

Hakomi in Action: A Narrative

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Editor's Note: Amy Marco's article comes from a Master's thesis she did on Hakomi at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada titled: "The Hakomi Method of Psychotherapy: An Exploration of Healing." It encompasses a unique contribution in our literature by outlining Hakomi principles as they were illustrated in her personal therapy with a Hakomi therapist.

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Abstract

This article introduces readers to Hakomi in an alternative manner. Rather than present an overview of the interventions associated with the principles, it provides a personal narrative illustrating how the principles are demonstrated, and the effects of this implementation on the counselling process. To begin, the article provides a context of my therapy experience by introducing my therapist and my reason for seeking Hakomi therapy. Thereafter, I discuss each principle with reference to my own therapy experiences of it, and link to the therapeutic alliance throughout. Finally, I reflect on the experience of writing this narrative and provide a summary of applied Hakomi principles.

Context

Attending Hakomi weekend workshops intrigued me regarding the method of work I saw and experienced the trainer doing. Hakomi tapped into a part of me that I could not explain or figure out and triggered a level of emotion new to me. Out of curiosity (and what I now know as a tapped inner drive towards healing) I began attending individual therapy sessions with a highly recommended Hakomi therapist, whose name is Anna. When I first went to see her, I was unsure what to expect. I had previously tried many cognitive and behavioural methods to heal myself, but something was still missing.

The following is an experiential narrative description of the principles of Hakomi in terms of how they showed up in my therapy. Each principle will be reviewed with a description of how each was experienced.

Mindfulness

Kurtz (2008) observed that when people are in mindfulness (self-observing and aware of the present moment without judgment) they gain insight into their own experience (see also Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008). Hakomi therapy holds mindfulness of the mind as the primary tool for accessing and working with the unconscious, that is, the experiences and memories people unconsciously base their lives around (Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008).

For me, Hakomi mindfulness was not a simple skill. There were times when it perhaps came easier, but often

it was challenging. Sitting and paying attention to a body sensation or an emotional experience was hard, as my typical way of managing had been the exact opposite: distracting or denying its existence.

Anna worked within the same framework as other Hakomi practitioners, using mindfulness in various stages. This involved first establishing contact with me in ordinary consciousness (not in mindfulness), then inviting me to become mindful (accessing), encouraging me to maintain mindfulness (deepening), experimenting with new beliefs and the barriers to them (processing), and then moving back into ordinary consciousness (integration or completion). These stages: contact, accessing, deepening, processing, and completion, are used by Hakomi practitioners as a general format for a typical Hakomi session (J. Hull, personal communication, December 4, 2011).

The relationship between Anna and myself was crucial for her to establish contact with me in the first place and then carry on to the subsequent stages of the process. I had to know Anna empathized with me and trust her before being willing to be contacted and go into mindfulness. This concept of the therapeutic alliance and its necessity for the counselling process has been discussed in the literature over the past two decades (Horvath, 2006).

Some moments of sitting with the experience happening in my body and emotions during my therapy stand out as entirely new experiences in my life. I had never really experienced myself or paid attention to what was happening inside me. This reflects the aspects of mindfulness that encourage leaving judgments and theories behind, slowing down, and moving into a place of not knowing and acceptance. Allowing myself to be mindful meant suspending the judgmental commentary in my head, taking the locus on control away from both my ego and the ego of my therapist (as Kurtz wrote about in 1987), and following Anna's soft cues to notice anything that happened inside me.

Anna would frequently ask what was coming up for me, what I was experiencing in my body, and what was arising as I spoke to her. Asking me to focus my attention in a receptive and curious way abruptly stopped the endless stream of cognitive analysis in my head, and snapped me from intellectual never-never land into the here-and-now present moment: with her, with my body and my emotions, in that room. I would tell Anna about an event and how I was feeling because of it. While I talked, she looked right at me, her hand under her chin

and two fingers resting on her cheek. This is the familiar look I have come to know, the way she always listens to me—inquisitively, interested, with a focused expression that tells me she is hearing between the details and paying intuitive attention (Marks-Tarlow, 2012) to how I am holding myself, what is happening around the words. She became my guide to look at my own inner world and helped create a space where we together explored anything that spontaneously arose. Barstow (1985) discussed the creation by the therapist of an environment of curiosity, so that spontaneous material is free to come forth and be discovered. The environment and Anna's attunement to me fostered a special relationship between us, another example of the therapeutic alliance.

Anna would ask me what I noticed in my body as I spoke (an example of accessing). This invitation made me pause and stop talking long enough to notice I have a body to focus on. To actually notice what was occurring inside me would take me awhile. I often experienced sensations in my chest and stomach, and so I told her that I felt something there. Anna would ask about the quality of that sensation: was it heavy, tight? These were questions directed at the right-brain, tapping into my experience in that moment. The answer I came up with was not really diagnostically important, because the answer was not the focus. The question simply served to keep me in my own experience as long as possible, and helped me move deeper into it. This was mindful deepening, in which Anna asked me to focus first on the general or surface structure (e.g., I feel mad), then move toward the more specific structure (e.g., heaviness, tightness, or whatever the sensation was), and ultimately to the deep structure of the core organizing belief that brought the anger into existence.

There were no left-brained inquisitions here. Anna did not want a theory about my experience—me explaining why I thought there was a sensation in my chest. If I began to go down this path (which distanced me from my immediate experience), she graciously brought me back by gently encouraging me to notice what was happening as I spoke.

I would then go back inside to discover the quality of the sensation in my body and sometimes told her what it was like for me. Anna asked me if I could stay with it. I usually said that I could, because at first it seemed like I should be able to. I should be able to sit with a body sensation. This sounded so simple and so it should not have taken effort—and yet it often did. This was mindfulness. This was paying attention in a purposeful way, and it was not what I was used to.

Notable here is what Kurtz (1987) said about courage on the part of the practitioner: they need courage to truly see whatever arises for a client—pain, fear, joy, love, or hate—and to do this, a practitioner first must be open to the same things in themselves. I consider this to be notable because it took courage for me to agree to look inside myself, likely because I was afraid of what would arise. However, as I reflected on what it was like to go into and stay in mindfulness in my sessions with Anna, I recognized that my courage was in part facilitated by her own willingness to have first been mindful and present with me, showing me that she had done this before: been open, and had courage in that openness.

As I sat with the sensations, the heaviness or the tight pressure, things happened that I did not anticipate when I first began mindfulness practice in therapy. Emotions arose. I could start out thinking I was angry, mad, or annoyed, but when I focused in on the pressure in my chest I suddenly felt sadness or grief arising. I was surprised about this at first, and as I grew more accustomed to what mindfulness was, I became anticipatory and nervous because I knew where mindfulness took me—to my own experience void of denial, rationalizations, or projection onto someone else. What was evoked in mindfulness had to be owned because it came from inside me and no one else.

Early in my therapy I began to experience emotions I had rarely felt. Many instances from those early months stand out as introductions into the power behind mindfulness in drawing out inner experience, and how one is organized. I recall I did not want to be mindful then—I did not want to focus on the sensations. I wanted to talk, and in that talking stay mostly in my head, because that is what I knew how to do. I knew how to explain and describe from an emotionally detached place, but that is not what Anna focused on—that is not what she had learned to do as a Hakomi therapist.

Her words directed me inward, not outward. The words were simple, asking me to notice my breath quicken, saying out loud what I had difficulty paying attention to: my increased breathing. This is again an example of accessing. Anna invited me to become mindful by noticing my breath. I remember suddenly it was as if the world had slowed down around me. I saw and felt my breath come in and leave. She was right—it was fast. I saw my chest rise and fall with each breath, and suddenly I also noticed my heart beating faster than usual. It scared me a little. The sensations reminded me of feeling anxious, but the sound of Anna's voice, as she reminded me she was still there, calmed me.

As though she knew what was happening inside me—that I was feeling scared—she would pull her chair closer to where I sat, offering comfort by her presence, and ask what I was noticing. This helped me to stay in mindfulness, to stay with what was happening in my body, although it was not comfortable. Seconds passed, and then minutes. I remember drifting in and out of a mindful state of consciousness—I could not stay focused so intently on my body and on the sensations for more than a few seconds at a time. Anna sat patiently, not drifting away either. This is a practitioner engaging in mindfulness as the premiere tool for helping the client study the organization of his or her experience. Anna stayed present in those moments with me. Her eyes did not shift from my face and body; her energy did not feel farther than my own. She stayed with me as I tried to stay with myself. Hakomi emphasizes empowering the client's own self-discovery (rather than the therapist simply achieving insight for its own sake), inviting a client to be curious about themselves (G. Johanson, personal communication, November 20, 2011).

The emotions, sensations, images, and memories that often emerge in mindfulness, (practiced in a Hakomi way) are congruent with the notion that mindfulness accesses unconscious and emotional material (Johanson, 1988; Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008). In session, if I sat and focused inward, what was already there would come forth. The emotions and self-knowledge lived inside me, I simply had to sit and give them time to show up. I often did not know at first the relevance of the images or memories that arose.

Another common occurrence for me in sessions was to place judgment and non-acceptance onto my experience when I did not understand the significance of what arose, or felt ashamed of having intensity around it. Anna constantly encouraged me to leave the judgment behind, to be curious about what emerged from inside me, and suspend the thoughts that would tell me my emotions were unjustified, or the images were strange and made no sense.

At some point I followed her lead down the path of being mindful about the creations inside of me, the sensations, thoughts, memories, and feelings that came from the creative act of living, making meaning from every event and message I received. That meaning shows up now each time I am mindful and material emerges. Through processing, Anna would eventually move us towards finding the creator—the core belief that brought my creation into being. Mindfulness was used as a primary tool for accessing the things that needed to be processed—the beliefs (shaped by the events and messages in my life) that I used to organize how I existed in the world.

My goal when I entered therapy was to have a new way of existing. Though I did not anticipate that mindfulness would bring so many things to the surface, it did. Memories, images, emotions, words, and gestures, all reflective of the organization of my experience: how I carried out relationships and pursuits, and how I interacted with people and the world around me. Hakomi did not take intense assessment, analysis, or rehashing of every possible influencing factor in my life to this point, but instead began with a simple observation of what was already present in me right in front of my therapist.

Nonviolence

The greatest proof of nonviolence in my therapy sessions with Anna was the very fact that I continued to show up. Had forcefulness been used in any way or had there been any attempts to direct me to where she thought was best, I likely would not have returned. Nonviolence is described as the “practical recognition of organicity” (Kurtz, 1990, p. 29). Nonviolence was meeting my defenses as they appeared and flowing with them, not against them. Going against my defenses—asking or telling me to stop being stubborn or stop being closed off emotionally—would have been considered violent, and only served to make me feel more defensive, perhaps with added shame and frustration. The therapist as nonjudgmental has been discussed as a condition for fostering a positive therapeutic alliance (Startford et al., 2009). Anna’s gentle approach was devoid of judgment or presumptions, allowing me to be open because I did not fear criticism or negative assessment.

Kurtz (1990) considered violence in therapy to be the non-acceptance of the client’s needs, pace, images, ideas, and capacities. This is essentially the same constructs discussed by other schools of thought (Horvath & Bedi, as cited in Horvath, 2006), that value the importance of developing a positive therapeutic relationship. To me, non-acceptance meant being judged and shamed for the things that I was feeling and dealing with, which brought me to therapy in the first place. Like many, I had the experience of not being accepted. In that therapy room it was safe. Even in the hardest moments when excruciating emotions and memories overtook me, I was still safe, still okay, still acceptable in Anna’s eyes. That came through in her actions and words, and most of all in her presence. Her presence was nonviolent, in that I, the client, could find nothing in it to resist, allowing me the freedom to look within.

This sense of acceptance that I felt with Anna speaks again to the therapeutic relationship, specifically to how I, as a client, perceived our relationship to be positive.

According to some, client perception of the therapeutic alliance as positive is what is most closely linked to its effectiveness (Mitchell, Bozart, & Krauft, as cited in Horvath, 2006).

One area of nonviolence in particular was the simple and soothing manner in which Anna met my attempts to manage my experience, and to contact me in that experience. Management of experience is the way in which a Hakomi therapist frames resistance on the part of clients. This management behaviour is a reflection of how experience is organized and is a direct path to the experience. Everything that a client presents is a potential source for self-reflection. Anna noted and encouraged self-reflection of my management (resistant) behaviours: disconnecting from my body, talking around an issue, and talking cognitively about an event while refusing to feel anything about it. For me, the encouragement to self-reflect on my management behaviours (rather than pointing out that they were not useful), felt gentle and created a safe space for me to be curious and nonjudgmental about my experience.

Another powerful way Anna acted nonviolently was by simply sliding her chair forward and making physical contact. She did not try to convince me to do something different than what I was doing. Her reaching out to me in a small, nonthreatening way and accepting the place I was in, portrayed nonviolence to me—to all states of my consciousness. There were many directions she could have taken with what I was presenting to her, but moving in the direction of my defenses quieted them (Kurtz, 1988), and left room for me to go deeper into myself and experience whatever came up. This reflects the Taoist influence on Hakomi—the idea of mutual arising; for every force there are counterforces, and the Hakomi therapist opposing a defense may result in the client opposing the therapist (G. Johanson, personal communication, November 20, 2011).

Another way nonviolence showed up in my therapy sessions was in the emphasis Anna placed on being curious about my experience, rather than analyzing and giving me advice on what I should work on. Being curious and present with one’s experience (emotions, body, cognitions, etc.) allows deeper exploration of the organization of that experience. Each time I struggled with wondering why things were a certain way for me, why I felt the way I did, or how to find my way out, Anna came back to my experience of that frustration, steering me away from wondering why I felt frustrated, and helping me focus on self-reflection and being present with the experience itself. We did not spend a lot of time analyzing why I had

barriers and blocks, only that those things were there, and what the experience was like of being frustrated, being stuck, and whatever else came up in the process of being mindful.

At times, nonviolence meant more than Anna's actions and the way she thought about me as a living system. There were times where abiding by nonviolence meant she slowed down my rapid descent into a memory or story—helped me contain my emotions rather than allow them to spiral out of control. Nonviolence meant stopping my own violence against myself, figuratively speaking. I could push myself too far into the past, hoping that I would find some resolution by divulging all the painful details from a cognitive place. Anna could put the brakes on—a term referring to slowing down in therapy work, used extensively by Rothschild (2000)—by providing a nonviolent blanket, so to speak, as I metaphorically rushed out the door into the cold, without taking precautions to keep myself safe.

Organicity

The premise of this principle is the belief that living systems move towards wholeness and healing when they are unobstructed (Johnason & Weiss, 2011; Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008). People then, as living systems, innately know which direction to move in order to heal, and practitioners follow these directions rather than implementing their own agenda (Kurtz, 1990). Additionally, Kurtz (1990) wrote that living systems were interactive and participatory. This reflects the client–therapist relationship, which, according to the Hakomi organicity principle, is the foundation and locus of control for healing and growth (Kurtz, 1990). This is similar to Gestalt therapy, which holds the therapeutic relationship as the medium for healing and client development of a sense of self (Hycner & Jacobs, as cited in Startford et al., 2009). It was in the relationship between Anna and me that I was given the opportunity to experiment with and experience new beliefs and new ways of interacting, and challenge the old and familiar patterns.

Finding my way first to Hakomi workshops and then to therapy was an act of organicity in and of itself. It was my system moving toward healing. That in mind, when I first learned what organicity meant, I wondered if it was true that I could find my way to healing, and if I am honest, it is still the question I ask from time to time. The idea of being in charge of my own evolution scares me still because it does not imply control of my destiny, as one might expect, but refers to a level of trust in a living system's

innate ability to move toward wholeness. For me, trusting my system is a giving up of cognitive control, yet trusting my system is not anti-cognitive. In therapy, I am not expected to be solely cognitive, rational, and left-brained, trying to figure things out in an analytical manner while leaving out other parts of myself. Anna and I had touched on the idea more than once during our work together that insight was not enough for me to get to a place of healing and integration.

One of the most common things Anna said to me in our sessions was, "It's okay not to know." This referred to multiple times when I would move into right-brain (via mindfulness) and suddenly not be able to give an explanation as to why I felt a certain way, why an image or memory suddenly appeared in my head, or why I was experiencing an intense emotion. I would say over and over again, "I don't know," and she would say, "It's okay not to know." I see this as an example of organicity because it relies on a trust that my system, my being, will know and I do not have to rely only on cognitive or rational knowing. What Anna referred to when telling me was that it was okay that I did not cognitively know everything to begin with. Experiences can precede meaning. She seemed to have confidence that my system knew what it needed to do to move toward healing and growth. I do not think I had this same level of trust when I first began therapy. However, as time progressed, I developed a kind of quiet acceptance of my own cognitive not-knowing, which drew me closer to organicity and my belief in my living self to get where I needed to go.

Another way organicity was present in our sessions was when Anna seemed to focus on the way my system organized itself. She paid keen attention to emotional, behavioural, and psychological clues about how I existed in the world, bringing these things to my attention as they arose. One clue that came up in therapy derived from noticing the way in which I sat. During a session I experienced feelings of frustration and being stuck, not moving forward in therapy, and not knowing what to do to get past a particular area of difficulty and pain. We sat across from one another, me frustrated and her present with me, noticing what my system showed her next. I shifted from sitting cross-legged to pulling my knees up in front of me, arms crossed over them. I felt stuck and immobilized—and my body suddenly showed it. Anna noticed it happen and we then noticed it together. In mindfulness we explored the body position. That particular session the exploration and staying with the body position did not lead to a specific outcome. However, later on it

became evident that this body position was one I used as a child—I used to sit like that all the time. This provided good information to me, as I realized that this body position (as well as words and emotions during these particular sessions) were a display of the child state of consciousness. This was a place I needed to go to process and move further toward healing.

Kurtz (1990) discussed taking over as a technique that follows the organicity of a client's system and in doing so, supports the therapeutic relationship and creates safety. As being mindful of body sensations often resulted in an emotional expression, it became apparent that a lot of my emotion was stored in certain areas of my body, and I was using a lot of energy to keep the emotion stored. In keeping with the organicity principle, Anna seemed or appeared to look for and follow my natural processes, such as the tendency to place my hand over the area of tightness in my body. For example, I reflected that I felt pressure and tension in my chest. Supporting this process, Anna took over the pressure and tension by placing her hand over the area and matching it in intensity as I directed her. A frequent result of this was an emotional release—a release of an emotion I may not have been able to get at before. Other examples of things Anna took over for me included thoughts or beliefs I was repeating internally to myself, gestures or body movements I made, and efforts to support or soothe myself.

Both Anna and I were mutually participatory in sessions, which made it safe for me to explore myself, enabling organicity to reveal itself. Without her equal participation in my organization and exploration, I may not have participated as fully. I saw her interest in me, and her allowing me an important place in my work in therapy—removing her own agenda and leaving space for my system to provide the direction we went. This reflects what is written about the instrumental role of the therapeutic alliance in the client change process, described as an active relational element between therapist and client (Bordin, as cited in Startford et al., 2009).

I believe Anna gained the cooperation of my unconscious by fostering a positive therapeutic relationship between us that was special and took the highest priority. When something was off between us we attended to it, often with Anna taking the initiative to regain organicity by ensuring there was nothing acting as an obstruction. If I felt like I was not getting something I needed, there was permission for me to say that. Hakomi trainers have discussed the cooperation of the unconscious (J. Hull, personal communication, December 3, 2011). My system would

not have opened and displayed its organizing patterns had I felt something to resist in Anna. My unconscious did not find anything to oppose in her, and my experience became much more about feeling her embracing my spirit, and how I had organized myself through my years of becoming a meaning-making adult.

Even when mistakes were made in therapy or we became stuck were reflections of organicity. My living system moved towards a greater state of wholeness and health, finding not only nurturing in a participatory, therapeutic relationship but also imperfection and humanness that could still protect my emotional experience and inspire healing. Johanson and Weiss (2011) wrote about growth happening in therapy despite fumbling, stumbling, and ignorance on the parts of both client and therapist. This is true in my experience, because the work Anna and I did involved all that—stumbling, getting stuck, and pushing limits of what I believed I could handle emotionally. This speaks to organicity in that growth happens all the time despite obstacles due to what has been called a “life force,” an “organic impulse,” “transformance,” and a “life-forward direction”—all referring to living things moving towards growth and towards wholeness (Johanson & Weiss, 2011).

Unity

Movement towards greater wholeness and unification was where all the other Hakomi principles stemmed (Johanson, 1986). The healing of splits and disconnections was the goal, met via increased communication between various parts of oneself (Kurtz, 1990). Connection and interdependence are present among all things, such that alterations in one aspect of a living thing affect other parts of it (Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008). It is the connection and communication of all the parts within the whole that allows the system to be organic in terms of self-organizing, self-directing, and self-correcting.

A disconnection between certain parts felt true for me, fueling my desire to go to therapy. An increase in unity was the goal I was after, although in the beginning of therapy I did not know this and could not name it that way. In my life I felt a sense of separation between my emotional, mental, and physical parts, explained by Hakomi theory in part as some experience that had been missed during development (Hakomi therapists might use the term *organized out* to describe a missing experience.) Increasing unity meant that the missing experiences had to be added (*organized in*), promoting communication between split off areas. As organization of experience refers to how a person processes information—brings it in, codes it, filters it

(Johanson, 2006b)—organizing in new information is the point of providing a missing experience. A person can then take this new information (new experience) and integrate it into his or her life.

My therapy promoted the organization in of new information by fostering communication and contact between my mind, body, and spirit, by attending to all these elements and the role they played or how they arose in session. Anna and I worked with any material that came up from the physical, emotional, or cognitive realm and noticed how a change in one of these areas caused changes in others. Therapy happened when one part of me, like my mind, had an experience of anger and was not communicating with another part of me, like my body. I would work, with Anna guiding me, to foster communication between those parts and work towards integration.

Hakomi therapists promote unity and integration between all parts of a living system, believing in an inner intelligence that living beings possess to unite themselves (Kurtz, 1990). Integration of all parts of me was the goal. Anna spoke of integration as being naturally what we as living systems wanted to do—become whole, all puzzle pieces connecting together to form the total picture.

An example of integration beginning to take place was my transformation from numbed emotions to big emotions, and then from big, uncontained emotions to contained emotions that flowed and regulated with better ease. This shift from numb to experiencing feelings demonstrates integration of my emotional, cognitive, and spiritual parts, as I had only before been able to cognitively acknowledge certain things, never feeling or experiencing them. Integration happened, I think, from being mindful and learning to acknowledge the existence of these parts of myself. Paying attention to them through mindfulness and reflecting on anything that came up promoted unity because the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of me that began to appear were given space within the whole.

Kurtz (1990) discussed the best expression of unity as being a therapist feeling what a client is feeling, and a sense of connection between them. Looking at my therapist and seeing that she felt what I felt was powerful. She displayed this through her words, body language, emotional expression, and presence. I felt connected and linked to her, letting go of part of my own sense of being isolated and separate from other humans. This was the beginning of unity and of feeling whole inside myself. This sense of

empathy conveyed from Anna to me is another example of how the therapeutic alliance is described: as the ability of the therapist to genuinely relate to the client in a caring way (Mitchell, Bozart, & Krauft, as cited by Startford et al., 2009).

Another way that unity shows up is when the therapist helps the client be in connection with themselves and self-regulate (Kurtz, as cited in Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008). In turn the client is in connection with the therapist, an example of dyadic regulation. Anna used her own state of mind to help me manage and regulate my emotions by breathing with me and modeling calmness. Using this stability and acceptance, Anna taught me some strategies to regulate and contain difficult emotions. In this union of both of our living systems I could feel her calmness and acceptance, and take cues to then do more specific actions to manage and contain.

This above description is not unlike a child regulating themselves with cues from their caregiver and speaks to the unification and interconnectedness of living things, including what can happen between therapist and client. It illustrates what Lewis et al. (as cited in Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008) termed *limbic resonance* (p. 74), the attunement of two mammals to one another's emotional states via mutual adaptation and exchange. In addition, part of the definition of the therapeutic alliance is a critical state of attunement, in which the therapist's affective state resonates with their client's (Schore, as cited in Startford et al., 2009). In part, I could adapt to Anna's internal state after she first became attuned to mine, demonstrating to me that she felt what I felt. Limbic resonance and mutual attunement were apparent during sessions in other ways as well, such as mirroring one another's physical posture or experiencing a mutual physical sensation (like coughing or vocal hoarseness).

The connections that were made between the various parts of me were in the service of unity and wholeness, as I worked toward integrating what I experienced in therapy sessions into my outside world. These connections were in large part made possible by the grace, acceptance, and presence of my therapist, which assisted her in gaining the cooperation of my unconscious. As discussed previously, a client's unconscious self being willing to emerge is essential if therapy is to be successful (Kurtz, 1990). Additionally, Anna's attitude toward my disconnected parts fostered respect, honor, and the coming forth of my own loving presence, further serving unity and wholeness.

Mind-Body Holism

As evident from the previous discussion on mindfulness, as well as by the inclusion of Hakomi as a body-centred therapy, there is a clear connection in Hakomi between the mind and the body. This second to last section of illustrating Hakomi principles will delve further into this connection by addressing how Hakomi works at the mind-body interface—the place where mind and body meet (Kurtz, 1990). This section, although interdependent with mindfulness (as it is the premiere tool in Hakomi for working with clients), is distinct because it places specific emphasis on the huge role of the body in holding and displaying unconscious material. I intend to convey the mutual importance of both the body and the mind, and demonstrate how Anna worked at the mind-body interface.

I do not recall a session when we did not notice my body and what was happening for it in conjunction with my mind. There was constant interplay between body and mind—between physical and cognitive. Hakomi therapists give attention and focus to both (a) bodily experiences and the beliefs stemming from those experiences, and (b) specific beliefs and cognitions and their subsequent bodily experiences (Kurtz, 1990).

As described previously, my body was a reflection of my mind, and became a frequent object of study and self-reflection. I learned to be curious in mindfulness about what my body showed me, following Anna's lead. I started to see that my body could at times express things I could not say, and show Anna what I needed her to know. At times, I felt my left brain shut off, go blank, and render me unable to verbally express emotions or sensations. Anna would continue coming back to my body, asking me to come with her and use what my body was telling us to understand what was happening in my mind. This process repeats aspects of working in other Hakomi principles, since they are all related.

My body stored and expressed deep core beliefs, the things I held as true about myself and the world around me. Previous to this work I had only known these beliefs intellectually. Focusing on a bodily sensation such as quickened breathing or tense shoulders, could lead us to finding feelings such as fear and then to connected thoughts. Other times we started with a belief or an experience and worked toward noticing the effect it had on my body—how the storage of the belief impacted my posture, stance, expressions, or sensations. I had not expected body and mind to be so inter-relational, like watercolor paint streams running together, one color altering the other, reflecting in the end product a new

vibrancy and shade. A belief about safety was revealed in my shoulders, hugging in tightly as if in self-protection. Exploration of my arms crossed over my torso found us at images of vulnerability and pain. Our work was constantly in the mind-body realm. Anna tracked my gestures, posture, and facial expressions, assisting me in being curious about them. Sometimes she would ask me to focus inside and be curious about what movement my body wanted to make. This demonstrates placing the locus of control on my inner sense of knowing and whatever spontaneously arises—important aspects of working at the mind-body interface (Kurtz, 1987).

A particularly powerful instance of working at the mind-body interface came through exploring what my body wanted to do when I was recalling a painful memory. I knew what I felt and what I thought, but at first I did not know what my body wanted to do or what this even meant. Anna encouraged me to be in mindfulness and follow whatever came. I sat with the feelings, and began to be curious about what my body felt and if there was a movement my body wanted to make. I worked hard to suspend judgments about looking strange or appropriate. In mindfulness a body position suddenly appeared in my mind: I suddenly wanted to lie down. I noticed my body had sunk in the chair, slid downward, and almost felt like it was pulling toward the floor.

Anna facilitated me lying on the floor on some large cushions, with a blanket and pillows around me. As much as I tried to leave judgments behind, I felt like I did not know why I wanted to lie on the floor, and I felt strange doing it. I lay there, Anna sitting beside me. The memories and images from earlier in the session continued, along with emotions. Her voice was soothing, encouraging me to stay with whatever came up. Lying on the floor in this safe, protected, and restful position facilitated an emotional release and then a period of rest that my body seemed to intuitively know I needed, as I had never had the opportunity to do this in the memories I was processing. My body often felt tight, and I typically had trouble relaxing. This experience and the processing around it brought me to a place where I drew a connection between how tired I really was and how I had never really had the chance to rest or recover after some of the experiences I had endured. As a result I walked around in the world very tight, tense, and literally showing in my body my constant need to be on guard and not appear exhausted.

Hakomi practitioners are interested in the impact of early beliefs on body structure and physiology (Kurtz, 1990). Other body-centred therapies have attended to this issue

and shed significant light on the ways the mental and emotional issues are revealed through the body (Johanson, 2006b). Previous research in the area of body therapies has, therefore, contributed to the conviction of mind-body holism and Hakomi practitioners' subsequent interest in it.

Reflections and Summary

The principles of Hakomi therapy created the foundation and framework for my therapy with Anna. The principles made room for exploration of my entire experience and fostered a special relationship between my therapist and me. Though Hakomi is one of many methods of psychotherapy, the principles seem to attract practitioners who are interested in learning more than just a linear, manualized method. My experience of the Hakomi principles embodied in therapy and in my therapist showed me, as a novice counsellor, that practitioners of the Hakomi method must have a principled presence that inspires healing, and the corresponding qualities required to support the emotional healing of another human being (Kurtz, 2008). I had this in Anna. Though our process was not perfect (there are instances of difficulty I have not discussed), returning to the principles seemed to put us back on track and repair any ruptures.

Hakomi principles combined with the therapeutic relationship promoted a gentle and connected relationship between Anna and myself. I felt like I was on the bank of a rushing river that I wanted to cross (the river a metaphor for the issues I wanted to resolve). Anna did not stand on the other side of the river, trying to convince me to cross or give advice on how to navigate the waters. She did not try to push or drag me in or force me to swim. Instead, she stood with me and carefully aligned herself with my natural process of wading through, trusting that my living system would know what I needed in order to get to the other side.

The generalized impact of this Hakomi work on my life has been profound. Learning mindfulness in the way Hakomi practices it—*noticing and observing myself*—has given me a much needed skill of experiencing my world without fighting against that experience. I learned I could become aware of my body through mindfulness practice, and then notice how it facilitated and held information about my experiences.

This above example of resting after experiencing intense emotions challenged a belief and old pattern of not giving myself permission to rest. As a result, I began to feel more inclined towards rest and self-care in my day-to-day life. In the past I had attempted to convince myself that I could

take time to rest, but this intellectual process did not result in the same felt experience I received in Hakomi therapy. I needed to experience what it felt like to rest, and the subsequent relief and peace that followed. It was important for me to follow a body urge, noticed in mindfulness, because doing so proved the concept of organicity to me in a way that cognitive therapy did not. It showed me experientially that my body knew what it needed for healing. The challenge of old beliefs resulted in new insights and clarity regarding missing experiences in my life related to rest and self-care.

Mindfulness practice in and of itself also helped me achieve some clarity and insight around my ability to handle intense and difficult emotions. Previous to this therapy work, I tried to challenge thoughts and use logic to change emotional experience. Hakomi offered a different approach: not to change the experiences I was having, but accepting them and observing how they appeared in my life through mindfulness. This was rejuvenating because my energy was no longer spent trying to change emotions or anticipate an inability to handle difficult experiences without collapsing or numbing. Overall, Hakomi eased the tension that came through fighting against living.

Principle	Definition/Description	Core Example of the Principle in Action	Sample Sentence Stem from a Hakomi Therapist
Mindfulness	Awareness of one's inner experience in the present moment with an attitude of acceptance and nonjudgment (Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008; Seigel, 2010).	I noticed, with Anna's direction, tension in my chest as I was talking. I stopped talking and continued to pay attention to the sensation. It was heavy and tight.	"Just notice your breath and anything that is happening as you talk about this."
Nonviolence	Stemming from Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism and Taoism, a living entity has a natural process and wisdom to know what it needs, which should be respected (Barstow, 1985; Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008).	Anna refrained from going against my management behaviours and instead flowed with them, inviting me to notice how I felt disconnected while talking, as well as making contact with me in my disconnected state.	"What would it be like for me to just move my chair forward so you feel less alone, and we'll be curious together about this disconnected feeling you're having?"
Organicity	Living systems naturally move towards health and wholeness, and are made up of multiple parts within the whole (Johanson & Weiss, 2011; Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008).	Anna employed the technique of taking over tension in my chest, following my system's natural process. Applying pressure to the right area of my chest lead to a release of emotion and dissipation of the tension.	"What comes up as I take over this tension? A memory?"
Unity	All living things are connected and interdependent (Kurtz, as cited in Myllerup-Brookhuis, 2008). Changes in one aspect of a living thing affect other parts of it (Johanson, 1986).	Dyadic emotional regulation, in which Anna breathed deeply and calmly, in turn helping me to breathe deeply and calmly. An experience of the connection between us.	"I'm here, breathing with you. Notice what happens as we breathe together."
Mind-body Holism	The mind and body influence one another, with the body an expression of mental life and a path to the unconscious (Johanson, 1988; Kurtz, 1985a, 1990).	Cognitions about being afraid showed up in my body as increased breathing rate and tense shoulders. In turn, a body posture such as sitting with my legs up and arms wrapped around them revealed thoughts about feeling stuck and immobilized.	"What does your body want to do as you think about that fear?"

Table 1: Hakomi Principles with Examples

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