



Loving the Parts We Tend to Push Away

Hakomi Blog #1

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In our Hakomi work with clients, one of the most important systems¹ to identify and “jump out of” is that of colluding with the client’s tendency to disavow, diminish, or push past a part of themselves.

“What?” you might say, “I would never collude with a client who is disavowing part of themselves!”

But, we do this much often than we would like to think.

Let’s see how this system might show up in a session.

Your client says:

“I just need to get past my fears of meeting people in social gatherings. Can you help me put my fears on the side so I can move forward with my life?”

Or: “My shoulders always feel so tense. Can we do some of those Hakomi techniques, so I can make my shoulders let go and relax?”

Or: “I have this voice in my head telling me that I’m not good enough. How can we make this voice stop, so I can value myself more?”

For a Hakomi practitioner, it can be very tempting to take the bait and use some fancy techniques to help the client get what they are asking for.

So, to take the examples above, for the client who asked you to help them put their fears aside, the Hakomi therapist might get the client mindful and then have them imagine that their fears are very far away. If the fears seem to abate, then the practitioner and client are happy about how the work is going.

Or, for the client who asked you to help them release their tight shoulders, the Hakomi practitioner might comply by bringing the client into mindfulness, and then offering to take over the tension. If the tension goes away and doesn’t return before the end of the session, both the therapist and client are quite satisfied.

¹ In Hakomi, we use the term “jumping out of the system” to refer to the skillful practice of stepping out of internal or relational systems that the client can get stuck in. Clients and practitioners can often get stuck in these systems together, each playing their own part to keep the system going.

Or, for the client who hears the critical voice that they are not good enough, we might take over the voice, in the hope that this will mobilize the client to talk back to it with some newly found gumption. In this situation the practitioner is often hoping that the client will get to a place in which the voice disappears or at least loses most of its power. The assumption here, very often, is that the voice itself serves no meaningful purpose for the client².

Not to rain on anyone's parade, but I believe the interventions above are usually **not** the best way to go.

Why? Because the above interventions can actually serve to solidify the polarizations between different parts of the client.

For the client who wants to recruit us to help them push their social fears to the side, we would be effectively allying with the "pushing" part, and squashing the fear parts, if we go along with this agenda without a real respect for the fear parts.

For the client whose shoulders always feel so tense, depending on how we hold and frame our taking over, we could be communicating to the client that we agree that there is no intelligence informing the somatic holding patterns.

Even for the client who is plagued by the critical voice, we run the risk of denigrating a deeper adaptive intelligence that led to the creation of this critical voice in the first place (regardless of how maladaptive the voice might be in the client's current life).

In other words, Hakomi interventions, when not grounded in a deep respect for the client's parts (especially protector parts and disavowed parts), can create even more internal conflict in the client.

What might we do instead? Well, to answer that, it is helpful to think about the bigger picture of what we are doing in this wonderful Hakomi method.

The main force of healing in the Hakomi method is not our smart techniques, but rather the cooperation of the client's unconscious. The Hakomi principle of **organicity** is deeply interwoven here. The client's unconscious organically wants healing, and once it senses that a caring, attentive person is present in a healing way, organicity starts rolling and becomes a hugely powerful force for transformation.

The key is that the client's organic impulse for healing will emerge exponentially more powerfully *when all the different parts of the self can get on board*.

² Now, don't get me wrong. Taking over the voice might actually be a fine intervention. But the question is how and why we would do so, and what do we end up communicating to our client about the value of this voice. Keep reading...

To illustrate, picture a large rowboat with many people on it, but only the captain is rowing the boat. Now picture a large rowboat in which *everybody* is rowing in a spirit of togetherness and common purpose. Which boat will travel faster and more smoothly?

So the question becomes: how do we get all the client's parts to row the boat? Here's a hint: *No part of the self is going to start rowing until it feels respected by the other parts.*

We can see now that one of our most important tasks as Hakomi practitioners is to help build respect for the client's different parts.

Let's go back to one of the earlier examples.

For the client who just wants to push past their fears of social gatherings, you might slow things down and say,

"I can see how frustrated you are by these fears when they keep showing up. The fears have kept you from meeting people and having enriching experiences. But I am also wondering if these fears once served an important purpose for you... I can imagine that there might be a battle going on inside you, between the *you* that wants "to move forward in your life" and other parts that believe there really is something to be scared of. These different parts are not really listening to each other at all, and they are each pulling you in different directions, like an internal tug of war."

After discussing this more with the client, you might suggest the possibility of welcoming in the fear parts, just a little, so they can feel more listened to. You might say:

"Maybe we can learn a little more about what the deeper concerns of these fear parts are, and maybe they in turn might listen more to what your concerns are. Would you like to consider this a little bit?... OK, let's take a few breaths together before we get started."

Let's pause for a moment to take this in.

How does this feel in your body? What do you start to notice? Take your time to study your experience before you continue to read.

When you are ready, imagine the client we discussed earlier with the tight shoulders whose only goal is to leave the session feeling more relaxed. Imagine what you might say to them to provide what I call *context and compassion* for both sides of their experience; that is, both the part of them that wants to feel more relaxed, and the parts of the self that have a reason to feel tense (that the shoulder is embodying). Try to find your own way of wording your *context and compassion*.



What about the client with the critical voice telling them, “You aren’t good enough.” What could possibly be valuable about this critical voice? In my experience, critical voices tend to enter the mind in moments when there are (usually unconscious) feeling states that are chaotic and disorganized. The critical voices originated in difficult times when there was a need for other people to be present in a caring way, to help co-regulate the overwhelming feelings, but instead the client was alone with the chaos and overwhelm. In essence, the critical voices came to provide order and meaning³, compensating for the absence of the co-regulation that was needed at time.

Here's how I might apply this with the client. At the right point in the session, when I feel a strong relational connection to the client, I might say:

“I can hear how plagued you have been by these critical voices and judgments. And it makes so much sense that you would do anything you can to get rid of them. And, I imagine that these voices, as difficult as they are for you, once served an important purpose... As strange as it to say this, I can imagine that they acted like *friends* to you at some point, even *holding you together* in some ways... Does this make any sense to you at all?”

A great deal of sensitivity is needed in these moments, and we have to be willing to “turn on a dime” and attune to where the client is and what they need from us. But I think you get the sense that we are working towards helping the client accept that even their internal tormenters may have originated for a good reason.

What would we do next? That depends on many factors, so I’m not sure I can answer that in any definitive way. But I can give you a few general thoughts.

First, we might continue with the theme that the critical thoughts (aka judgment states) serve to “hold the client together.” I often ask if the client would be interested in exploring this possibility (that they may have an underlying need to feel held together), by allowing themselves to be literally held together by a blanket or weighted blanket, cushions, yoga bands (or other items I have in my office), or imagining someone helping hold them together in some way that would feel good to them.⁴ This intervention can go

³ This is similar to people who engage in self-destructive behaviors. They often report that they would rather feel a sense of *badness* after engaging the behavior, and at least have a defined sense of self, rather than experience a chaotic sense of themselves (or no sense of themselves at all) if they don’t engage in the behavior.

⁴ Here we are using the *taking over* technique in the spirit of valuing the different parts of the self.

very deep, shifting the client right into the missing experience of needing to be held by others at a critical moment in their life.

Ultimately, we want to be able to explore the internal somatic/affective state that is present *just before* the critical voices/ judgment states start to arise. That's when time begins to slow down. That's where the client can take in more deeply the missing experience of relational co-regulation, and bring this co-regulation to the original distressing somatic/affective states in which they felt so alone at vulnerable times in their lives. It is this present moment where our clients begin to deeply internalize the co-regulation they are receiving, not just from us, but also from the larger healing field that is present in these moments.

This doesn't usually happen in the first session with a client. It can take a long time to get there. But as we slowly build the client's capacity to be mindful of difficult experience, and to internalize the relational holding and co-regulation they are receiving from us, they become more and more available for this work.

Healing happens when all parts of the self are honored, especially those parts that have been pushed away, and when we as practitioners can help the client journey into their somatic experience as these estranged parts are welcomed back. We offer context and compassion to help the client accept these disavowed parts, and then we engage the old experiences, frozen in time, in which the initial estrangement occurred. We help the client simply observe the shifts that happen organically, and we offer missing experiences of co-regulation (as needed), and creative exploration (as we are inspired) to support their journey of re-integration. This is the incredible journey of the Self coming back together.

If you want to explore these themes more deeply, please sign up for a 3-part series in working with protector parts, starting May 17-18, 2025 with the workshop, Working with Protectors, Part 1: How to Go Beneath Judgment States to the Underlying Core Material. I hope to see you there!