracking.) These signs are reliable indicators of the client's experiences which, when focused on, are immediate and real to the client. It is this immediacy and reality that makes present experience the "royal road to understanding" in body-centered psychotherapy. By tracking and contacting experiences happening in the present, which both therapist and client have access to, real events are attended to and much speculation is avoided. Ideas may be fun, but they're not nearly as convincing as experiences. Ideas are often open to doubt; experience, hardly ever. Real, felt, present experiences lead quickly to understanding. Since experience is the direct result of both events and the meanings that are unconsciously and habitually assigned to events,⁵ gathering information directly from present experience, is the most rapid and reliable way of discovering those meanings and their effects.

Item 4. The Emphasis on Nourishment and Self-actualization

What's wrong. How bad things are. Feelings of grief, fear, anger and pains are the usual focus of psychotherapy. They needn't be. They may only be signals that something's missing. Some kind of nourishment or some kind of potential that should be there, or could be there, isn't. We concentrate on discovering what is missing and finding ways to get it. These painful feelings can tell us something. Fear can

⁴ Francisco Varela, *Embodied Mind*

⁵ See *Experiential Method*, also on this web site.

tells us what we need to be safe. Sadness, what we need to be happier. What we really need is usually available. When we discover what that is and see it without the distorting effects of outdated or extreme beliefs, it's usually available. It's us, that's not. We're not available to the nourishment we could have, if we didn't react in old, habitual and "misinformed" ways. Our habits prevent us from getting the nourishment that's there for us. When that's the case, as it is most of the time, we can help. When what you really need isn't available, the best you can do is face it and move on. As the Rolling Stones song goes: "You can't always get what you want..."⁶

Unnecessary suffering, that's what we're after. If it's unnecessary, we can help you. If what you need is there and you're not taking it, if you're starving at a banquet, we can help. So, that's what we look for. The kind of problems people present in therapy most often reveal that they have some unreal beliefs about what's possible in the way of happiness and the nourishment that leads to it. Once we understand what's missing, we move towards understanding what keeps it that way, what is in the way of getting what's needed. Often, it was missing in the past and the person organizes around the absence. They manage the pain of what's missing by not feeling it, or thinking about it. The beliefs that keep that missing need from becoming action are habit now and function unawares.

Staying only with pain, suffering, fear, hate and such debilitating emotions is unnecessary and can even be dangerous. By staying too long, therapists strengthen the habits which manage pain and prevent nourishment (pleasure, love, calm, and so forth). By searching for sources of nourishment and ways to take nourishment in, we help people become stronger, more courageous, and more effective in their worlds.

When pain and suffering are emphasized, rather than nourishment, the process remains difficult and drawn out. The therapist's ideas about transference and counter-transference make therapists extremely cautious about offering nourishment as part of the therapy process. By contrast, in Hakomi, we encourage it. With the caveat that one must be careful that the nourishment is actually taken in. It can be that it's the nourishing relationship that's being sought by the client or the therapist, or both. If that's the case, you have a transference problem. You can get a dependency situation that way. It's a matter of being careful. If you are, if you teach a person how to take in what's available, where they hadn't been able to before, then you are helping and healing. The primary job is to help the client learn to get available nourishment. We have to be real about it; it has to be some kind of nourishment that's actually available. It usually is.

Item 5. A Clear Relationship to the Unconscious

Most therapists, the exception being hypnotherapists, are not trained to relate directly to the unconscious mind of the client. The old concept of the unconscious as a primitive, irrational, "seething pool of emotions and impulses," is simply not accurate.⁷ The unconscious is highly complex and "logical" and carries out very complex tasks, including judgments and decisions. By tracking for and adjusting to unconscious needs, we establish good relations with these all important aspects of the mind. When we don't, progress is hampered by distractions, all kinds of "non-cooperation," which is often called resistance, like forgetting, low interest, irrelevancies, lack of focus, and on and on. A lot of respect for the intelligence and effectiveness that functions outside of awareness is the remedy. Paying attention to non-verbal signs of experience is a very good way to engage in a "conversation with the unconscious." Needs, feelings, even ideas, that do not appear in the present consciousness of the client are often expressed non-verbally. By responding to these, we can establish a direct relationship with that part of the client's mind. If we respond with awareness, understanding and kindness, it can be a very positive and productive relationship. Such relationships gives us, as they do the hypnotherapist, powerful allies.

Item 6. Management Behavior

What in other methods are called "defenses," we see as the management of emotionally intense experiences. This management behavior is habitual and organized outside of awareness. When it is called defensive, it usually carries the judgment that it is "bad," it's something like germs in disease, it's something to fight, to overcome. When therapists make this judgement, it often works to reinforce negative self judgements in the client, enhancing impulses that are already conflicting and troublesome. The resulting

⁶ "but if you try sometime, you just might get what you need."

⁷ See the article, "The Butler Did It," by Bruce Bower, Science News, Dec. 1999 Also, my article, "Listen to You."

tension wastes emotional energy, causes suffering and takes a lot of time to resolve. Taking sides against the parts that manage the organization of experience just adds to the tensions already present.⁸ As with the unconscious mind in general, respect for and a cooperative relationship with these parts is the key to moving quickly and smoothly the therapeutic process. Management behaviors are protective basically and there is always an understandable need for safety behind them. That some of these needs are old and outdated is a good reason to bring them into consciousness in gentle ways, ways which make them easier to change. Seeing them as management and treating them as such, gives the client respect for his or her own process. That helps with finding ways to use the energy that goes into that same management in more realistic, effective ways.

Item 7. We're Experimental

Remember Feynman? "The sole test of the validity of any idea is experiment." So, when the therapist has an idea (and you know how easily that can happen), especially if it seems like an important one, it's time for an experiment, not a big discussion. This "experimental attitude" is an expression of true open-mindedness and curiosity. Without the testing of ideas, questions are left unanswered and issues, unresolved. The notion that experiments require elaborate designs and therefore are not really doable in clinical sessions is just wrong.⁹ "What happens when...." is the basic form of all experiments. Or, as Wilber has pointed out, "If you want to know this, do this!"¹⁰ All one has to do something to know something. All that's necessary is to a what-happens-when question and pay attention to the results. The result of not using little experiments where possible is confusion, uncertainty and a great waste of time. Experiments often lead quickly and easily to clear, direct understanding. This approach is essential to the method. Without it, there's no Hakomi. And, let's give credit where credit is due: I learned a lot about this from several really good therapists of the Gestalt persuasion, Fritz Perls, Jim Simkins, Stella Resnick and Richard Miller. I'm grateful to them all.

Item 8. Emphasis on Understanding rather than Emotional Release and Expression

The model that emotions are like gases under pressure and need to be released in order for the pressure to be reduced is attributed to Freud. He was probably inspired by the excitement generated in his time over the invention of the steam engine. It's an hydraulic model. Here the hope is found that, once expression is "allowed" and pressure relieved, understanding will follow. And that's often the case. Experiences are often organized around avoiding the experience of certain emotions and their expression. In Hakomi, rather than placing an emphasis on the expression of emotions, we focus on understanding of how they arise and fail to arise. We look at how emotional experience is managed, what beliefs influence that process. The main point for us is that the operations of the mind are information processes, not an hydraulic ones. While the computer may be only crudely analogous to the human brain, but it is a lot better of an analogy than are shock absorbers and tea kettles. As if there were so many gallons of tears, so many lbs./square inch of grief. (I'm feeling a little pressure myself, just writing about it.) The point is, we do not need to push for the expression of emotions to discover the processes that influence them. Expression alone, without understanding, is exhausting and provides only temporary relief at best. The beliefs and organizing habits that create a need for emotional release, when these are unrealistic and outdated, can be examined and changed like any other beliefs or habits, by making them conscious and making it possible (or showing that it's possible) to believe otherwise and to act differently. In this method, it is the beliefs that influence the expression of emotions that we seek to discover and work with, not emotions themselves. Of course we do support release when it is spontaneous. But we don't push for it. We allow it and support it when it happens, but we emphasize understanding the processes that organize all experience, including emotions and their expression. Working with beliefs brings about changes that much faster.

⁸ Richard Schwartz, in his books on Internal Family Systems, calls these parts managers. He talks about several varieties and explains how they originate and function. He also recommends fostering cooperation with the managers rather than opposing them. They are, as he points out, only trying to protect.

⁹ On this subject, see Richard Rhodes' description of inductive reasoning, in his 1999 book, "Why They Kill," pages 137 -140

¹⁰ From *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, Chapter 11, What is Science?

There are several more of these elements which speed up the process, but these are the main ones.

A quick summary of the method: (1) create the right state of mind; (2) build the relationship; (3) get ideas about the person (about how he or she organizes experience and what beliefs influence that); (4) do little experiments in mindfulness to test your ideas; (5) work with the emotions, memories and insights evoked by the experiments you've done; (6) create the missing experiences that the limiting beliefs have prevented. Simple enough! The main techniques we use for these simple steps are: (1), we follow the flow of the client's present experiences (tracking); (2) we name the experiences, once in a while, to demonstrate to the client (especially the unconscious mind of the client) that we're "getting it" (contact and acknowledgement); (3) we detect and adjust to the person's unconscious needs; (4) we think about what sort of history and beliefs lead the person to organize his or her experience the way we're noticing it's being organized; (5) we create little experiments, like probes and taking over (which evoke and access character material) to test our hypotheses about the person and to evoke memories and emotions that bring that material into consciousness; (6) we work with the emotions that are evoked (by supporting spontaneous management behavior and by creating secondary experiments to move the process along); (7) we seek to discover and to provide, at least for the moment, the experiences that have been missing as a result of the effects of the limiting beliefs and the habits they created.

An Important Note:

It's been pointed out to me, by Halko Weiss and the European staff, that the use of the term "core material" is misleading and does not take into account how sane we all really are at the core. They have suggested the term "character material" and I think they're right. It was a serious mistake on my part and I'm happy to correct it. The core is sane and I would add, it is spirit. It's not exactly scientific, yet, to talk that way. (That's perhaps the reason behind my mistake.) But, I've every confidence that it soon will be. "To see God in everything and everyone." I was told that Swami Premananda said that was the purpose of life. At the core, if we could see it, God. Not craziness and pain, ignorance and suffering. That's material of another story. That's the overlay of character and ego. Character material. At the core... sanity and spirit. Something to celebrate.¹¹

I haven't yet talked about character theory, that ones we've been using for so many years. Here's some recent thoughts about that:

Listen to You

They all talk to themselves; the problem is, nobody listens.

—Fritz Perls (a rough translation)

It's true: nobody listens. Or, hardly anyone.

We call all this talking to ourselves: thinking. In effect, thinking is self-talk. And, it runs us. Decisions are made. Emotions are triggered. Speech is created and spoken. (I'm writing this.) And almost all of it goes on without "deliberation." Without.... a witness. We're hearing it; we're just not hearing who exactly is saying it. The talker is on automatic and we call that, when we think about it at all, our.... self. We are not, as is commonly believed, what we eat. Our selves are, for all practical (and impractical) purposes, how and what we habitually talk to ourselves about. That is, we are who we think we are. Not what we tell other people we think. What we really think, without thinking about it.¹²

The music of an orchestra is made by probably millions of small, automatic, habitual acts on the part of nearly a thousand fingers, over a hundred arms, another hundred each of legs, eyes, ears, lungs and fifty or so brains. The outcome of all this can be beautiful, organized, synchronized, harmonized complex musical sounds. Almost none of those millions of habitual acts is being witnessed by the actors them-

¹¹ The paper Experiential Method still uses the term "core material." Where ever you see that, just change it to "character material." I'll also change it where and when I can.

¹² "We haven't paid much attention to thought as a process. We have engaged in thoughts, but we have only paid attention to the content, not the process. Our thought, too, is a process, and it requires attention, otherwise it's going to go wrong." — David Bohm, from *On Dialog* (pg. 9)

selves. Nor could they be called deliberate. They're not planned and then carried out. All these movements have been rehearsed, memorized. If there is anything deliberate about them, it's that they've been deliberately practiced and memorized, "habitualized" and put outside of consciousness. In that sense, they're not attended to. (Just as thoughts are not listened to.) Because: it's the only way to have an orchestra that works, an orchestra worth listening to.

In the same way, we don't listen to all our self talk. We can't. We don't have the time. Usually! All the models, instructions, assumptions, beliefs that create the highly complex behavior we exhibit operate almost entirely as habits, outside awareness. As a result, we are organized, synchronized, etc, and we can react to the events around us. We can operate in the flow of the ever changing world. We can be part of it, at whatever speed it's going. In that world, as part of that "orchestra," the self is our instrument. On it, we make the music of our lives. We are our own creations. We have organized who knows how many habits out of the experiences of our lives and more than anything else, those habits are who we are. Because it's the only way to have a self that works, a self that other people will recognize as such.

So, everyone is who they think they are. Which is to say, it's who they say they are to themselves. Only they don't listen. It doesn't work that way. It couldn't. Not in the everyday world of work and relationships and "playing the music of your life." But, if you're going to change, you're going to have to listen. Like a conductor, you're going to have to listen to yourself.

As you may have guessed, I've got a plan for that. First though, a little more thinking. Richard Schwartz calls it "the myth of the monolithic I." This is the idea that we're a unity. Of course all of us who've read Ken Wilber know that everything is a part of some whole and a whole made of parts. "Nature of the universe, Old Sock." The orchestra is a whole made up of multiple musicians. (Every whole is made up of multiple somethings.) And we're no different. Cells, organs, systems.... The self, the "who-we-are" is also a collection of parts. And these parts are each, in its own way, a whole, with feelings, attitudes, beliefs, etc. The whole of a subpersonality. Making us all "multiples."

H.L. Mencken said, "All men are frauds. The only difference is that some men admit it. I, personally, don't." All selves are multiple. The only difference is that some selves know it and some don't. (I, personally, do.... if that's any of your business.) That is, sometimes the "parts" communicate and sometimes they don't. Or some parts communicate with other parts and some parts don't. Some are unconscious to others. Invisible. Some parts oppose other parts. Freud called it conflict. One part against another. Schwartz calls it polarization. Part against part, a big cause of suffering. Dissociation: parts not communicating. We're all orchestras. We're either friendly and playing together, or we're having some kind of hard time. Multiplicity. The self as multiple.

Lonnie Athens, the noted criminologist, calls this internal world of parts a "phantom community." They're like people, these parts. Schwartz says that, too! They certainly have some of the complexity, motivations and beliefs. Of course, at each level of organization, there's some level of complexity that goes with it. For our parts, our phantom community members, they're one step down from the top, the top being a "whole" individual person. So, naturally, they're very close to being people themselves. And they often act that way and just as often other people accept them as such. Parts function as wholes when the orchestra isn't following the conductor anymore, so the lead violinist steps in and conducts. It may not produce the best sound, but at least the music's still happening.

Let's say your ability to cry, those habits that make up openness, sensitivity and vulnerability have gone numb for some reason. Maybe you were told "big boys don't cry" or "I'll give you something to cry about." So, the part that toughs it out takes over and a new organized self is operating in the world, a self that doesn't cry and maybe doesn't feel very much either. And the world says, "he's a real man" or "he's too macho!" Of course, if the people in your world like "real men" and reward you for it, you're likely to stay one, if you can. However, you may not be a hit with a modern woman. Athens would say, the self is a social phenomenon. It is, in the sense that it formed and is maintained through social experiences, like the events and rewards we just mentioned. It's also true that it becomes stable within social networks. There are also some internal rewards and punishments that are established and, in that way, the self is also a "personal construct," a "semiautonomous system." That is, once it's established, it will tend to recreate and stabilize itself. It will "self repair." So, it's a social phenomenon and an individual one, too!

We could, if we wished to, examine these parts, these members of the phantom community within ourselves.

I really like the word phantom, here. It resonates with the Buddhist idea that the self is "empty of separate existence." "All is impermanent. All is without a (separate) self," is the mantra of the Amitabha Buddha. These selves are only phantoms, ghosts who meet in ghostly ways and go about their ghostly

business that is our daily lives. The situation would be a bleak, as many think it is, were it not that even that thought is just a ghost itself.

"You have come to attain. And you will attain," Swami Rama told me. To attain... to see the ghosts for what they are. To witness. To observe. To know who you are and who you aren't. "In the silence," said Swami Premananda. "When thinking stops," he said, "you will see God." That way lies freedom, as every saint has told us.

To examine the phantoms, we have to stop being them, if even for a moment. We need to observe them doing their ghostly chores. And that means mindfulness. A mindful moment is one in which we are simply observing the ghostly doings of our own minds. We're watching, hearing thoughts go by, without "being" them. Even if only for a moment. In one moment of light, like a flash of lightning, whole mountain ranges can be seen. Once seen, we know forever that they're there.

The beginning of freedom is listening to yourself (or your selves, rather). We have become who we are, members of our culture, family, community. And we have taken in, as complex sets of habits, beliefs, thoughts, phantoms, this mix and made of it a self. We can remake it!

I haven't yet spoken of what part inheritance plays in all this. For this, I recommend a book called, *Entwined Lives*, by Nancy L. Segal. It's a book about twin studies and what they tell us about personality, experience and genetic inheritance. The gist of it is this: we inherit tendencies. Nothing is fixed as far as personality is concerned, but there will be genetic influences, more or less strong, depending on the trait. So, it's not black or white. It's complex, subtle and juicy. Still, within the range of most of what we call personality, most of it is learning and social interaction, biased by some genetic influences. It's nature and nurture. Both play a part in how our selves are shaped.

From here on out, the stuff about self, for me, is method. It's how we go about seeing who we are and changing what needs changing. I am not partial to any particular description of the structure of the self, whether it is the "hungry ghosts and hell beings" of Buddhism, "top dog and bottom dog," "managers, exiles and firefighters" or "the child" or "orals, masochists and schizoids." All are good ways to sharpen up our thinking. And I think, for now, I've said enough about that.

I haven't talked about techniques. Or the principles. They are both important parts of the method. But, I'll save that for another time.

Before I finish, there is an aspect of Hakomi that I think needs emphasis. It needs to be seen clearly so that we can distinguish just what it is that makes Hakomi unique. Given the history of psychotherapy, its roots in medicine, we've been taught to think about it as a cure for disease. And there's plenty of room for this kind of psychotherapy. But, I don't think of Hakomi as any of that. I think of it as self-study. Psychotherapy as learning who you are. And I want to talk a little more about that.

Within this limited area of the whole field of psychotherapy, I want to think about psychotherapy as self-study, as learning who you are. A good question to ask right off is this: how is it that we do not (if we do not, and let's face it, most of us do not) already know who we are or at least have a pretty good start on it? What, you might add, have we been doing instead of studying who we are? What have we been paying attention to? How is it that we've learned so much without each of us learning very much about ourselves. And, now that I've asked a few questions, let me venture a few answers. Self-awareness is a habit. It's one of two habits we, as therapist need to cultivate and to help our clients cultivate. (The other habit is warmth, friendliness and compassion, which I'll talk about at another time, when I'm describing loving presence.)

Self-awareness is gained through the cultivation of paying attention to yourself, meaning your thoughts, your sensations, moods, emotions, desires, dreams, and so forth, and when and how they all occur. Mindfulness is a big part of that. Mindfulness is also habit; it must be learned and practiced. It must produce desirable results. It must prove useful to have a knowledge of one's self, a well-conceived model that emerges out of this habit of self-awareness. (Gurdjieff called it, self-remembering.)

So, why didn't we learn all this in grade school? Why are there no programs for this in the curriculums of the Western world? After all, self-study is the foundation of almost all spiritual development. What is valued so much more highly than this? Material success, that's what. Witness the tight correlation between level of education and lifetime earnings. So, when we ask about why we're not more self aware, one reason is that it's not highly valued in our culture and therefore, it's not taught.

A second, related reason is that we're not exposed to models of self-study and self-awareness in the media. Just not there. Not on TV, in movies, popular books, music, theater.... invisible. (I could rant on and on and quite enjoy myself doing it, but, dear reader, I'm going to spare us both. It's enough for me that you know that I could have.)

A third reason, is the great value of (now get this!) not knowing. Too much self-awareness is bad for getting things done. "Sickled over with the pale cast of thought." It's the reason for habits in the first place: some things are best done without thinking. True enough. If you're trying to get certain things done, over and over again in much the same way, then deliberate and conscious is a waste of precious brain power. (A topic worth pursuing for another time.) But, if you're not just trying to get things done in an efficient way, if, rather, you're looking for knowledge of the true self, for freedom, clarity and meaning, if it's happiness you want, if you're wanting to end unnecessary suffering, well then... self-study is the way.

Lastly, before we give up on the reasons we're not more self-aware, I want to mention repression, the "force" that keeps some stuff out of awareness for safety's sake. Of course that's happening. Of course it's one of the things we should be aware of when we're doing this business of helping others learn about themselves. Just so you'd know. And, if we're careful about it, we can go about our business of "making the unconscious, conscious" without doing damage or wasting a lot of time, either. It's a matter of working with the unconscious and not forcing anything. But, you knew that, I'm sure.

So, I see Hakomi as the method that is particularly about self-study. And I've said before that it behooves us to teach our clients that this is the case. It will save a lot of time, I've said. It will. We all need to notice what we're doing with our lives. We all need to be able to look at things like that. How do you answer when you're asked, "who are you?" And if you ever ask yourself, what then? What kind of person are you to yourself? That's what I think this Hakomi stuff is all about. And Lord help me, I should know.

That second habit I mentioned, warmth. Let me just say this. I think it's the therapist is obliged to shine a friendly light on who one is. It's a very important part of the therapeutic relationship. Since we're trying to help people look at who they are, it's a good idea to be friendly about that. Because... we must welcome their emerging recognitions. We must help them understand and accept who they are, the sinner at the surface and the saint at the core, their capacity for love and wisdom as well as their pain, their guilt and all of that. So, that's another habit we ought to cultivate and help our clients cultivate: friendliness towards ourselves and towards others.

So, that's the combination: "warmth and wakefulness" (Trungpa), "wisdom and compassion" (Tibetan Buddhism), "love and hope" (Jesus), "gnothi seatum" (Socrates), "no freedom without enlightenment" (Da Free John).... "God in everyone and everything." (Premenanda) I'm going to end with a couple of poems. First, Rumi...

Come

Come,
whoever you are! Wanderer,
worshiper, lover of leaving

Come,
This is not a caravan of despair.
It doesn't matter if you've broken
your vow a thousand times, still

Come,
and yet again
Come!

Jelaluddin Rumi

I Know the Way You Can Get

I know the way you can get
When you have not had a drink of Love:

Your face hardens,
Your sweet muscles cramp.
Children become concerned
About a strange look that appears in your eyes
Which even begins to worry your own mirror
And nose.

Squirrels and birds sense your sadness
And call an important conference in a tall tree.
They decide which secret code to chant
To help your mind and soul.

Even angels fear that brand of madness
That arrays itself against the world
And throws sharp stones and spears into
The innocent
And into one's self.

O I know the way you can get
If you have not been out drinking Love:

You might rip apart
Every sentence your friends and teachers say,
Looking for hidden clauses.

You might weigh every word on a scale
Like a dead fish.

You might pull out a ruler to measure
From every angle in your darkness
The beautiful dimensions of a heart you once
Trusted.

I know the way you can get
If you have not had a drink from Love's
Hands.

That is why all the Great Ones speak of
The vital need
To keep Remembering God,
So you will come to know and see Him
As being so Playful
And Wanting,
Just Wanting to help.

That is why Hafiz says:
Bring your cup near me!
For I am a Sweet Old Vagabond
With an Infinite Leaking Barrel
Of Light and Laughter and Truth
That the Beloved has tied to my back.

Dear one,
Indeed, please bring your heart near me.
For all I care about
Is quenching your thirst for freedom!
All a Sane man can ever care about
Is giving Love!

-- Hafiz

Appendix One: Getting a Fix

A fix is what a navigator takes. To take a fix is to locate yourself, to get an idea about where you are. In the sense I'm using it, I mean finding some central point in what the client is showing you and telling you that you think is significant, or is possibly significant. So, it's getting an idea about the client and it locates you in the therapy process; because when you have a fix, you can think of experiments. It's not just responding to whatever is going on in the moment, what you might call the immediate event, it is getting some idea about the big picture, about where this client is in some larger way.

For example, the client is talking about a tired feeling he's having. That's the immediate event. But this client is also talking about the feeling as if he shouldn't have it, and he's got a faint sneer on his face, and he's thick and contracted downward, and he's been talking about his job which he hates but can't seem to leave. Well, you could focus on the tired feeling, the local event, maybe by giving a probe about it's okay to rest or something like that. But, all the other things point to something else. If you get a fix on the whole thing, it looks a lot like a burdened process. That's where you are located. And having that idea, you can create an experiment around it, maybe a probe that says: "Your life belongs to you." So, considering all that's going on and all the things you know and can see about this client, you can respond to the whole thing. That's what it means to take a fix.

Once you've got an idea about what you believe is something significant about the client, something important in a big picture way, there are two more steps in the experimental process. First, you must think about what this idea means. You must create an hypothesis about the client. Okay, you've heard all this stuff and now you think, this probably means.... For example, listening to a client talk about needing to be the best, and seeing the client with a tight jaw, speaking with a lot of energy, giving a lot of details and explanations: you get the idea that this person is driven by beliefs about needing to perform to be worthy. So, you reason that it will not be acceptable to this person to simply be, to rest or to accept themselves the way they are. And you might reason that there's a repressed part of them that just wants to play or to be taken care of. That's the kind of reasoning I'm talking about and it's perfectly parallel to the thinking that all scientist do.

Once you've reasoned out an hypothesis like this, the next step is to create an experiment to test it. A probe might be: "It's okay to rest." Or, "You're okay the way you are." Or anything that tests how this client will react to the idea that they're worthy and/or don't have to effort to prove it. "Observe, reason and experiment." This is the scientific method. This is the experimental attitude. Just as applicable in psychotherapy, at any moment, in any session, as it was when Michelson and Moreley failed to detect the effect of the "ether" on a beam of light.¹³ Or when Galileo observed and reasoned about the earth and sun and got in trouble with the church. What gave them all the spark and energy to seek the truth in this singular and special way. It was discovery, the joy of it. That's my hypothesis.

I find these are the very same joys that inform this method. The same pleasures one may find in it, plus many more. It seems an everlasting source of sweet and blessed satisfaction.

With kind regards,
Ron Kurtz

¹³ Supporting Einstein's theory about the speed of light as a constant.