
FOUNDATIONS OF HAKOMI THERAPY

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Ron Kurtz is the founder director of the Hakomi Institute. The following article describes some of the foundations Hakomi is based on. It is a tape transcription of a lecture Ron gave to a training group at the Coleman Center in West Germany. As the article indicates, Hakomi is alive, fresh, and developing as new material is integrated and experimented with. Ron welcomes dialogue and feedback, and can always be contacted through the Institute's main office.

I want to discuss the theoretical and spiritual foundations of the work. I want to do that because I want you to be able to reach back into your sources and see where we came from. There's a great deal of emotional, psychological, and theoretical support that comes from having roots, especially these roots, and I want you to have access to them.

There are three main foundations of the work. The first is the body centered therapies of the twentieth century, like Gestalt, Bioenergetics, Reichian work, Rolfing and Feldenkrais. I also include Carl Rogers and Psycho-motor Therapy too. So that's the first root. The second is eastern philosophy and religion, particularly Taoism and Buddhism, with a little Chinese/Japanese medicine thrown in. And the third branch is General Systems Theory and the twentieth century paradigm shift. I'll discuss all three of these.

Let's call the first branch the Modern Psychology Branch. That branch has contributed a lot of techniques for working with the body that I learned from people like Al Peso, John Pierrakos and a few good Gestalt Therapists. I have sampled the work of maybe ten or twelve people, have read the books of two dozen more and I have brought their ideas and techniques into Hakomi Therapy. The character theory, in its original form came from Riech and bioenergetics.

From Buddhism and Taoism, we imported the principles and the emphasis on mindfulness and nonviolence. These pervade the work and

structure the overall process and all the techniques. The entire body of the work rests completely on this foundation.

The third root, General Systems Theory, is still evolving rapidly. Just twenty years ago, half the concepts now part of general systems theory had not even been formulated. They weren't even known about. So we're looking at what must be the most rapidly evolving conceptual system of our time. It has become so general, so grand in its design and scope, that it applies even to the unfolding of the universe, from big bang to galaxies to you and me. It also applies to the unfolding of life. The evolution of any complex organization, living or not, is best described and understood using the web of concepts and ideas of general systems theory. So if you want to describe character, if you want to describe the process of therapy, or the development of the individual, systems theory is the best tool that we have. And it's getting better. But, because it's changing so fast, you kind of have to run to keep up.

Because Hakomi work is open to the changing influences of modern psychotherapy and the shifting scientific paradigm, Hakomi is also unfolding and evolving. When you get deeply into this work, you find it's a continual growth process. You step into this flow and go with it. New ideas, new views of character, new techniques and exercises - the work itself is alive. To keep up with the changes in techniques you have to work with them, and stay in touch with what other people are doing. To keep up with the character theory you just have to read and think about the different ways of looking at people. To keep up with general systems theory you have to read and read and read. The best book about general systems that I know about is The Self-Organizing Universe by Erich Jantsch.

With things changing so fast, it is crucial that we have the principles and our roots in Buddhism to guide us. In a very practical way, meditation, tai chi or yoga, which are living expressions of the principles, help keep us sane through all the shifts and turns.

So those are the three foundations: modern body centered psychotherapies; Buddhism, Taoism and Yoga; and General Systems Theory. I want to point out a couple of things that we derive from each of these branches.

From Buddhism and Taoism we take the spirit of the work. If everything else fails, if you can't remember a damn thing, you're totally blank on technique, you can't remember any character theory, Hakomi vanishes out of your mind, - when all else fails - you can rely on the principles. By themselves, the principles will sustain the work. Gurdjieff said, "If you can pour a cup of tea right you can do anything." I think he means, if you can pour a cup of tea within the principles, with mindfulness, gracefully, nonviolently, going with the grain, embracing the situation as it is, then you can pour a cup of tea right. The presence and love that help you to do that will help you to do anything.

I'd like to look at some contributions of twentieth century psychotherapy to Hakomi. If you said to Fritz Perls, "it's all your fault", Perls would say "put Fritz in the chair over there and tell him that." It was an empty chair and you were supposed to put your projection of Fritz there and interact with that. The process was intrapsychic. Fritz himself was not part of your problem, just your projection of him. There was nothing personal about it. It's important to realize that the work is intrapsychic. The therapist's role is not one of somebody you're working out a relationship with, the therapist is somebody who's guiding you and helping you as you study your own inner world. That's very much like the relationship with a Zen teacher or a Buddhist meditation teacher. They're helping you learn about you're inner world. They are catalysts who help the process unfold and then step out of the way. One time, at a meditation retreat, someone said to Chogyam Trungpa that they were angry at him. Trungpa replied, "that's like being angry at the mirror for being fat". The teacher is constantly stepping out of the way. If you get some people who are not very mindful then you have to do this little dance all the time getting yourself out of the way. They like to relate to the therapist. We borrow that intrapersonal perspective from both eastern religions and

Gestalt. In Hakomi, the therapist guides as the client explores their inner world.

There's another important concept we borrow from Reich mainly and it's related to general systems thinking. That's the concept of mind/body holism, the idea that mind and body are parts of one system with various interacting levels. This is quite different from the reductionist approach so characteristic of the "old" medicine and the "old" physics. In Hakomi, we work with several interconnecting viewpoints of the person. We understand some of the ways the body reflects beliefs and emotions and some of the ways beliefs and emotions reflect the functioning of muscles, organs and metabolism. Though these different realms of mind and body interact (in fact, several levels of both), neither one is primary nor totally in charge. Each level has some autonomy. It may seem at first a pity that the situation isn't simpler. Later it's a source of wonder, pleasure and relief - if you don't mind a little uncertainty.

We can even talk about one level of the body as metabolic mind, the metabolism acting as if it had intelligence, which in fact it does. It has a whole storehouse of knowledge. The antibodies for example have an enormous storehouse of knowledge. All these various minds are interacting and effecting each other. I don't doubt at all, for example, that some people have cured themselves of cancer by changing their attitudes. We borrow these ideas about interacting systems from general systems theory and we also borrow mind/body holism, an example of such whole system interaction, from Riechian Therapy and Bioenergetics. This system of thought allows us to look at the body as an expression of mental life, which we do very deliberately and precisely, in the study of character, body structure, posture and behavior. In the short term, we're constantly tracking the person we're working with, for bodily signs of inner experience. I don't trust the words as much as I trust what I see and hear. So we borrow that reliance on the body as an expression of mental life.

We also work directly with the body. We put our hands on it, deliberately and skillfully.

We're not trying to change the muscles, we're trying to interact with the mind through the body. If I reach over and take hold of someone's shoulders, it's not simply that the shoulders are tight, it's that the tightness is a reflection that they're frightened and I want them to access their fear. I'm not working on the body. I'm accessing the mind through the body. We do that in Hakomi and it's based on the notion of mind/body holism. Touching the body that way is, as far as I know, unique to the body centered psychotherapies.

A last connection to modern psychotherapy I want to mention is our connection to Carl Rogers' work. I don't know if he talks about nonviolence, but his use of contact, his staying with the other person's experience, not giving advice, not playing the authority, all that is totally within the principles.

Finally, I want to talk about our roots in General Systems Theory and some of the important differences in theoretical thinking before and after its development.

It's been very difficult for physics to explain how in the hell we all got so complicated, how it happened that we've become such marvelously evolved beings. That sort of thing leaves a terrible vacuum of understanding and every kind of thinking rushes in to fill the space. Thank heavens something's happening to science now which will help make sense of it.

There are three levels of physics. There's the level of old time physics, the atomists and their most recent spokesman, Issac Newton. The only explanation an atomist can offer for how we got so complicated and evolved is: the molecules bumped into each other that way. The atoms, by bumping into each other, like a gigantic billiard game, finally ended up being us sitting here talking this way. Billions of years ago, when it all started, it was all set to end up this way. And tomorrow is just as determined. If all there are are atoms, and all they can do is bump into each other, then that's the only explanation.

It doesn't sound very believable to me. The atomists had atoms bumping into each other

and that was reality. There's a lot of that kind of thinking still going on. It has to do with trying to reduce everything down to molecular behavior, trying to reduce everything down to atoms. Solid matter and forces operating in space. This thinking uses the idea of linear causality. A bumps into B and B bumps into C and finally, we all end up here at Coleman. And of course, there's absolutely no free will. We're all going to end up wherever we end up next year also simply because the molecules are moving that way. It's sounds ridiculous now, but it's all they had. And Newton, who developed the mathematics of this level of thinking, that had one of the finest brains ever encased in a human skull. That's all they had.

The next level of physics comes along a few years later and it's called thermodynamics. At this level of physics, it's not just little guys bumping into each other, there's a whole bunch of them. And you don't have to study the little ones bumping into each other; you can learn how the whole bunch is operating. This is called thermodynamics. You can study the behavior of masses of molecules, the "rules of the game." At this level, the law of large numbers applies. One important result of this view is that the universe is running downhill. The universe, as a matter of course, will get less and less complicated. If you pour some cream in your coffee and stir it, cream and coffee will get maximally mixed and the chances that they will separate are very slim indeed. If, however, you stir it for a very long time, every once in a while it will get less mixed up for a while. And every two hundred billion, billion years or something all of a sudden you'll have the cream on one side and the coffee on the other. Timothy Leary has made the analogy of a tornado blowing through a junk yard and creating a 747. A remarkable chance occurrence. Yet, that's basically the only explanation thermodynamics has for how we got here.

Why are we so complex? How come evolution? How come the trees grew and the universe isn't running down hill right here on the planet earth and it hasn't been for billions of years? Life has surely gotten more complex. Went from steam and lightning and molecules to cells and now they have disco-

dent, just an unlikely damn accident. Things have been stirring around a long time and then this happened. Well, I want to recommend that you don't believe that theory either. Thermodynamics was an improvement, but it still didn't explain life. It didn't explain evolution. The universe has an unfolding, it got more complex. Life came along. Thermodynamics fails to explain that.

So, who can explain it? The third level of physics is just now coming of age. And at this level, the level of dissipative structures, autopoiesis, systems thinking and self-organization, life can be explained. Let me tell you a little bit about these concepts. The main concept is that of dissipative structures. Ilya Prigogine won the Nobel prize for developing the mathematics of dissipative structures. Dissipative structures get more complex, more organized. They import energy and they export (dissipate) entropy (noise, confusion, disorder). It's like hiring someone to get your apartment organized. They use energy, which they have to import (by eating food) to create order. The dirt and confusion of your apartment is less, the organization, greater, the confusion has been dissipated. The source of energy for the whole process of evolution was imported from the sun.

And at every level at which we are alive, at the level of genetic material, cells, tissue, individual animals, human nature, groups, societies, cultures, at every level we are participating in dissipative structures. Life resists the darkness. Life grows and changes, becomes bigger, smarter, more and more complex and organized. The explanation that finally makes sense is one that rests on system theory, self-organization and dissipative structures.

All dissipative structures have three basic characteristics. One is: it must import energy. We call that kind of system, open. A dissipative structure imports energy and, therefore, must be open to its environment. Life always exists in a context. You can't talk about a person without understanding his or her environment. People are organized systems. People are living systems and must therefore operate in crucial ways as complex combinations of dissipative structures. You cannot understand a person without understanding their environment. You cannot talk about character without talking about the

situation in which that character is operating.

Another thing about dissipative structures is that they must operate at high levels of non-equilibrium. Non-equilibrium is like a spring. We humans have the tension and non-equilibrium of the upright posture, for example. It keeps us a little more awake, a little more alert, a little more capable. The energy stored in this non-equilibrium allows us to move and turn very rapidly. In the Chinese paradigm the tension of non-equilibrium is in the polarity between yin and yang. The Chinese knew about this aspect of dissipative structures. All have a high level of non-equilibrium. If they are anywhere near equilibrium they will tend, in accordance with the laws of thermodynamics, to run down hill and level out. That is, they would tend towards equilibrium.

To be a living thing, there has to be tension. You can think of a relationship between a man and woman. In the beginning the differences are great and this creates some tension which keeps the relationship alive and changing. But, when they start to get more and more similar, the relationship starts going flat. Just as there are dead trees still standing there are dead relationships. They're in equilibrium. Like the cream in the coffee that just got all one color.

The last and most important thing about dissipative structures is that they are self-organizing. They have an autocatalytic component. They are self-reproducing. There is a process whereby the the key elements of the structure create and recreate themselves. In an ecosystem, it is the reproduction of plants and animals. These are the key elements that are constantly reproducing themselves. Without that, an ecosystem dies, stops being a living system and starts to run down. With personality and character you also have key elements, related to core material, with which people constantly create and recreate themselves. Think of the man who makes one fortune, loses it, makes another or the woman who marries one alcoholic after another. Think of all the ways we act to make and keep ourselves who we are.

This is the key to living systems on all levels - autocatalysis, self-organization, self-reproduction. All that's needed is the

import of energy, a state of being far from equilibrium and some way to recreate ourselves.

Some general things about using systems theory rather than the models created by the physics of thermodynamics, which is really the study of energy, especially heat: Freud's model is an energy model, actually, a hydraulic model, pressure and all that. Bio-energetics uses the term "energy", but its meaning isn't at all nailed down. If you examine it closely, it's really energy with consciousness. The old model is an energy model and the new model is an information model. That's why Hakomi uses mindfulness as the main tool. Information controls the flow of energy. In Hakomi Therapy, information is primary. Energy flow is important, but it's not primary. It's not the thing we're working with. It's not the thing we're trying to do. What we're trying to do is reorganize concepts and beliefs, core material.

So, information is primary. And it's not linear causality either, it's process thinking. You're not thinking of the individual trees. You're thinking about how the whole forest is working. You're not so much looking at the structure, but how it unfolds. The dynamics are more important than the structure. You get more information from the relation of the parts and the parts to the environment than you do from what the parts are made of. It's the message in this case and not the medium. Who cares if they call you or send you a telegram or what, as long as you get the news.

To summarize, Hakomi is rooted in three sources: modern psychotherapy, especially body centered therapy; Taoism and Buddhism, especially in their principles of mindfulness and nonviolence; and general systems theory, especially living systems, which are self-organizing in nature and are best studied from a process oriented point of view.

