

## Selections from the Readings in The Hakomi Method

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### Healing Process Talk 2008

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. We are the context in which healing is inspired.

Healing is a spontaneous process. It is genetically programmed and waiting to come online when needed. That's the way Porges describes the social engagement system. It's waiting to come online. In people who are autistic, it doesn't come online. It's available but, for some reason, it doesn't happen. The normal stimuli that would bring the social engagement system online don't do it.

Healing is another process that comes online spontaneously when you need it. A good example would be a cut finger. A cut finger repairs itself. You don't have to control that. If nothing interferes with the process and your body has the resources, it will heal itself. However, under certain conditions, the healing process, just like the social engagement system, doesn't come online. For example, in some people cancer is a process that often doesn't heal by itself. In some people, it does. Some theories suggest that the body is normally cleaning up cancer cells all the time, but this process gets overwhelmed.

Our concern is with the damage that has been done to a client's mental and emotional health. These systems can also be overwhelmed. When they are, they are handled by adaptations that work to prevent further damage, like becoming hyper-vigilant or going numb. Some adaptations interrupt or prevent the natural healing process. The damage cannot be integrated. The painful issue doesn't resolve. It gets shunted off to the side and stays there backstage.

Repressed, it saps strength and energy, undermines clarity and in many ways, disturbs thinking, feeling and behavior. Sometimes it doesn't even stay backstage as when traumatic events are relived in flashbacks. Adaptations are in operation all the time. They are the myriad habits that are our everyday behavior. They're automatic and normally operate outside of consciousness.

So that's the first thing: healing is a spontaneous process that can get interrupted. Some psychotherapeutic techniques do exactly that; they interrupt the healing process, often when it is just beginning to happen. For example, something comes up in a therapy session and the client suddenly becomes sad. Some therapists are trained to ask things like: "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 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 is spontaneous. It will arise spontaneously and continue spontaneously if it is not interrupted. For example, after the



emotion has arisen, given time, memories and images may follow. All you have to do when a healing process is underway is support it. You can often support the process, when sadness is the feeling, by a gentle touch on the arm or hand. Of course, touching is problematic for professional therapists. For ordinary people, and even some of our mammalian cousins, it's the obvious thing.

If you want to help, you don't ask questions and you don't make a lot of statements. You 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. This happens because, when you have a spontaneous emotion, the mind will automatically try to make sense of it and it will search for associations, ideas, beliefs, memories, and images that are coherent. But only if you do not interrupt.

The client may interrupt the process himself. 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 interrupt, if you wait when the person stops to think, if you can wait when the client closes her eyes, if you can read the signs that the client is thinking or feeling something, concentrating on her own thoughts, memories and feelings, and just wait, you will be supporting the healing process. At some point the client will open her eyes and look at you. When she does, be there waiting. Let the client speak first. She will realize you have stayed connected. The client will have an unconscious sense that she can take her time, can go inside and begin to make sense of what's been happening to her. It may not make total sense immediately, but the process will be moving forward. The little things that come up when clients open their eyes and tell you what they've been experiencing are very important. What they tell you will most likely be something that will help the healing process continue.

So, that's how to help a healing process move towards completion. That's how you get to the memories and beliefs that are held in check by the adaptations that, while they offer affective protection, also prevent the healing. For me, the most important thing you can do is to learn to read the external signs that the person is doing internal work. They're not just sleeping in there, not just relaxed. They are processing. And there are signs that they're working, that their minds are working. The fact that they're not talking to you is perfect. You don't need an explanation. You don't need to know the story. You need to be able to wait patiently while the client does her inner work. When they come out, there may be something else to do, another step in the process. It may deepen at that point. Eventually, they come to an important, healing insight. The insight usually contains information about what was missing. Part of that missing experience is almost always somebody to do what you are doing right then. If you are comforting the person, or if you're waiting patiently, if you are listening, if you are sympathetic — those things could easily have been what was missing. Had it been there, the process might have completed already. It may complete now when all the right elements are in place. It's that simple.