

## **The Healing Process<sup>1</sup>**

By Ron Kurtz

*Ron Kurtz, the founder of Hakomi Therapy, is one of the most gifted, loving, and articulate presence-centered practitioners I've ever met. This excerpt from a longer article includes Ron's moving description of how he discovered the therapeutic power of loving presence. Although this excerpt was intended for helping professionals, I'm convinced that it will also provide "helping humans" with some inspiring insights.*

The impulse to heal is real and powerful and lies within the client. Our job is to evoke that healing power, to meet its tests and needs and to support it in its expression and development. We are not the healers; but happily, given the grace and skills required, we may be part of the process.

Healing is a spontaneous, natural process. It is a process that comes online spontaneously when needed, if it's not interfered with. A cut finger repairs itself. If nothing interferes with the process and your body has the resources, it will heal itself. However, under certain conditions, the healing process doesn't come on line. Something is missing.

Our particular concern is with the damage done to a client's mental-emotional health. Often, the natural healing process has been overwhelmed. When that happens, the experience is handled by adaptations that work to prevent further damage. That could include becoming hyper-vigilant or going numb. The damage is contained but cannot be integrated. The doesn't go away. It stays "backstage," where it saps strength, undermines clarity, and troubles thinking, feeling and behavior. Sometimes it breaks through to consciousness as flashbacks.

So, healing is a spontaneous process that can get interrupted. Even some psychotherapeutic techniques can interrupt the healing process. For example, a client suddenly becomes sad. Some therapists would ask: "Where do you feel that in your body?" Or, even worse, "Why are you sad?" The very act of asking questions too soon or too often is the thing interrupts the healing process. Anything that takes the client out of his experience and asks for information or an explanation interrupts the natural emotional healing process. The client may not have the explanation. The process may just be beginning to unfold. It may be the start of a whole series of healing events being organized by the adaptive unconscious. It may just need time. It may need the therapist to remain silent. It usually does. Healing will arise spontaneously and continue spontaneously, if it is not interrupted. After sadness (or whatever emotion) arises, given the right support, memories and insights usually follow.

Anyone can support a healing process; it's done all the time by all kinds of people. When sadness arises, holding or a gentle touch are things that support the process. (Of course, touching is problematic for professional therapists. For ordinary people—and even some of our mammalian cousins—it's the obvious thing.)

So, if you want to support an emotional healing, don't ask questions! Don't even talk! Put a comforting hand on the person, stay silent, and wait. The client will probably close her eyes and deepen into her experience. She'll likely get memories and insights which will help integrate the original painful experience. When an emotion arises spontaneously in the course of a session, the client will automatically search for associations that make sense of her emotions. It's a spontaneous, internal process. The ideas, beliefs, memories and images that help make sense will pop into consciousness—but only if you do not interrupt.

The client herself may interrupt the process. That's what's been happening all along. If you have established a relationship in which the client knows, without thinking about it, that you will not

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interrupt...if you wait when the person stops to think...if you can read the signs that the client is busy internally and just wait, you will be supporting the healing process.

Eventually, the client comes to an insight that helps the healing. That insight is usually about what was missing that would have supported the healing when the painful experiences were happening...part of what was missing... something you're doing right then. If you are comforting the person, if you're waiting patiently, if you are listening, if you are sympathetic, you could be doing exactly what was needed originally. Had it happened then, the process might have completed without damage. With the right elements in place, it can begin now.

At some point the client will open her eyes and look at you. When she does, be waiting! At some level, she will realize that you have been patient and paying attention. Let her speak first. Doing these things gives her a sense that she can take her time, but she can go inside without losing you. It tells her you are supporting her efforts to make sense of her feelings. It most likely won't make total sense that quickly, but it doesn't have to. What has happened is that the process has begun and can now move forward. What she tells you when she opens her eyes will most likely be something is part of the healing process continuing to unfold. And you have done what needed to be done to be part of that.

### **Loving Presence**

All that adds up to one thing, being in loving presence. I learned about it when I was doing a nine day therapy group in Germany. (Nine days! One German after another.) On the last day, I was working with a client and found that I couldn't follow what he was telling me. I was sitting there in front of the guy, exhausted from trying to hold all the details of his story. Slowly I yielded to the inevitable: I gave up. Being the kind of person I sometimes am, I thought, "Well I'll just look like I'm listening. He seems okay talking. Maybe I'll recover later and think of something to do. I certainly won't know what he said, but maybe I could still make something good happen. We'll see." I surrendered to my fatigue and that was serendipitous. When I gave up trying to understand, my perception changed. I became visual. As I did, his face became beautiful. He looked like a Rembrandt painting to me. This experience was very new to me. As I became absorbed in just looking at him, I not only saw colors and shapes, I saw something of who he was, his humanity. Seeing that, a deep feeling of compassion arose in me.

Following that, I had the thought, "My face must be showing that I feel this. I should ask him to look at me. He'll see it." I wanted him to see what I was feeling. This idea came right out of my ideas about how we create a healing relationship. (What better way to demonstrate compassion and presence and to actually feel it and show it.) I asked him to open his eyes. When he looked at me, his whole being changed. He slowed down. His feelings intensified. He became vulnerable, which made me feel even more loving. As he changed, I changed. Together, we went deeper and deeper. We were in a reinforcement cycle. We were triggering each other and together we were creating exactly the right context for a healing process. What ever happened after that, our mutual reinforcement was driving it.

After that, it happened somewhat with each person I worked with. It didn't always happen as strongly, but it would always happen at least a little. It happened enough so that deep and important healings took place. I don't always get the same deep level of love, but I feel it often enough to know that it's always a possibility and it's powerful when it happens. Seeing beauty and humanity in the other became my "therapeutic meditation". It was my way of becoming loving and present. I learned to avoid listening for problems, engaging in questions and explanations and long conversations. My first impulse now is always to find something to love, something to be inspired by, something heroic, something recognizable as the gift and burden of the human condition, the pain and grace that's there to find in every soul you meet.