



The Hakomi Method of Body-centred Psychotherapy

Its contribution to the evolution of the character map

Emerald-Jane Turner

*Nothing else matters half so much.
To reassure one another, to answer each other.
Everyone has, inside himself
... what shall I call it?
A piece of good news!*

Hakomi body-centred psychotherapy was founded by Ron Kurtz. He was over many years influenced by the techniques of gestalt, bioenergetics, Feldenkrais and other body-oriented therapies, by the intellectual breakthroughs of modern systems theory, and by the timeless spiritual principles of Taoism and Buddhism. He synthesised key elements of these into this precise and graceful method of working. The word 'Hakomi' was given in a dream and is a Hopi Indian word that

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means 'How do I stand in relation to these many realms?' or 'Who am I?' Hakomi is an information-oriented therapy; one of the key ways in which it gathers information is by exploring how the body and mind interact and affect each other.

The method comprises a 'being' aspect and a 'doing' aspect. The 'being' aspect rests on five principles and it is from these that Hakomi derives its unique flavour. The principles are simply described as organicity, body–mind wholism, non violence, unity, and mindfulness. These principles work alongside each other, influencing the therapist's attitude and quality of presence. The techniques of 'doing' arise organically from the principles and are seen to be of limited value unless supported by them. They are written about in much more detail in Kurtz's book but in short can be defined as:

- **organicity** healing only happens to living organisms; you look for natural processes, for the client's growth and unfolding; answers and resolutions are all within
- **body–mind wholism** mind and body interact and influence each other
- **non-violence** is born of an attitude of acceptance and an active attention to the way things naturally want to unfold; a letting-go of the therapist's agenda
- **unity** to bring attention to aspects of ourselves and others that are in isolation or conflict; we are connected to each other and the world
- **mindfulness** a preference for the path of consciousness, focusing on present experience

In Hakomi therapy we pay a great deal of attention to the body and how, by studying

subtle gestures, tensions and patterns, we can gain information about core beliefs; this is called working at the body–mind interface. As you are reading this you could take a moment to experiment with the following: try opening your eyes a little wider and lift your shoulders up to your ears a fraction. Allow yourself to slow down and witness the world from this place. The chances are that as you observe this you will get a sense of the world out there as a dangerous or threatening place.

Come back to a neutral place in yourself and turn your attention inside at this moment (you may find that closing your eyes helps you focus). Now look to your body, slow down and notice the kind of qualities your body holds in its different parts, face, hands, belly; what kind of world is this body living in? What have you decided about this world and how is your body reflecting these decisions? Take your time to do this; you have to slow down to become mindful, and without mindfulness you cannot really know yourself. Mindfulness involves slowing down and turning our attention inwards towards whatever is present, going slowly and gently, being non-violent and protecting the spirit. This allows a greater capacity to develop for witnessing non-judgementally; defences can then be examined and experimented with, rather than confronted and overpowered.

Hakomi therapists are trained to track every nuance of the body's gestures, tensions and habits. They then invite the client to study and be curious about these things. The word 'curiosity' is used extensively in Hakomi; it implies an open-mindedness, a light quality, not knowing what the outcome may be but a

willingness to explore. It is this quality which supports the process as a journey of discovery which therapist and client are mutually engaged in.

Throughout history the body has given clues to an individual's state of mind and health. There are many ways of reading the body, depending on the discipline and therapeutic background of the practitioner; for example a Riechian therapist may look for armouring, while a body worker may look for energy blocks. The Hakomi method, however, rather than using the body as a diagnostic tool, encourages therapists to allow their resonance with another person's energetic qualities, to give them clues to the kind of world this person may have grown up in and that they now inhabit. They are asked to be open to many aspects, such as the strengths of the body, the kind of child that lives in the body, experiences the body may have missed, the soul qualities. This attitude has undoubtedly been influenced by Pierrakos, who was Kurtz's therapist for some time, and encourages the person looking to draw from a wide perspective.

During his years of therapy and study Kurtz realised that just as the eyes are the windows to the soul, the body is like a door that can open to the whole character and belief system of its owner. Along with colleagues such as John Eissman and Pat Ogden he evolved a widely inclusive character theory which has become one of Hakomi's primary maps. This is what he says about it: 'Character, the deep seated belief system that fixates behaviour patterns, is seen not just as a result of interactions with significant others but as interaction between psychological situations, and genetic, temperamental,

metabolic, and physical predispositions towards psychological characteristics. Mind and body interact to shape each other.' So it is beneficial when studying this map to understand also the complex and widely diverse dimensions that contribute and support the formation of character; the map is then not simply based on spiritual beliefs, physiological data or psychological categories, but integrates all three. When we think of the incredible diversity of human beings, then a map that makes use of multifaceted theories must be useful.

A way of understanding how character strategies work is to take a look at the animal kingdom. Here we have some wonderful examples of strategies at work and the purposes that they serve. Think for example of a moth that has large spots on its wings, so that when viewed from above by birds they look like the eyes of a bigger animal — that is the strategy of fooling or deceiving others into thinking that you are bigger, stronger or more powerful than you really are. Then there are strategies of playing dead or freezing in order to be passed by when a predator is around, or looking weak or needy in order to be kept safe and looked after. Exploring biostrategies, looking at the natural world, can be an enjoyable and informative way to learn about ourselves and others.

Other areas that can be studied and taken into account as part of the map are Sheldon's soma types; Kelly's metabolic types; Erickson's dimensions; or you could look at the idea of information overload. There are other maps taking into account chakras, or astrological data; these all remind us that there are many factors involved in our functioning.

During training we look closely at child development and its influence on developing strategies. From this perspective strategies can be viewed as strengths that a child develops to deal with their particular life situation, and therefore functional rather than malfunctional. However every function overdeveloped leaves another underdeveloped and creates an inability to respond flexibly to life.

The neo-Freudians named four basic stages of development, tactile, oral, anal and genital. In Hakomi we relate five questions to those stages: What is this? How nourishing? What are the rules? What are the limits? Am I enough? When these questions don't get answered in a positive way, often over a period of time and at the particular stage of development that each one is relevant to, then a strategy develops as a way of coping.

An example of this might be that around the age of four, children are particularly exploring the question 'Am I enough?' If they receive evidence from family and the outside world that they are loved for who they are, rather than for what they do, then they can relax. However, if the atmosphere is one in which their lovableness is linked to or dependent on producing or performing, then a strategy may develop as a way of managing the hurt around that. The body will start to develop certain qualities over time to support this strategy, which since it would be a strategy of 'doing' will lead to a body primed for action, with an overall mesh-like tension. The core beliefs that develop could be something like 'I have to work to be OK'. In Hakomi we call this the 'industrious over-focused strategy'.

Part of the evolution of the character map has been to rename the bioenergetic character types in a more descriptive fashion, naming the strategies employed to cope with each particular developmental missing experience. Thus the 'hysteric' becomes the 'expressive clinging', and the 'schizoid' becomes the 'sensitive analytic'. Lately they have also been named after their energetic patterns, reflecting the movement away from the possibly more charged medical names; hence the above example of the 'industrious over-focused strategy' becomes known as the 'producing pattern'.

The Hakomi map works with seven character strategies. Below is a brief outline of each.

1. Energy pattern: **containing** (sensitive, withdrawn)
 - Missing experience: the right to be alive, safe, and welcome
 - Survival strategy: withdraw, freeze, hide, take refuge in thought and fantasy
 - Strengths: sensitive, imaginative, creative, spiritual; innovative thinker
 - Body: narrow, contracted, tension under occiput, unintegrated quality
2. Energy pattern: **conserving** (dependent, endearing)
 - Missing experience: being cared for, bonded, nourished, having willing support from others
 - Survival strategy: gain support by being harmless, needy and endearing
 - Strengths: affectionate, tuned in to others, easy to trust, expresses feelings (except anger)
 - Body: looks dependent, tends to thinness, no energy

3. Energy pattern: **self relying** (self reliant)

- Missing experience: trust that others will help you get your needs met
- Survival strategy: keep emotional distance to avoid being let down again; seek challenges
- Strengths: as above
- Body: gunfighter's stance; may look wiry

4. Energy pattern: **expanding** (tough, generous, charming, seductive)

- Missing experience: being real; showing weakness or needs
- Survival strategy: hide weakness and insecurity, look tough, act important; perhaps charm others to get what you want
- Strengths: good leader, powerful, charismatic, cool under fire
- Body: either mobilised upwards (top half inflated, bottom half thin) or seductive and smooth quality

5. Energy pattern: **enduring** (burden-carrying)

- Missing experience: absence of pressure, responsibility, guilt; freedom to express self
- Survival strategy: bear up and wait it out; do what others want, but resent them for it
- Strengths: reliable, dependable, hard-working, capable of great love
- Body: compressed, muscular, mobilising downwards and back

6. Energy pattern: **producing** (industrious, over-focused)

- Missing experience: being loved and appreciated for who you are; freedom to relax and play; sexual expression
- Survival strategy: workaholic; keep going, let nothing distract you, meet

adversity by trying harder

- Strengths: self-confident, exciting to be with, down to earth, gets things done
- Body: proportionate, integrated, ready to move, braced against a challenge

7. Energy pattern: **attracting** (expressing, clinging)

- Missing experience: not to have to struggle for attention, closeness and love; freedom to relax and know that others will stay; freely-given love
- Survival strategy: dramatise events and feelings to get attention and avoid separation; express feelings loud and clear
- Strengths: enthusiastic, spontaneous, flexible, can be very loving
- Body: seductive, upper/lower half split (upper childlike, lower seductive, full)

Working with strategies inevitably leads to the uncovering of core beliefs, the beliefs that organise us. When we bring to consciousness these aspects of ourselves we start to realise that if we can really accept them, make space for them, then we no longer need to be run by them; that freedom and choice are available to us, though it takes courage to really want freedom, and that it helps to have a sense of humour, not to take ourselves too seriously. This character map is only one of several used by Hakomi therapists, each giving its own particular clues about how we organise in our life and our relationships; helping more of us to become available to ourselves and others.

Hakomi offers a precise and powerful way of working. However, like most seemingly simple arts it takes time to dive into the depths, to savour the subtleties and be fascinated by the diversity of experience. It is necessary to live and embody the principles, so that working in this way becomes a dance between two people. The journey

then moves from 'Who are you?' to 'Who you are'.

At the end you have consistency and vision, you know your needs and direction. You can say 'This I will do and this I won't'. You have resolved many conflicts, where one part of you wants something and another part is against it. It's not a final place you reach. The journey itself becomes a way of life. If it ends at all, it ends in enlightenment. The self one is interested in is no longer the individual ego, but the

unbounded self of the spirit. Because, finally, that is who you are.

In this country Hakomi is not taught as a full psychotherapy training, it is a particular method of psychotherapy and therefore best taught to people who already have a background in client or group work. It is taught in modular form and is organically evolving, in response to the interest and energy of the people involved. It continues to receive energy and input from the USA.

Further reading

Ron Kurtz, *Body-centered Psychotherapy: The Hakomi Method*

The Hakomi Training Manual



Kum Nye: A contemplative body practice

Sue Green

I first came across Kum Nye in a Cambridge bookstore, enticed by the title *Kum Nye Relaxation*. It's a set of Tibetan Buddhist bodywork exercises made public in the West amid some controversy by Tarthang Tulku Rimpoche. 'Kum Nye' translates delightfully as 'pleasing the body'.

If only. However seemingly innocent on the surface, gentle movements and stretches, nothing arduous, Kum Nye reaches the depths of resistance that many other practices simply cannot reach, notwithstanding Tarthang's frequent exhortations that sensations like being on holiday on a sunny day could well be our

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