

Why Nourishment in Hakomi?

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In the Hakomi training , we focus a great deal on identifying possibly nourishing experiences and providing them for one another. It is sometimes useful to reflect on why we place so much attention on the nourishment aspect of the work, so the following is a brief summary of why we believe nourishment or comforting is so important.

While the research on early childhood, development is voluminous and can be quite technical; in summary, what all of us need in order to feel secure in our lives and in particular in our relationships with others, is a series of experiences with our primary caregivers that were sensitive, responsive and non-anxious. What this means in our early months (newborn to six months) is that our cries are responded to, our caretakers mostly are correct in their assessment of our problems and they provide the comforting, food, change of diapers, etc. that we need in the moment. As we get older we need for our caregivers to provide safe spaces for us to explore in, and a “home base” for us to return to when the exploration becomes frightening. Each stage of development creates new challenges for a growing human being and for the caregivers who are primarily responsible for his or her care.

Over the course of each particular childhood, our specific caregivers probably did well at some things and not as well at others. There are no perfect childhoods. The challenge is that these less than perfect events (an extreme example being a serious illness than may have required hospitalization) become part of a type of memory called “implicit memory” rather than being recalled consciously (which is “explicit memory”). This implicit memory, while not available to us in our normal consciousness, becomes the basis of deeply held beliefs about what is possible. We adapt our behavior to a great extent based on such powerful unconscious memories. As you can imagine, we all have many of these memories, and an equal number of unconscious beliefs. This is the basis of what Buddhists call “unnecessary suffering”. The initial suffering was necessary – nothing else could be done at the time (such as the hospitalization for a serious illness).

However, when the implicit memories that these events create continue to limit our current possibilities, we find that our capacity to take in the joy, contentment

and love that is available to us keeps us in a state of re-experiencing that original suffering.

So, what can be done about this situation? Is it still possible to have a happy childhood?? While we cannot go back to being small infants or toddlers, there are many ways we can begin to alter these implicit memories and impact the beliefs and limiting strategies that are based on them. Our primary tool for this shift is the practice of self-study using mindfulness. As we begin to practice a kind of noticing without judgement, we can watch and listen to our internal dialogue, bringing many of these beliefs to conscious awareness. Noticing, however, while important, only gets us half-way there. It shows us the patterns that are limiting our lives, but may not give us clues about what else is possible. That is where nourishment comes in.

Recent research has demonstrated that when we recall a memory, bring one of these unconscious and painful events back into awareness, it then goes back into memory storage WITH whatever events take place during the retrieval of the memory. So, if, when you retrieve a memory about not being attended to, you ARE attended to in the present, the memory is altered to include the nourishing experience. In Hakomi we call this a "missing experience".

Think of all of this as a process of unraveling knots – old and invisible knots that nonetheless have a way of pulling the fabric of your everyday life out of shape. Each time you find a new belief and begin to experiment with different ways of experiencing new possibilities, you loosen the knot a little. Each time you retrieve a memory and have a "missing experience" you loosen the knot even more. Over time the whole knot comes apart and that area of your life has more space to it, more freedom, more opportunity for experiencing the fullness that is available to you in the here and now. Then you notice a new knot. While there may be an endless supply of knots, the effect of the unraveling is cumulative. In other words, each knot that is unraveled creates more space, more freedom, more of a sense of what is possible, and more momentum. Each time you begin to shift a memory from the past, you create more of a possibility for nourishment in the present.

Another way to hold this is to realize that nourishment is, in fact, your birthright. We were born with an infinite sensitivity for the kind of nourishment that is available in loving and secure relationships. We are wired to find and/or create

these kinds of relationships. Once we begin to shift the more painful memories that hold the knots, we find that we can have these kinds of relationships with our work, with our world, with all living creatures. This work is not just for us. As we unravel our own knots, we are more able to BE with others, without having a particular agenda for them (or needing them to be a particular way). As you can imagine, this has a ripple effect – in our families, in our communities. So – enjoy the process – give yourself the gift of nourishment – for all of us.