EDITORIAL:
Ripples from a Life Lived
Ron Kurtz—1934-2011

When someone dies and there are people who gather at the grave to laugh, cry, stamp their feet, feel their hearts, their grief, stand quietly while remembering, be nourished by the presence of others, share outrageous stories, and walk into the future with hope, one knows that life has happened. Love has happened. Connections have been made and communion has been encouraged, which in many traditions is considered a spiritual happening. Such was the response to the life of Ron Kurtz—originator of Hakomi Therapy and founder of the Hakomi Institute—after he died January 4, 2011.

This special double-edition of the Hakomi Forum is in honor of Ron and contains a special tribute section. Since Ron was the master teacher of contact statements, he left instructions thirty years ago of what should be chiseled on his tombstone: “Dead, huh?”

Teaching both clients and therapists how to be mindful within therapeutic sessions was one of Ron's lasting contributions to the field of psychotherapy that has taken 40-some years to catch up with his pioneering insight. When introducing someone to the skill of mindfulness, we often use the metaphor of a person standing quietly beside a pond and simply being aware of the ripples that happen when a fish jumps in the water. Another way to appraise someone's life is to take note of the ripples created when they dived into the pond of human existence.

To study the ripples of Ron's life is impossible and incalculable, of course, since he influenced an unknowable number of clients, students, teachers, trainer, colleagues, friends, and family who in turn touched others. Each person necessarily holds unique memories of their encounters with him in whatever direct or indirect way it was.

One obvious massive ripple is that despite his enormous and unique personal charisma, humor, and brilliance, he was able to craft and pass on a work that carries on without him. He was always generous in giving away the work, empowering others to teach and train, and encouraging them to take it wherever their energy led them. Ron and a core of founding trainers in Colorado founded the Hakomi Institute. It was established as a non-profit educational corporation in 1981 for the teaching of Hakomi Therapy, and has continued its mission world-wide ever since. New trainers of the Hakomi Institute are voted in unanimously by the international faculty of trainers, and up to his death were required to study with Ron personally, who always retained veto power over every trainer accepted before and after he resigned as the Director of the Hakomi Institute. Still, there are untold numbers of students who have benefited from the Hakomi Method in workshops and trainings who never met him at all, as this cadre of trainers spread out to lead events on their own where Ron may or may not have had the opportunity to join in.

Likewise, the principles of Hakomi that Ron developed from the sciences of complex living systems and ancient wisdom traditions (unity, organicity, mind-body holism, mindfulness and non-violence) have been broad and cogent enough to invite eclectic dialogue and integration with widespread conversation partners. A number of the articles published here in the Hakomi Forum are by those in the larger field of psychology with whom we share common concerns, and seek to make common cause.

The ripple of Ron's curiosity that impelled him to be a life-long learner and integrator has washed over the Hakomi Institute faculty as well. While core Hakomi Institute curriculum for every training world-wide is continually affirmed in annual faculty meetings, specific trainings weave in the particular interests various faculty members have developed in such things as dance/movement therapy, Re-Creation of the Self, Internal Family Systems Therapy, psychodrama, music therapy, Chinese Medicine, Diamond Heart, trauma, early childhood development, Hellinger's Family Constellation work, Levine's Sensory Experiencing, Fosha's Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy (AEDP), or many other possibilities. Some things, such as elements of interpersonal neurobiology, trauma, and attachment theory have been incorporated into the common curriculum.
Some faculty delved deeply enough into specific content areas that their interests rippled into separate or parallel trainings. Pat Ogden synthesized Hakomi with trauma therapy to the extent that she created a new approach that is one of the most respected in the field: Sensorimotor Psychotherapy. Cedar Barstow worked on a relational approach to ethics termed The Right Use of Power that now has its own book and training structure. Jon Eisman's exploration of self-states resulted in a coherent approach he titled Re-creation of the Self (RCS), that can be taught alone or integrated with Hakomi. Amina Knowlan concentrated on group work that evolved into the Matrix Leadership Institute. Mukara Meredith developed Matrixworks trainings, a Hakomi approach focused on human potential in the workplace, now taught in major corporations, including The Gap, Proctor and Gamble, General Mills, and Mattel. Halko Weiss worked with colleagues to develop an approach to teaching emotional intelligence to corporate executives. Weiss also developed a training that worked with partners in relationship, with special workshops integrating mindfulness and erotic relationships. Rob Fisher's specialization in couples work resulted in the publication of his 2002 book Experiential Psychotherapy with Couples: A Guide for the Creative Pragmatist. Lorena Monda integrated her background with Thich Nhat Hanh, Yvonne Agazarian, Gabrielle Roth, Hakomi, and Oriental Medicine into a book called The Practice of Wholeness: Spiritual Transformation in Everyday Life, along with a specialized training. Richard A. Heckler brought Hakomi sensibilities and curiosity to researching two books: Waking Up Alive: The Descent, the Suicide Attempt, and the Return to Life; and Crossings: Everyday People, Unexpected Events, and Life-Affirming Change.

In 2001 Ron called together an international network of those teachers and trainers that had studied closely his latest developments of the method that he termed “simplified Hakomi,” and later the “refined Hakomi method.” The name adopted was the Hakomi Educational Network or HEN. Today there are various HEN centers in a number of countries that can be contacted individually.

A final ripple in this blatantly non-exhaustive list that I would like to highlight is that Ron's unique and masterful way of combining right and left brain functions, highly experiential work with high-level reflection and theory, has inspired others to go and do likewise. I want to personally thank all those who have furthered Hakomi over the years by writing in this journal of the Hakomi Institute, trained in the Hakomi Method and creatively explored its interface with various clinical populations, other modalities, and other thought systems that enrich us all while developing the work. I look forward to welcoming new contributions as we all walk into the future with thankfulness for a big life lived and a big gift given.

Greg Johanson, Ph.D., Editor, Hakomi Forum
Dead, huh? Sorry to see ya go man.