



THE HAKOMI PERSONHOOD SERIES

THE PRACTICE OF LOVING PRESENCE

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The Practice of Loving Presence

The Loving Presence Workshop is about a particular kind of healing relationship, one that creates enough safety to allow for the kind of emotional expression that leads to an unburdening and release of emotional pain. The creation of this kind of relationship involves both personal values and specific skills such as compassion and present-centered awareness.

The workshop follows a sequence of experiential exercises. As the process unfolds, our habitual ego-centered, task-oriented agendas are consciously examined and put aside. As we progress, an open and compassionate state of mind emerges within which perception, understanding and compassion are dramatically enhanced.

Understanding and implementing certain ideas are essential for loving presence:

1. For emotional healing, the context in which it happens is important. The right context involves an attentive, compassionate and understanding witness. With that, the process has a good chance of developing and completing in a natural way, guided by the same kind of natural wisdom that guides the healing of a broken bone or a cut finger. This means having a witness who knows how to develop and sustain loving presence.
2. Loving presence is a state of mind and a way of being. It is learnable. This is the central idea around which this workshop is designed.
3. Only three things need to be learned: the main task is to find something in the other person that lifts your spirits, that makes you feel loving and to make that a priority over any other agenda. Secondly, stay with present experience. Lastly, be patient and follow the process – don't lead it or try to make something happen.
4. Since our habitual ways of relating if we are therapists or helping professionals may be motivated by agendas different from loving presence, we want to become aware of just what those agendas are. We may need to drop some of them entirely and so we need to begin with a study of the self.
5. A person in loving presence is attempting to influence the therapeutic process by setting the context, not by directly controlling the content. The influence is subtle and there is surely power in that subtlety. That's the intention here – to use the power of presence to evoke healing. This is an indirect approach, non-controlling and much less active than more directive approaches. Being less task-oriented allows for a more open, present and relaxed state of mind which we call *spacious mind*.
6. This spacious state is quieter, more receptive and sensitive so that perception and understanding are enhanced. Our search for inspiration is made easier.
7. The outer signs of our state of mind, the signs of appreciation, patience, compassion and understanding that are reflected in our facial expressions, posture and tone of voice can all be sensed or seen by the other. This is what prompts something in them to unfold the healing process. This is the context that healing has been waiting for. As the healing process unfolds, we are even more deeply inspired; we can find even more to feel loving towards.
8. In this way, a positive reinforcement cycle is established. Each person is inspired by the other. Loving presence evokes the healing process and that brings up deeply felt emotions and an honest expression of them. This is the cycle of loving presence.

9. The workshop teaches the skills and understanding that create and sustain this cycle. We learn the tools and the state of mind called loving presence.

There are five areas of study covered in this workshop:

1. **Mindfulness and Self Study:** This segment focuses on creating a mindful state of consciousness, studying it in ourselves and others and using it to study our habits of being with others. This is the groundwork of Hakomi.
2. **Spacious Mind:** In this segment, we celebrate mystery and the sense of a larger self. An open state of mind results from dropping our addiction to having answers and agendas. We explore how it feels to drop those burdens and to embrace uncertainty in a calm and open manner.
3. **Seeing Through** (or what we might call “perceptual wisdom”): We use mindfulness and spaciousness to explore issues around seeing and being seen. We focus on seeing through to the core material that organizes every experience. We use mindfulness to explore issues around listening and being listened to. We learn about bringing mindfulness, spaciousness and intuition to close relationships.
4. **Spiritual Nourishment:** This segment is about the key to loving presence - finding inspiration and spiritual nourishment through being with another person. First, we “prime the pump” by recalling and and sharing peak experiences we have had, perhaps about special people who have been an inspiration or a blessing in our lives, or experiences which have changed us in a truly positive way. Then we practise being with others and listening and searching specifically for something inspiring or spiritually nourishing about each person. Upon finding it, we very naturally and effortlessly begin to feel more loving and to return warmth and unbroken kind attention.
5. **Loving Presence:** Now we practise loving presence. We have practised the steps necessary to relate to others from a place of love, acceptance and understanding. Finally, now, we practise a kind of intimacy where two or more people are enveloped in offering and receiving loving presence with each other.

Being and Being With

“All real living is meeting.”

Martin Buber

We all organize in unconscious and habitual ways to be with others. These ways may be different depending on the context. We want to practice studying the differences in who we are when we go from being alone to being with another person. We want to discover the habits that govern this change, because some of these habits make it difficult for us to cultivate a state of loving presence. By becoming more aware, we can begin to put aside what doesn't serve. T.S. Elliot, in his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, has the phrase: *“prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet”*.

Being human is all about meeting. How can we learn to meet in more loving ways? Why don't we, if we can? What are we doing instead? What face, in an unconscious second, do we tend to prepare? That's what we're asking in this practice.

Living beings like ourselves have a variety of identity functions. In fact, all self-organizing systems have such functions. For living organisms, it's DNA. For corporations, it might be vision statements. For personalities, it's more complicated. We have a self, but we also have many sub-selves, or parts, many ways we organize depending on the context. These sub-selves can be quite different. We might be sweet and loving with some members of our family but not others. We might be easygoing with friends but aggressive and harsh at work. So, who we are when we meet someone, how we organize to be with others, is something we can study. If we want to be more loving and present, we have to look at some of our habits and beliefs around being with others.

Over the centuries, there's been a lot of discussion about what it is to be or to have a self. Recently, neurologists have found structures in the brain that mediate (1) the sense of a personal, physical boundary and (2) the flow of time. They talk about this as being related to a person's sense of a separate self and to an altered state of consciousness that one enters during religious experiences.

Similar altered states happen in therapy. Time slows down or disappears completely. Experiences occur which are not planned or expected, seeming to just happen. Sub-selves or "parts" emerge and are able to interact while one's core self - or what Internal Family Systems creator Richard Schwartz simply calls the Self - is also present.

Such multiple states of mind can be very productive in therapy. A common one is a vulnerable or "child" state, where there is a clear experience of being in another place, at a much earlier time, that is simultaneously present with the familiar, here and now, adult state. Such states make changes possible in the systems that create and organize the sub-selves and in the most direct and effective way.

To relate to such states effectively, it is most helpful if the therapist's state of mind is one of loving presence. Loving presence is itself a state where self, time and place lose much of their importance. It is not a state that is relevant only for therapists or helping professionals. It is an essential state for anyone who is wanting to be more consciously open-hearted and truly present in any relationship.

Be what you are: intelligence and love in action.
Nisargadatta Maharaj

Workshop #1: The Practice of Loving Presence

Suggested practices for Teachers:

1. **Introduction exercise** to create safety and connection
2. **Leaning Forward and Back**
3. **Being With**
4. **A Larger Self**
5. **Do Not Decide**
6. **Priming the Pump**
7. **Search for Inspiration or Non-egocentric Nourishment**
8. **Loving Presence Practice**

Ex. 1 Introductions

Some of the options are:

- to have people say their names into the group and hear the group say their names back to them. The invitation is to notice what happens. Then share briefly in pairs.
- Have people in pairs take a few minutes to find out what they have in common...
- In pairs or small groups, have people introduce themselves and tell a little bit about what brought them to Hakomi. Or you might have them pair up, share with their partner, and then have their partner introduce them to the group and vice versa.
- Introduce a simple guided mindfulness and example of a nourishing statement like "you're perfectly welcome here". Have them share briefly in pairs and then in the large group.

Ex. 2 Leaning Forward and Back

- Have people work in pairs.
- Each person takes a turn studying reactions so it is important to set up mindfulness and create a signal system when the person is ready to self study.
- When the person self studying is ready, they open their eyes and their partner will lean forward just a little. Make it a subtle movement.
- Second experiment: when the person self studying is ready, they open their eyes as a signal for their partner to lean back, just a little way back from neutral.
- Partners discuss their reactions to these two experiments.
- Change roles and repeat.

Ex. 3 Being With (Part 1)

Our life experience has taught us that there is a way to be with another person, partly modelled by parents and other family members and partly learned from the reactions of others. Some of how we're organized to be with others came from our need to feel safe and our decisions and ideas about what that required. Some of it came from a natural desire for approval, for a sense of belonging and acceptance, for love. We have made decisions about who we need to be and those decisions are now mostly outside awareness.

Our unconscious ideas and assumptions about who we need to be, with and for others, has created a whole set of habits and patterns that change our body, our face, and our thinking when we are in relationship. As therapists and helpers, we want to know what these habits are, so that we can put aside any that are unnecessary, or even a hindrance to being fully present with another person and so that we can introduce more effective ones where necessary.

The essential idea: We have habits of thought, mood and bodily organization that change when we are with another person. The more conscious we become of habitual patterns, the more possibilities for change become available to us.

Instructions: Here's how to describe the practice:

- Sit in pairs facing each other, each person has their eyes closed to begin with and you try to get into a very deep meditative space - just get into this deep space where you can feel very open and comfortable, sensitive and vulnerable.
- When you're comfortable and quiet inside then you open your eyes and look at your partner.
- Your partner's eyes may be open or closed. Sometimes you both have your eyes either open or closed. Sometimes one of you is looking at the other.
- You just try to stay open and somehow take in your partner; you have to let that being in front of you come into you somehow.
- If you feel like you want to observe something that's happening or to get centered, just close your eyes again and be inside for a few moments.
- Study your experience. What's going on in you? What triggered your reaction or discomfort? What ideas might be behind that discomfort?
- After studying your experience as long as you like, get calm and centered again and open your eyes.
- Repeat this cycle as many times as you like.

Ex. 4 A Larger Self:

Here's a poem, by the ancient Chinese poet, Lao Tzu.

*Once upon a time
a man whose ax was missing
suspected his neighbors' son.

The boy walked like a thief,
looked like a thief,
and spoke like a thief.

But the man found his ax
while he was digging in the valley,
and the next time

he saw his neighbor's son,
the boy walked, looked, and spoke
like any other child.*

You could tell that story and then describe the practice this way... in the large group, ask everyone to look around and simply notice impressions and their own experience for a minute. Then ask them to close their eyes and imagine something like this: consider the possibility that you learned that everyone in the group has already, or sometime in their life will save another's life. With that thought in mind, now take another look around... what impressions do you get? What is your experience? How is it different? Close eyes again and just be with that experience for a bit longer. Then let that go and imagine this: you have just learned that everyone here has written a book about to be published... now take a look with that idea in mind... notice impressions. What is your experience? Finally, imagine, with your eyes closed, that this is actually a kindergarten class and when you look around you will see a group of five-year olds: take a look... notice impressions... your experience... Again, close eyes and be with that for a minute. Reflect on all the different impressions you've had... what different qualities did you see each time? What fantasies or ideas showed up? How did your experience change with different impressions? Now take a look around once more. Sit in pairs or small groups and share about your experience.

(Ron first used this practice by inviting the group to close their eyes and to imagine that everyone was a Nobel Prize nominee, and then to take a look around and notice impressions.)

Ex. 5 Do Not Decide

*"To arrive at the simplest truth, as Newton knew and practiced, requires years of contemplation.
Not activity. Not reading. Not talking.
Simply bearing in mind what it is one needs to know."
from Laws of Form by G. Spencer Brown (1969)*

Essential Idea: Reactions take only a second or two. In that time, we get all the information we need for recognition and an unconscious categorization – good, bad, interesting, not interesting, safe, dangerous. When we intend to listen to another in a more neutral state, neither judging, deciding or problem solving, we are more open to different ways of seeing and understanding the other. This creates a space where the others be more truly themselves.

Instructions:

- In pairs or small groups, one person speaks or just sits...
- the others pay attention to the person but *don't decide anything about her or him*.
- Do not label or categorize the person...
- If some part of you decides something about this person, notice it, let it pass and return to just paying attention without deciding...
- mostly this is an opportunity to discover some of our assumptions and how many “decisions” we tend to make unconsciously when with others. Talk about this with your partners after everyone has had a turn.

Ex. 6 Priming the Pump

The essential idea: When you start a pump, if it's full of air, it can't draw water, so you have to pour water in it - that's called priming the pump. To set the mood for spiritual nourishment, we remember and speak about someone who has been special to us in our lives, or moments of peak experiences that have felt life changing. As we listen to each other share about someone or something that has been meaningful and positive in this way, we can feel a special energy being created in a very natural way.

Instructions:

- Sit together in small groups of three or four.
- Share one at a time about a significant person who has been a blessing in your life. (Or people could be invited to speak about an experience that felt spiritually nourishing.)
- As listeners, don't comment or ask questions. Simply take in the sharing as an experience of nourishment for you. After everyone has shared, speak about the experience of listening and sharing this way. Don't comment on the content but rather talk about what was generated, individually and in the group, by this kind of sharing.

Ex. 7 Search for Inspiration or Non-Egocentric Nourishment

The essential idea: We can find inspiration or nourishment of a spiritual kind in almost every person we are with if we remember to look.

*Nothing else matters half so much,
To reassure one another,
To answer each other.*

*Everyone has inside himself,
- what shall I call it?
A piece of good news.
-- Ugo Betti*

When we step aside from some of the habitual preoccupations and reactions of the mind, such as the tendency to analyze, to criticize, or to take action, we discover that we can find nourishment of a spiritual kind in almost every person we are with. It takes a certain intention and way of seeing, combined with a relaxed openness and willingness to be inspired.

Instructions:

- Have people work in small groups of 3 or 4.
- Each person has a turn to speak.
- One person talks about something significant in their life.
- Listeners follow the story, but that's secondary. Your main job is to stay available for those aspects of the person that are inspiring or about the situation that feel nourishing, maybe how beautiful the storyteller looks or sounds or how wonderful it is to be with someone in such an intimate situation. It could start simply with the enjoyment of connection and discovery. It could be seeing the vulnerability or being touched by the suffering of the other.
- Search for something universal, for grace and beauty, for some essential good you can see in this person and see if there's some way you can start to let that fill you up. Open your heart and take them in.
- Listen to the person without making any interventions. It's not a conversation.
- Do this as long as feels right and then discuss it.

Ex. 8 Loving Presence

The essential idea: A cycle of inspiration is possible, where one takes in non-egocentric nourishment and the other unfolds a healing process.

We have found that a beautiful cycle of expanding inspiration is possible between people, where one person's intention is to take in non-egocentric nourishment and the other talks about something important or releases an emotional burden, thus unfolding a personal healing process. Each person contributes to the other's experience. The more the listener feels inspired or touched or nourished in some way, the more the speaker unfolds in deeper and deeper ways. The more the speaker opens up, the more honoured and nourished the listener feels.

Instructions:

- Work in small groups.
- One person talks about an emotionally powerful event in his or her life.
- The listeners follow the story but also stay in touch with all the potential sources of non-egocentric nourishment available in the present moment.
- Whatever sources you find, take them in and let them inspire and nourish and enrich you as you listen!
- Listen without making any interventions. Simply be in loving presence!

- Open your hearts, pay close attention, listen with warmth and without judgment
- You have no responsibilities beyond your own nourishment.
- The person speaking: look at your listeners! Study how you are affected by these loving people listening to you. Keep looking!
- After each speaker, listeners could share what inspired them, especially about the embodied experience of being nourished. The talker also reports the experience they had.

Finally, responding in Loving Presence: At this stage you are co-creating emotionally nourishing experiences for each other depending on the nature of the relationship and the particular setting you are in.

*When you move more and more
into that love center
the ache of being two,
of feeling separation,
dissolves...
(Rumi)*

I Know the Way You Can Get
by Sham-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz

I know the way you can get When you
have not had a drink of Love:

Your face hardens, Your sweet
muscles cramp. Children become
concerned
About a strange look that appears in your eyes Which
even begins to worry your own mirror And nose.

Squirrels and birds sense your sadness And call
an important conference in a tall tree.
They decide which secret code to chant To help
your mind and soul.

Even angels fear that brand of madness That
arrays itself against the world
And throws sharp stones and spears into The
innocent
And into one's self.

O I know the way you can get
If you have not been out drinking Love:

You might rip apart
Every sentence your friends and teachers say, Looking
for hidden clauses.
You might weigh every word on a scale Like a
dead fish.

You might pull out a ruler to measure From every
angle in your darkness
The beautiful dimensions of a heart you once Trusted.

I know the way you can get
If you have not had a drink from Love's Hands.

That is why all the Great Ones speak of The vital
need
To keep Remembering God,
So you will come to know and see Him As
being so Playful
And Wanting Just
Wanting to help.

That is why Hafiz says: Bring
your cup near me!
For I am a Sweet Old Vagabond With an
Infinite Leaking Barrel Of Light and
Laughter and Truth
That the Beloved has tied to my back.

Dear one,
Indeed, please bring your heart near me.
For all I care about
Is quenching your thirst for freedom! All a
Sane man can ever care about Is giving
Love!