

## THE PROCESS AS THREE PHASES

*“To heal is to be whole again.” Ron Kurtz*

Ron Kurtz wrote a section in his Hakomi Training Handbook called “The Process as Three Phases.” Although his article is in point form, it contains an outline of the process of practicing Hakomi that is very important for both students and practitioners to understand. As a trainer, I use Ron’s description of the Three Phases to structure some of my teaching and to help my students understand how to locate themselves in the process of learning a complete Hakomi session.

This paper is intended to make Ron’s article more known and to expand on the point form format. Any errors are my own. I will use Ron’s headings as a guide to the reader and will quote him frequently.

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*“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.”*



## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THREE PHASES

Ron describes three distinct phases in a full Hakomi session: Preparation, Assisted Self Study and Mental-Emotional Healing Process. He writes, “All three phases operate within a context characterized by an embodiment within a set of well-defined Principles.” For a complete discussion of those principles, please refer to the document called Loving Presence and the Hakomi Principles.

As a practitioner of Hakomi, it is helpful to be able to locate yourself in the three phases because each phase has its own characteristics and techniques and you can become more confident in your work if you understand the purpose and techniques of each phase.

The first phase, Preparation, involves many facets including managing your own state of mind as a practitioner, tracking and contact skills, developing safety and relationship; however, it does not involve experiments. As a learner of the method, you can rest in the first phase without needing to experiment or without jumping into experimentation too quickly. You can learn to trust this phase and get a feel for when the client is ready for transition into the second phase. The first phase is very important but not experimental. The second phase, Assisted Self Study, is fully experimental and one of its characteristics that a practitioner needs to be comfortable with is being in the unknown, not knowing what is coming next. It requires an experimental mindset without forcing the client’s experience, an adherence to non-violence and skillful means of following the adaptive unconscious. The third phase, Mental-emotional Healing Process, begins when you are clear that you are working with a belief structure and your work becomes more focused. This phase of the work contains experiments but the therapist is working with a particular structure that has arisen and is challenging that structure by offering potential nourishment and the missing experience.

## A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EACH PHASE

### PHASE: PREPARATION PHASE

Ron separates the first phase into two parts, loving presence and developing a healing relationship. Loving presence is “highly dependent on your own state of mind skills” and it is a practice. Much needs to be said about this topic and Donna Martin has published a book on Loving Presence. In studying Hakomi, loving presence exercises are the first practices that a student might encounter in trainings, it is one of the basic exercises that is used as a fundamental practice. This essential Hakomi practice emerges from the wisdom traditions which inform our work – the search for inspiration, the expression of appreciation, the opening of the heart to love and compassion – these are some of the basic skills upon which Hakomi rests. As we sit in loving presence, we are also tracking for signs of a person’s present moment experience. When I am teaching students, I ask them if they have ever been in the present of a dead person. Many have. I ask them to remember how much is absent when a person dies, how still and quiet they are, how the essence that imbued them with life is gone, dramatically gone. In contrast to the state of death, we are in the face of living beings who are in motion all the time, they are alive and uniquely so. I ask students to notice signs of life...there are many, too many to name but we



learn to choose some of those signs of life and name them with short contact statements. These tracking and contacting skills are essential and in the forefront in the first phase of Hakomi and they are used throughout the process. In addition to noticing signs of present moment experience, Ron instructs us to “make initial observations of the person’s qualities,” more enduring aspects of a person’s being that he named as indicators in his later writings. The tracking of indicators is done internally without the client’s awareness – it is useful information to gather before setting off into the unknown of the second phase.

The second part of the Preparation Phase is development of a healing relationship which requires a few specific skills. A Hakomi practitioner must have good relational skills. “These are skills that build and maintain a strong connection with people. Through your behavior and a few short, accurate, non-disruptive contact statements, you show that you are aware of what the other person is presently experiencing. Getting and staying in contact is the primary skill for connecting and staying connected. It creates the sense in others that you are with them, aware of their feelings and present experiences. It makes you able to anticipate their needs and work to provide help.” Ron is specific about these connecting skills in his article called “The Six Skill Sets.”

As well as relational skills, a Hakomi practitioner needs to understand clearly that the one important relationship in a session is between your adaptive unconscious and that of the client. It is a dance, a deep dance between your noncognitive realms and the deeper realms of your client. You must learn to trust the process, to trust in the capacity for healing in your client, for the natural unfolding of that healing process and allow yourself into the flow of it all. Ron writes, “This phase requires relating to the adaptive unconscious, looking for signs of cooperation and non-cooperation, making adjustments to the person’s unconscious needs.” It is not in the client’s best interests to proceed into the experimental phase of the process if the adaptive unconscious is not in agreement. Once you detect signs of cooperation with the adaptive unconscious, Ron suggests that you proceed. Knowing what to do next is of course dependent on the silent tracking which you were doing in phase one and tracking for indicators.

## PHASE TWO: ASSISTED SELF-STUDY

Ron outlines six ideas in phase two: a search for indicators, development of hypotheses, development of experiments, working with outcomes of experiments (get the data, he used to say), arising of insight in the client and finally the spontaneous movement into the third phase of mental and emotional healing. Let’s examine each of these facets of the second phase.

The search of indicators begins in the first phase and continues in the second phase. You do need to make observations and have ideas for experiments before starting the second phase because one hallmark of phase two is its experimental nature. In the second phase, the client is now actively self-studying and the therapist needs to have a good idea of what to study. In Ron’s final years, he taught his students to search for indicators as a key skill in practicing Hakomi. He did not want to be prescriptive about the meanings of indicators: he encouraged students to be creative, to see what was there and to imagine what it might mean. He has written about indicators and offered a list of indicators, but he did not encourage his students to use lists. He



wanted people to just look and see what was there, what was enduring and evident in posture, facial expressions, tone of voice, pacing, gestures, qualities and style.

When I am teaching, I use a literary metaphor to help explain indicators. One of the enduring metaphors in story is the hidden door, the door in the garden wall that cannot be seen, the door that will only be seen or be opened with patience and knowledge and even perhaps some magic. Indicators are like hidden doors – you need to practice and be patient to see them; you need deep patience and safety for the door to open. When the door opens, it is like magic, the healing unfolds in a natural way.

Once you observe an indicator, Ron suggests that you “develop an hypothesis about the person’s models of self and world.” He elaborates this idea in “The Six Skill Sets” as “modeling skills.”

He says, “The bridge between observation and experiment is the ability to create models of the laws governing the behavior you’re observing. We could call these skills modeling skills. This is the method of science. Richard Feynman, the Nobel physicist, tells us the three steps of science are: make a guess, calculate the implications of your guess, and test your guess on the basis of your calculations. ... We use our ability of observe behavior, especially indicators and our knowledge of indicators, to make guesses about the person’s beliefs and models of self and the world. Then we test our guesses by doing experiments.... The general idea of modeling is this: we need to make guesses about what beliefs (models) are organizing the client’s behavior and we need to do that by observing that behavior.”

The next step is to “develop and do an experiment with the indicator you’ve chosen to work with. These experiments are done with the person in a state of mindfulness in order to bring the actions of the adaptive unconscious into awareness. The goals of such experiments are two-fold: bringing the person’s unconscious models into consciousness and initiating phase three, Mental-Emotional Healing. Experiments can be attempts to offer a kind of mental-emotional nourishment that your hypothesis predicts the person will either have difficulty accepting or will experience as very nourishing. The experiment can be a way of working with an indicator for which we have no hypothesis.”

Once you have done an experiment with an indicator, you need to get the data, the result of the experiment. You can get information about the outcome of your experiment either by observing it or by getting a verbal report from the person. Given the outcome of the experiment, you have a choice of what to do next. You can refine or reject your original hypothesis about the person’s models of the world. You can do another experiment based on the outcome of the previous one. The iterative nature of the second phase, experiment, data, new experiment, refining of hypotheses, continues until there is some clarity about the client’s belief systems.

Clarity comes because “the person’s models of self and the world become conscious and clear to him/her or the process moves spontaneously into the healing phase.” This is a point in the phrasing of Hakomi that some students will miss because they are not clear about identifying models of the world or belief structures. Once this point of clarity or focus is reached, we move into the third phase.



### PHASE THREE: THE HEALING PHASE

This phase requires support for healing skills. The therapist must be skilled in supporting spontaneous management behaviors, in allowing time for the client's internal processing which is often in silence, in following those spontaneous behaviors, in providing comfort and holding when needed and with permission, and creating and offering missing experiences.

This phase is marked by emotional expression, strong beliefs, early memories and insight. The behavior that is displayed is controlled by the adaptive unconscious and sometimes the unconscious hijacks the client. The behavior of the adaptive unconscious is nonconscious, fast, unintentional uncontrollable and effortless. These behaviors are and were adaptive and usually learned early or under extreme conditions.

“During the third phase, the primary tasks for the practitioner are supporting the person's spontaneous management behaviors. Examples of spontaneous behaviors are changes in posture such as closing up or dropping the head, spontaneous protective thoughts, tightening certain muscles such as the shoulders, chest and stomach, and holding the breath. When these behaviors arise, we need to provide signals of safety and caring such as gentle touch, being calm, softening the voice and having a natural sympathetic facial expression, providing tissues, providing physical support when needed and accepted.

The therapist during this tender phase must contain the unfolding process by taking charge and directing the person's behavior where necessary. We need to learn to follow up on the person's spontaneous images, memories, impulses and ideas as if these were signals from the person's adaptive unconscious as to where the process wants to go.

We need to recognize periods when the person needs you to be silent by watching for signs in the face that the person is doing internal work, waiting while the person has his/her eyes closed, waiting until he/she looks directly at you and speaks before you speak, listening to the person's report about his/her insights, feelings and memories and avoiding interrupting the process by not encouraging conversation. As therapists, we provide physical and verbal comforting and nourishment. We provide the missing experience, the experience that was blocked by the person's adaptations and distorted or unrealistic models of self and the world. We allow the session to come to completion in a natural way when it feels right and when the person signals that he/she feels complete.”