

Selections from the Readings in The Hakomi Method

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THEORIES OF HOW THE BRAIN WORKS – THE OSAKA TALK

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The ultimate goal of therapy is the same as that of the spiritual path, freedom from unnecessary suffering. Most suffering is unnecessary. We reach that goal through our commitment to self-study and authenticity. By studying ourselves, we can discover the inner structures of the mind that cause our suffering.

Underlying Models

Every mind has an inner structure which operates habitually. It's a structure that is learned through repeated experiences. It's a structure built around memories, beliefs, early decisions and habits, most of which exist outside of awareness. It determines all our actions. Dr. Suzuki, who teaches music to children, says that every Japanese child learns Japanese. They all speak Japanese. None of us has to think about how to form a sentence in our native language. We do that with habits we can't even remember learning. We have many inner structures like that. Some people's minds are habitually focused at a deep level on material things; others, on relationship; others on sex. If you are a victim of trauma, your mind has been distorted by that experience. These inner structures control us, which is why we must bring them into the light of awareness.

One of the difficulties we have when we try to understand ourselves is that we habitually keep our awareness away from inner structures in order to deal with surface things. Often we automatically distance ourselves from our own negative emotions, like pain, fear, and anger. There are people who have an angry attitude their whole lives, others are afraid or depressed or ashamed their whole lives. Ideas people have about themselves control them without their being aware of how or why. Ideas cause suffering; ideas like, "I'm a bad person," "I'll never get what I want," "I'm stupid," "Nobody loves me," "Nobody could love me." You only have to stand on any busy street corner to see this. As the faces go by, you will see one that says, "I am in pain." Another that says, "I'm lost." You see disappointment. Bitterness. One face after another talks about how the person wearing that face is captured and held in an emotional prison.

You can also look for someone who is peaceful, somebody who is happy. They're hard to find. Fixed attitudes and ideas keep us from the nourishing feelings - happiness, love, peace, acceptance, generosity, tenderness. They keep us from feeling these higher emotions. They keep us enslaved. We run from the painful emotions that control us only to find that we've been running in place. Our inner world is the very ground we're running on.

Those are the difficulties that we have when we try to study ourselves – when we try to determine what kind of an inner world we were captured by and got lost in.

Hakomi is one method for overcoming those difficulties. It's a method for helping people study themselves. You don't have to be helped by a therapist. You can be helped by a teacher or a friend. You can be helped by anyone that knows how to help. When we train therapists, we train them to be very good at this method. But even a little bit of this knowledge will make you helpful, especially with your own suffering.

Here is how we help people study themselves. First, we focus on present experience. Present experience is a very clear example of how we organize our experience. Suppose five people walk out of a building and see the sky—it's a beautiful sky. They could easily have five different experiences. One person might completely ignore it. Another person might get very sad about all the things he's missed in life. Another person might get very happy about it. It's the same morning. Why are they having different experiences? They each have different worlds. Their inner world determines what experiences they're going to have. Present experience, therefore, is as much an expression of that inner world, as it is the sky it's looking at. So, we focus on present experience in order to help the client turn inward.

The typical client will come in and want to talk about himself. He'll talk about what happened when he was a child, all the problems he has or what they were in the past. Clients are not usually focused on present experience. Someone could say sadly, "I had a very tough time when I was a child." She's talking about her past, but in the present, she's experiencing sadness. Another person could say angrily, "I had a very tough time when I was a child." She's experiencing anger. Only rarely does the content tell you what the person is experiencing at the moment. For that, you must watch and listen to things other than the content of the conversation. When it's appropriate, you turn the client's attention towards their present experience. If you're going to discover your inner world, you must go through this doorway called "present experience." That's what meditation is all about.

Mindfulness

One characteristic of the method that makes it unique is its use of mindfulness. Mindfulness is a special state of mind we use when studying ourselves. Mindfulness is a state where you are relatively quiet, your attention is turned inward and you are observing your own experience with a minimum of interference. You don't try to control your experience; you simply allow it to happen and you observe it. This is not as easy as it sounds. But, if you can do that, then you can discover little pieces of your inner structure. To help you discover your inner world, the Hakomi therapist suggests doing little experiments which the client does while in mindfulness.

For example, I was lecturing once in Vienna to several hundred people. To demonstrate this method, I asked them to become quiet and turn inward (mindfulness) and study their experiences when I said to them, "You're a good person." The results were these: About forty percent of the group felt sadness. Another twenty-five percent felt relief. A few people felt happy. Some noticed that their chests felt warmer and more open. Some had a thought or heard an inner voice which said things like, "No! I'm not!" So you see, one little experiment showed something about people's inner structures. A simple experiment in mindfulness can do that.

If we help a client stay with her sadness, or listen to the voice she heard, or to just stay with the



experience that the experiment evoked, memories may appear. When they do, they help the client understand her reactions. They also help the therapist understand the client's inner reality. Evoking reactions through experiments in mindfulness gives us a glimpse of the inner world creating those reactions.

Without mindfulness, it's possible nothing much would be evoked. If you said, "You're a good person" to a person who wasn't in mindfulness, wasn't focused on her own present experience, wasn't allowing and observing without interfering, she might casually reply, "Well, thanks!" If you asked it as a question, "Are you a good person?", you might get an equally casual, emotionless answer. "Yes, I guess so." No sadness. No relief. Without mindfulness and the intention to study oneself, the automatic, conversational mind replies and nothing very informative happens. But, with a little bit of care and relaxed concentration, we just might learn something very important about the inner structure of the mind. That's the power of mindfulness.

Nourishment, Missing Experiences, Changing Early Structures

When something significant is evoked by an experiment in mindfulness, like an emotionally charged memory, the meaning of the experience and its influence on subsequent behavior can be uncovered. The inner structures of the mind—ideas, beliefs, decisions about who one is and what kind of world one lives in—arise to be examined. With this arising comes the opportunity to begin the change process. Almost always, the memories that arise this way—through experiments in mindfulness—are from a time when the client was four to six years old. The inner structures that run our lives were developed in childhood. They are the best that the child could do. She could not reason like an adult. She did not have the experience and understanding she has now. She did not have the support she needed to do things differently. As her memories are being revisited, as her beliefs and emotions rise to the surface, change becomes possible. The present situation is very different. We're there! We can provide the appropriate emotional, mental and spiritual support she needs. We can help her experience what was missing in those early, life-shaping events. If she then has courage and the inclination to try something new, her inner structures will begin to change. They have to because what is happening now, what she's experiencing now, isn't congruent with them.

Loving presence

This kind of helping requires a safe, intimate relationship. To be helpful in this way, the therapist must be in a certain state of mind. The therapist must arrive at a feeling of compassion. He/she must be present, sensitive and thoughtful. We call this state of mind loving presence. It is easy if we're not busy doing something else, like analyzing or pursuing a particular agenda.

Typically, people who enter the Hakomi training believe they are learning to help others solve problems. They're task-oriented. They want to make something happen for the client. As a result, they work too hard. They're too anxious to make things happen. This focus on doing and making things happen tends to draw people away from loving presence. It's true that there are things to do. And we do want things to happen for the client. Being in loving presence makes that much more likely to happen. It is the very heart of the method. If you have a newborn infant and you want her to grow up emotionally healthy and happy, be in loving presence with her. Be loving, present, sensitive, available, patient, kind, and generous. And stay relaxed! Make it joyful



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work! It's natural and easy to be that way with a child. Being that way with clients may take some practice.