

Selections from the Readings in The Hakomi Method

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The Importance of Experience in Hakomi

In his book *Six Easy Pieces*, Nobel physicist Richard Feynman describes the one statement that would carry the maximum information about material reality. He says, “If, in some cataclysm, all of scientific knowledge were to be destroyed, and only one sentence passed onto the next generations of creatures, what statement would contain the most information in the fewest words?” He believes it would be this: “All things are made of atoms—little particles that move around in perpetual motion, attracting each other when they are a little distance apart, but repelling upon being squeezed into one another.” Feynman goes on to show that from this statement alone, one can derive pressure, temperature and many other physical properties.

Following his lead, we can ask ourselves if there is such a statement for the field of psychotherapy. Is there something as basic as this for psychology? I think a good candidate would be something like this: “All experience is organized—by the nervous systems we were born with and the habits our history has left us with.”

Experiences are the result of a lot of organization. The nervous system is unimaginably complex. The conscious experience that emerges from that complexity is only a small part of what’s going on. Many different influences are at work. Momentary perceptions, habits from our earliest years, themselves the results of experiences, convictions, memories, intentions, attitudes, all these are parts of every moment of experience. All these sources of information combine, drawn together as atoms are drawn together into molecules. These complex, interactive layers of organization finally create who we are, our very own virtual realities. All this exerts a powerful influence on what we can experience in any given situation. In a circular and stable way, experience creates habits which in turn limit and shape new experiences. This central position of experience in the making of who we are makes it the natural focus of psychotherapy.

Fifty different people will experience a beautiful morning sunrise fifty different ways. Some will stop and enjoy it; some will hardly notice it. One or two may be moved by it. In a way, it’s the same sunrise, still none experience it in exactly the same way. Each of us continuously shapes his world, not consciously, but by habit. Our individual experiences are the result of this shaping. About sunrises, we need not be especially concerned that this is so. However, how we experience each other, how we relate, who we are with and for each other is important. It may be the most important thing of all. It determines the quality and meaning of our lives and any happiness we might find in them.

The key organizers of experience, the creators of our virtual realities are just habits. Like all habits, they operate mostly outside of awareness. Some are so old and ingrained, they are difficult to bring into awareness. Because of that, they can’t be thought about or challenged. They are unquestioned certainties. They’re like the layout of rooms in a house one has lived in all one’s life. The rooms are where they’ve always been. You don’t think about how to get from



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one to the other. You just do it. You turn left and there's the kitchen. Anger can be like that for some people. The world is bad or wrong or irritating. That attitude is just there all the time. It isn't questioned.

Anger like that is a "reality" worth challenging. Anger like that causes a lot of suffering. It can be changed. It is experience being organized. The habits around that organizing can be made conscious. The implicit reality they create can be realized and transformed. In the final analysis, the task of psychotherapy is to change the organizers of experience. For that work, experience itself is the doorway.