

The Evolving Vision

Introduction

I'd like to clear up some of the confusion concerning what the Hakomi method is and what it means to teach it. *Hakomi* is a word that came in a dream to one of my earliest students, David Winter. In that dream I handed him a piece of paper that had the words *Hakomi Therapy* on it. At the time, a few of us had been searching for a name for the work I had developed. We found out that the word Hakomi meant *Who are you?* in the Hopi language. It seemed very appropriate and, because it came in a dream to someone who had no idea what it meant, we adopted it.

Early in the 1970's, I began to create the techniques and ideas that eventually became the Hakomi Method. I developed little experiments done with the client in a mindful state, experiments like probes. These experiments were done to evoke informative reactions and emotional healing processes. Probes were one kind of such experiments. I also began supporting spontaneous management behaviors by "taking over" the behavior. I took over tensions, voices, holding back and other spontaneous reactions. Tracking and contact were also developed then. During the 70's, I first outlined the linear process. In the early 1980's, the principles were developed with the help of students and co-leaders. This whole body of ideas and techniques became the original Hakomi Method. I and others taught it that way all through the 80's. Late in that decade, I discovered loving presence and began teaching it as an important part of the method. I left the Hakomi Institute in the late 80's and continued teaching as a separate entity, Ron Kurtz Trainings, Inc. Since that time, my vision of the Method has continued to evolve.

In my approach, the method has always been malleable and generative of new ideas. Early on, when someone in a training would ask, "How do you "do" Hakomi?" I used to say, "I'm not trying to *do* Hakomi; Hakomi is trying to do me." This was years ago and back then it was the truth. The work that came to be called Hakomi was almost completely my creation.

During all the years since I began, I've never viewed Hakomi as something fixed and rigid. I've always and only been doing what inspired me, adding new ideas which came frequently. I've always and only been trying to express what delighted my mind and touched my heart. Happily, I have been blessed with frequent inspirations. I have read a lot and have worked with many people, in many different countries. I've enjoyed the company of poets, spiritual teachers and scientists. I have known and had support from many, many loving, bright and generous people. All of them have added to my life and the development of the method.

Once, during the Q&A period after a talk, a woman asked me how I developed the Hakomi method. Recalling that Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." I told the audience, "I stand with my hands in the pockets of giants." It was a joke and it was true. As much as anything else, I took inspiration from those pockets, the pockets of Lao Tzu and Buddha, of Meher Baba, Milton Erickson, Al Pesso, John Pierrakos and Fritz Perls, of Ben Webster, Bill Evans, Edward Hopper and Robert Frost. Every time I teach or do a session, I dip into those pockets.

I grew my own method using that inspiration, using the thousands of opportunities that came, the workshops, the trainings, the hundreds of sessions. Though I did see some great psychotherapists work, I didn't study psychotherapy formally. I cobbled together a new way of helping people, a way that is a unique and personal expression of "*who I am and where I'm coming from*".¹ When I "do" it, it's not simply a method that's being applied; it is a spirit being enacted.

Over the years, that spirit has inspired others. Some of my very first students are now teachers and trainers. Some of the Institute's current trainers were my first students. They loved the work

¹ Have a look at the Scharmer quote on page 3.

enough to make it their lifelong professions. I'm happy that they did. They have developed their own ways of "doing" it while I have continued to grow and learn and to evolve the work in my way, as they have in theirs. Since that time, we have all taken the original method in different directions.

The original version that began with me continues to be the root of all versions. Using mindfulness and experiments is still essential to all versions. The differences now are in the content of the trainings and the style of teaching. I have dropped a lot of material that I thought was no longer necessary, such as character theory and the sensitivity cycle. I no longer teach the method solely as a psychotherapy. I emphasize learning the skills through experience, practice and feedback, rather than formal lectures. Most of the theory is provided in over six hundred pages of handouts, audio files of talks, and DVDs which continue to be reviewed and updated regularly.

My teaching is characterized by demonstration and experiential exercises. This method is a way to help people become aware of their implicit beliefs and habits. Mine is the method of assisted self-discovery. It's for people who have the courage and capacity to discover how they became who they are. To make Hakomi effective a practitioner must be more than just someone who knows a method. The practitioner must be someone whose very presence can be healing, a person who has all the qualities needed to support emotional healing in another. My training reflects and embodies this emphasis.

I emphasize presence, warmth and kindness more than maintaining a professional demeanor. Recent research supports this emphasis on the personal qualities of the therapist. Chögyam Trungpa called it "full human beingness" and described the essential qualities as warmth and wakefulness.² These are the qualities I look for in students and potential teachers. I believe that any intelligent, warm-hearted person can learn what I teach in a few months. I accept people into my trainings regardless of their academic background. I have taught high school students and seniors, body workers and students of Buddhism, as well as MD's, psychologists, psychiatrists and other helping professionals. They need only be motivated to wholeheartedly pursue the difficult work of understanding themselves and to help others to do the same. Happily this work is done within the warm and loving relationships the trainings foster.

What makes the method work is the practitioner's way of being. In the same way, a trainer's way of teaching makes the trainings work. The changes I have made to the method emerged directly from my impulse to use the greatest warmth and wakefulness I can attain. The spirit I impart to the work is my own. As I grew as a practitioner and teacher, that same spirit refined the method and the teaching, until now, they are one and the same. Here in more detail is how my work evolved from its original 1980's form to the refined method I teach now in 2008.

Original Components & Major Refinements

Original Components:

1. Character Theory (This was replaced by the more general category, *Indicators*.)
2. Reading Bodies, particularly Posture and Structure (Again, replaced by indicators.)
3. Experiments
4. Use of Mindfulness
5. Nonviolence

² In Wellwood, John. 1983. *Awakening the Heart*. Boston, MA: Shambala

6. Tracking and Contact
7. Probes
8. Taking Over
9. Offering Emotional Nourishment
10. Concepts: Core Beliefs, Unconscious, Explicit Memory and Defenses.

Items 3 through 10 are still part of the method as I teach it.

Major Refinements:

1. Loving Presence
2. Using Assistants
3. Searching For and Using Indicators
4. The Operational Shift to Holding the Work as Assisted Self-Study
5. Adapting to the Adaptive Unconscious
6. Irritations (Pierre Janet's ideas about what happens)
7. Following (responding to spontaneous impulses and behaviors)
8. Honoring the Need for Silence by Waiting
9. Touching and Comforting
10. Additional Ideas Introduced
 - a. Implicit Beliefs (acting as if)
 - b. The Six Skill Sets
 - c. Adaptive Unconscious and Procedural Memory
 - d. Moving the Process Forward
 - e. Mental-Emotional Healing
 - f. Letting Things Take Their Natural Course
 - g. Evoking Healing Processes
 - h. Following
 - i. Comfort as Essential to Integration

In Detail:

*Original Major Components*³

1. Character Theory. This derived from my interest in Bioenergetics and the work of Wilhelm Reich. It was taught, both as theory and method in the original trainings held in Vermont, Connecticut and Colorado, in the late 70's and early 80's.
2. Reading Bodies (Posture and Structure). This was a direct outcome of studying Bioenergetics and Reich. I would ask people to stand and I'd look at them for the kinds of bodily signs talked about by Alexander Lowen, in his many books. A book about this, written by Hector

³ These are covered in great detail in Kurtz, Ron (1997) *Body-Centered Psychotherapy: The Hakomi Method: The Integrated Use of Mindfulness, Nonviolence and the Body*. Mendocino, CA: Life Rhythm.

Pretera, M.D. and myself, was published in 1976.⁴

3. Experiments. I learned to use these when I studied Gestalt, back in the late 60's, at Esalen and as a teacher at San Francisco State. It was a very experimental time, with the whole culture experimenting with new ways to be and to relate.
4. Use of Mindfulness. Asking people to become mindful before doing an experiment was something that came out of my private practice around 1974. I was motivated by the idea that people in mindfulness could observe their reactions and begin to understand their true beliefs about themselves and the world, the beliefs that organize their behavior and experience. This was and is a direct way to support self-study and self-discovery. My meditation practice, a retreat with Chögyam Trungpa, and workshops Moshe Feldenkrais and Ruthy Alon were all part the inspiration.
5. Nonviolence. This inspiration also came in the 60's. Partly it was the temper of the times, the Viet Nam war, Flower Children and a couple of years of teaching at San Francisco State. It was the coming of Buddhism to America, my love of the Tao Te Ching and anti war movement. To me, nonviolence means not persisting, not forcing anything, not using power or coercion or acting authoritarian. This sentiment was the main reason I gave up using bioenergetic methods.
6. Tracking and Contact. Of course contact came from Rogerian Therapy, which I read about in graduate school and taught later in college. The idea of tracking (constantly following the trajectory of people's present experience) was a reflection of my Navy experience as a fire control radar operator. ("Tracking" is what those radars do; they follow the movements of an airplane, staying locked on it as it flies). The practice of tracking came out of that.
7. Probes. This technique came at the same time using mindfulness did. Having heard clients speak about themselves and having studied their posture and body structure, I realized that people were not always aware of what beliefs were at the core of their behavior and experience. As a way to help them discover that, I wanted to surprise them with their own reactions to statements that I figured they would not be able to accept, in spite of the fact that all those statements were designed to be potentially nourishing. Sure enough, it worked. And it became a cornerstone of the Hakomi Method.
8. Taking Over. This was the outcome of having pursued nonviolent ways to support the emotional processes that sometimes followed probes and other experiments. It was a simple reversal of the Bioenergetic practice of "breaking down" the defenses. I first used it in the late 70's. It quickly developed into the second major technique of the method, expanding into all kinds of ways to take over verbally and physically. It's used both in experiments done with the person in mindfulness to help people study themselves and with evoked emotional reactions, where it's used to support people's spontaneous management behaviors.
9. Offering Emotional Nourishment. This was a natural outcome of using potentially nourishing statements as probes. After some processing, the same offering that was automatically rejected when offered as a probe could be used to provide relief, relaxation and emotional satisfaction. It eventually became the general goal of a providing missing experiences, experiences that were automatically avoided due to the beliefs that organized experience.
10. Touching and Comforting. This is something we do that developed with the use of assistants and new understanding of the adaptive unconscious.
11. Important Concepts: These concepts were important in the early development of the method:
 - a. Core Beliefs: Core beliefs were what we called the general organizers of experience.

⁴ Kurtz, Ron (Author) and Pretera, Hector (Author) (1976). *The Body Reveals. An Illustrated Guide to the Psychology of the Body.* New York: Harper and Row.

- b. **Gaining the Cooperation of the Unconscious:** We thought of the unconscious much the same way as Freud and Jung did, though they certainly had their differences. Some of the ideas about this came from the work of Milton Erickson.
- c. **Defenses:** The idea of psychological defenses was and still is quite common in the field.

These ten components make up a good portion of the original method. They came together over two and a half decades of learning, practice teaching and training people. Used together in an integrated way, they make an effective method for helping others with their personal growth and emotional healing. They are taught and practiced today in at least thirteen countries and used by hundreds of practitioners.

Since the early 90's, when I resigned as director of the Hakomi Institute, I have continued to refine the method and to teach these refinements in workshops and trainings along with several newer trainers who have trained and worked with me, rather than the Institute. Some of them, like Donna Martin, have been working and teaching with for fifteen years or more.

Some of the refinements were made as far back as the early 90's and some as recently as the last three months. I'd like to describe the major ones and the changes they made to the method.

The Refinements

1. **Loving Presence.** The progression here was this: at first, I thought mostly about techniques, the momentary interventions I'd learned from Gestalt and Bioenergetics. After thinking about these for a while, I began to see how they formed a unified method, the when and how to use the techniques and the theory that made sense of them. After a while of thinking, teaching and writing about method and techniques, I began to see how they had to fit within the relationship one had with the client. I began to have ideas about what we called *The Healing Relationship*. All of this was part of the development of the original method.

Then, after reading a book called *Human Change Process* by Michael J. Mahoney, I began to see that the most important ingredient—after “client factors such as motivation—he called *personhood or therapist personal factors*.

I realized during one mind-opening session that my own state of mind (or state of being) was strongly affecting the outcome of the session. State of mind very quickly became the most important aspect of the healing relationship. I called that state of mind *loving presence* and began teaching it in trainings and workshops as the first and most important element of the method. The workshop was about how one creates that state of mind in oneself. It's now part of a book being published which I wrote with Donna Martin and Flint Sparks, two trainers of the refined method. Presence refers to attending to the flow of experience from moment to moment.⁵

2. **Using Assistants.** I began using assistants in my workshops and trainings back in the 80's. When I'd did demonstrations, I would have one or two of the observers come and help me with taking over voices and physical management reactions. I have trained many advanced students as assistants and pay them when I can. It's both a very good way to involve people and to teach them the method through that kind of participation. Since the mid-nineties, I've use assistants in my private practice. There are many things you can do when you have assistants that you can't do when you're alone with a client. For a while, early in 2000, I would have four clients come at a time, people who knew each other. I would work with one

⁵ Senge, P. Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J. and Flowers, B. S. (2005) *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society*. New York, Currency ISBN-10: 038551624X, ISBN-13: 978-0385516242

person at a time and have the other three assist me. Then we'd rotate and work with the next person.

3. Searching for and Using Indicators. Having tracked client's present experiences for many years, I began to notice and think about the person's habitual behaviors and qualities that are a regular part of their way of being, qualities like holding the head on an angle, shrugging the shoulders a lot, talking fast, constantly watching me, the person's default facial expression, and anything that jumps out at me. There are an endless number of such qualities. I learned that these qualities often reflect early adaptations and are the external expressions of implicit beliefs. One of the first things I do when I start a session with someone is to search for these qualities, which I call *indicators*, and come up with experiments we could do with them. I don't teach character theory any more and consider character traits as just one limited subset of indicators.
4. The Operational Shift to Holding the Work as Assisted Self-Study. This is the most important refinement of all. I stopped thinking of the work as belonging within the medical model of treating psychological problems or "diseases". I began to think of the method as a way of assisting a person in the pursuit of self-knowledge. When this pursuit is successful, relief from the suffering usually follows. Knowing the truth about oneself, making implicit beliefs conscious, recognizing the automatic behaviors of the adaptive unconscious, is the most direct path to changing oneself at a deep level. As part of this shift in perspective, I began to require of clients that they understand the work as self-study, that they be able to enter into mindful states and participate in the experiments that are the vital to the process. I give new clients a one-page description of what they can expect and what they'll need to do.
5. Adapting to the Adaptive Unconscious. The adaptive unconscious has come into currency in the last couple of decades. Books have been written about it (*Strangers to Ourselves* for example). In contrast to the Freudian unconscious, it's much more of a helpmate than a "cauldron of erotic and violent impulses". It is there to "conserve consciousness". (For more about this, see cognitive load theory articles on the web!) As I learned about the AU, I began to recognize and work with that part of the mind as it interprets situations and initiates actions and reactions acting completely outside of conscious decisions and awareness. Knowing this, I can understand and respond to a person's behavior in a more accurate, appropriate and sensitive way, thus gaining a level of cooperation that greatly helps the work proceed. (See Following, below.)
6. Irritations (Pierre Janet's Image of What's Happening). Pierre Janet wrote about events that overwhelm a person, events that cannot be integrated and "made sense of", events that happen when we're vulnerable, and especially when we're young. The emotions and memories of such events can end up, in his words, "encapsulated" in the unconscious. They remain there causing irritation and suffering and influencing emotions and behavior. It is these irritations that our experiments in mindfulness often bring into consciousness. And that's exactly what we want. Once conscious, with the proper emotional support, sense can finally be made of them and the irritation finally dissolved.
7. Following (Using Spontaneous Impulses and Behaviors). In keeping with a new awareness of the functioning of the adaptive unconscious, I now see the spontaneous impulses and thoughts that come up during the work as signals from the adaptive unconscious which point the way the work might proceed. When something pops into a client's consciousness, an impulse or a memory, I will use whatever it is as part of the very next thing to do.
8. Honoring the Need for Silence by Waiting. One thing that stands out in the demonstrations that I do is the long amounts of time during which I am silent and waiting for the client. Observers frequently comment on this. When I work, I track for signs that the person is inside: thinking, feeling, remembering, integrating. The signs are simple. Usually the eyes are closed.

The head may be turned to one side or nodding. The face may show signs that the person is thinking or having insights. When this is happening, I simply wait in silence. My attention remains on the person. When the person opens his or her eyes, I am present and I wait for the person to speak first. These simple behaviors of mine help shape the kind of relationship the person and I will have. They indicate that I will give the person all the time he or she needs to process experiences. This is especially important when emotions have spontaneously arisen or have arisen in reaction to an experience I have learned that clients need time to remember and figure things out, to integrate the memories and feelings that have arisen during the healing process. Integration is happening and needs to be protected from interruption. So, I remain silent.

9. Touching and Comforting. I started many years ago to offer physical contact in ways that are generally frowned upon in professional psychotherapy circles. Of course, they have good reasons for this. The imbalance of power, the privacy of the two-person interaction, the intimate nature of the relationship, all make it quite easy to violate boundaries. When I use touch and offer comfort, it is always in the presence of witnesses, sometimes a hundred or more. Usually, I'm not the one touching the person or holding them. I have assistants do that and always with permission. We touch people, usually gently on the arm or shoulder, at the first physical sign of sadness or grief, signs like tears forming and the voice changing. When we do touch, we're signaling that we're aware of the person's feelings and that we're sympathetic. We also keep silent to allow the person to deepen into the experience. We offer and extend comfort when those same emotions are moving freely through the person and painful memories are being integrated (made sense of), which happens spontaneously if not interfere with. At those times we're either silent or we make occasional comforting sounds.

10. Additional Ideas That Are Part of the Refined Method:

- a. Implicit Beliefs (acting as if)

Beliefs are implicit when they are not recoverable as memories of events. They are memorized procedures. Habits, in other words. They are equivalent to beliefs, in that the habitual behaviors can be thought of as the enactment of rules: "if this, then do that". They are outside of awareness, not because they are necessarily repressed, they are simply actions that can be performed without conscious attention, thus preserving consciousness for tasks which need time to think about and implement. Like all the habits which are by their nature procedural, they are functions of the adaptive unconscious. Some are adaptations to situations that were painful and/or unresolved. It is these latter adaptations which we help bring into conscious awareness, in order to resolve and change them, thus giving consciousness thought the implicit beliefs they represent.

These additional ideas are discussed in the full text of the 2008 Training Handbook. They are only listed here:

- b. The Six Skill Sets (see page 39 of this 2008 Training Handbook)
- c. Adaptive Unconscious and Procedural Memory (see page 8 of the 2008 Training Handbook)
- d. Moving the Process Forward (see page 62 of this 2008 Training Handbook)
- e. Mental-Emotional Healing (see page 35 of this 2008 Training Handbook)
- f. Letting Things Take Their Natural Course (see the section on Following)
- g. Evoking Healing Processes (see page 45 of this 2008 Training Handbook, Experiments)
- h. Following (see page 57 of this 2008 Training Handbook)
- i. Comfort as Essential to Integration (See Touching and Comforting, this page)