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## EDITORIAL: A WIDER PERSPECTIVE

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*GREG JOHANSON*

One potentially liberating experience in life is crossing over into another culture and then crossing back to one's own, much more finely attuned to its reality, structure and nuances. The otherness of what is not familiar to us can evoke new experiences and perspectives. I have benefited from this kind of experience before and recently went through it again as I had the opportunity to study healing in cross cultural perspective.

What came out of the study for me was much more clarity about the craziness of the West and how we in psychotherapy risk promoting as well as participating in it. The Newtonian world-view promotes the notion of a universe of isolated, individual, basic building blocks which encounter each other randomly by chance. Though we might not like this notion, in Western psychology we have bought into it through the promotion of the autonomous self. As David Augsburger notes, in his book Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures, we have uncritically assumed an a-cultural, a-historical, a-political individual who can create personal meaning independent of social entanglements, separate from binding family emotional ties, transcend the crises of life objectively and dispassionately without any dependencies, face suffering without avoidance and death without denial, and more -- all through actualizing the powers of the fully realized, autonomous self.

Viewed cross-culturally this Western conception is revealed to be both illusory and tyrannical, totally ignoring the reality of individuals developing and flourishing inseparably from their social-cultural-relational context. The cross-cultural perspective can give us a graceful dose of humility as it challenges what, from a Western perspective, was thought to be secure knowledge in relation to issues of personality development, transformation, and the therapeutic process.

The challenge comes from simply realizing that some people, two thirds of the world as a matter of fact, do things differently. What for us is a healthy individual going his own way regardless of the opinions of others, is in India and Asia a bearer of serious pathology, a person who does not know how to live harmoniously with the world and know his interdependence with it. In the East there is a healthy sense of shame for not meeting one's responsibilities to the greater society as well as a more Western sense of guilt for going against one's own ego ideals. While in the United States we regard family as a "roof organization" which houses a collection of autonomous individuals, in India family is a "root organism" providing a symbiotic unity out of which persons emerge in varying degrees of individuality. In Botswana there isn't even a word for family, the closest one being "compound". While the governing family dyad in the West is the husband and wife of

the roving nuclear family, in India it is mother-son, in China father-son, and in Africa brother-brother. (Notice the ethos of the entire planet is thoroughly sexist.) Identity around the world can be thoroughly tribal (Africa), communal (China), village (Palestine), as well as individual (America). While Western psychotherapists are trying valiantly (John Wayne model) to free people from entanglements from their mothers, Korean shamans and Voodoo priestesses in Haiti are trying to re-establish relational connections. For the West the big sin of all times is dependence (though fifteen year long psychoanalytic processes don't raise many eyebrows.) In the East it is resistance to dependence. Paradoxically, American individualists conform to a great extent, and those from traditional cultures can cultivate considerable individuality within a communal structure.

Western feminists are getting more and more tired of matrophobia and gynophobia. Some feminists such as Catherine Keller are starting to claim the virtues of relationality, connectedness, and interdependence. In her book From A Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self Keller does a nice job of contrasting the stereotypical Western male "separate self" with the stereotypical female "soluble self" and proposing as a healing alternative for both a "connected self". She also offers the image of the spider web as a nice way of thinking about interdependence. One cannot touch any part of the web without the touch reverberating through the whole. While we have broken many connections of the web in the West, we can't look for another world, but must begin the task of mending the broken connections of the web we have already been given.

The case for mending and promoting connections is not just for individuals, families and psychotherapists. It is a political, economic issue of enormous proportion. Americans are above all pragmatic. We are starting to be more open to learning from the two-thirds world, since our foolish pride and ignorance is now catching up with our pocketbooks. Once when Kurtz and I were talking about the problems of the world over lunch, Ron exclaimed "Why can't Americans build a Honda!?" The answer was brilliantly

offered recently by<sup>3</sup> David Halberstam in his book The Reckoning which deals with the American and Japanese car industries.

While Halberstam deals with many complexities of the Honda question, it is clear that we have trouble building quality in America because we have individualists on the assembly line. "Sorry your wire isn't connected man, but I only do bolts, and I get paid whether the wires are right or not." Every one is responsible for their particular job and no other. Only management level people have authority to shut down an assembly line if something is wrong. In Japan, by contrast, craftsmanship is promoted through everyone on the line being responsible for the final product. Since everyone is responsible, everyone also has the authority to shut down the line when something is wrong. Then an entire team swarms around the trouble spot to get it corrected as soon as possible.

Without trying to over-romanticize them, the Japanese seem to be embodying the most realistic general systems theory. The needs of individual workers are considered in relation to the needs of the company, the needs of the company are considered in relation to the needs of the nation, and now some in Japan (still not in the majority obviously) are realizing the needs of Japan should be considered in relation to those of the entire world market. America has overemphasized the individual. Communist countries have overemphasized the collective society. The most successful countries should be those who balance the needs of the parts in relation to the whole, realizing that every organic system is made up of important subsystems and is in turn part of a greater suprasystem.

This view of living, organic systems is the one hakomi has revolved around from the start, with special reference to Gregory Bateson's work in Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity<sup>4</sup>. What my journey into cross-cultural studies is clarifying for me is that we need to be careful in our therapeutic work to balance many polarities, not promoting a collapse into any one pole. We work with such tensions as internal vs. external control, internal vs. external responsibility, internal vs. external worth, internal vs. external identity. Humans live in the balance of a

number of forces. We are created yet co-creators, personal yet communal, finite yet free, dependent yet responsible, and more.

One of the ways I have always thought of hakomi is that it encourages communion. It helps make connections. It promotes interdependence. When viewing certification tapes, trainers look for living faith on the part of the therapist -- faith that life heals, faith that if the therapy is successful in getting the parts to communicate within the whole, that that is all that is necessary. Though a lot of our work in hakomi is intrapsychic in the sense of getting parts of the mind to communicate with other parts that have been split off, the result of making the internal connections is a transformation in the external way people are able to relate in the world. If they have been taken over by relationships, perhaps boundaries are strengthened. If they have been afraid to enter into realistic, nourishing relationships, perhaps boundaries are softened. Overall, core organizing beliefs are transformed in such a way that people can better accept life as it is --live life, relate to life, benefit from life -- as greater connections are made. On a spiritual level, awareness can grow to the level of realizing the unity, the interdependence of all life.

In his article on the healing relationship in this volume, Kurtz puts it this way:

Our present cultural myth is too much a celebration of the ego. Our notions of separate self are out of balance with all sorts of larger selves: family, community, the biological world and beyond to the universe and God. All too easily, we feel ourselves to be separate from and not much supported by these larger selves. It is upon this fundamental image of isolation and struggle that we build identities, world pictures and psychotherapeutic methods.

One way I have explored encouraging communion in my private practice, is to invite people to bring friends and family with them who they feel safe with and trust when they come for an individual session.

This accomplishes a number of things. It gives me assistants to use and more possibilities to play with. It promotes some of that group energy that expects "something significant to come out of this session." Most importantly, it gives the person a built-in support system when they go home which is highly sensitive to the issues the person is working on.

So many times a beautiful transformation happens within the therapy hour which is, in reality, a fragile flower just beginning to take root; then the therapist sends the person back into a harsh, non-supportive environment with the expectation that the person should live their new beliefs in the face of total non-support. Speaking from a cross-cultural perspective it would be pathological for a person to ignore their surroundings. Feminist therapists in the West are often sensitive to this and involve their clients in political action support groups at the same time individual therapy goes on to underline for them that they don't have an individual problem divorced from the political, economic realities around them. It is not just "in their head."

Of course, my own invitational practice can back-fire on me. Every once in awhile someone will tell me, "Look, dopey, if I had a support group of friends to bring that I feel safe with and trust, I wouldn't need you in the first place!" Right. They correctly perceive that their issue is precisely a break-down in relational living. The connections have been broken.

One other thing I do on the subsystem level, which is a clear implication of the unity principle, is to have people checked out by metabolic specialists. If the thyroid is off, if people are hypoglycemic or have candida, etc., one could spend an entire therapeutic career trying to cure something on the wrong level of the system.

This particular edition of the Forum underlines the wisdom of a general systems view of life where every living, organic system (being) is respected as having a mind of its own, and is seen in relation to both sub and supra systems. My article on curiosity is an overall introduction to the basic hakomi

method. Kurtz's article underlines the interpersonal relationship required to accomplish intra-psychic transformation. Lakshyan Schanzer investigates some of the neurological micro-processes that support individual self-exploration. Martin Schulmeister outlines how individuals can grow through self-conscious connectedness with others in a group setting. Chris Hoffman explores some aspects of hakomi at the level of larger organizations. David Patterson's article completes the volume with an essay on how our connectedness to another through a supervisory relationship can save us from the perils and pitfalls of a unhealthy, isolated, Lone Ranger therapeutic existence. For there to be health, all the parts of the system must be attended to, and the parts must attend to the whole in which they live and move and have their being.

1. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1986.  
This a great introductory volume to cross cultural issues. Augsburg brings together a massive amount of material from sociology and anthropology. The Christian perspective can be considered or ignored.
2. Boston: Beacon Press 1986.
3. New York: William Morrow & Company 1986
4. New York: E. P. Dutton 1979
5. In Lao Tzu's sense of being sane; not in the political sense.

*. . . despite our differences, we're all alike. Beyond identities and desires there is a common core of self—an essential humanity whose nature is peace and whose expression is thought and whose action is unconditional love. When we identify with that inner core, respecting and honoring it in others as well as ourselves, we experience healing in every area of life.*

—Joan Borysenko  
Minding the Body, Mending the Mind