

Hakomi Accessing

The Mindful Exploration of Present Experience Towards The Core Organization of Experience

By Jon Eisman, Sr. Hakomi Trainer

From an existential point of view, all we have are our experiences – the moment to moment flow of perceptions and internal events. If you consider any aspect or event in your life, your relationship to it is generated and defined by the fact that you are having that experience. Even externally sourced experiences – the voice of another, the wind rustling the leaves – are embraced by you through your own internal experiences. Whether you are talking to someone or to yourself, if you are feeling his love for you or your love for him, if she is touching you or you are imagining touching her, if you believe the sun will rise tomorrow, if you are embodied in the underlying silence of everything, those moments are all experiences, and collectively determine in full the content of your present life.

It follows, then, that the quality of your life is determined by the kind and quality of experiences you are having. When clients come to us, they are basically saying, "I am having a certain kind of experience and I'd prefer to have a different one."

The power of Hakomi as a method of therapy is rooted in the clear understanding that the client's well-being and satisfaction are generated by the kind and quality of experiences he or she is having. To assist clients, then, we need to engage their experiences, to sort which are resources and which are causing distress, to discover the source of those experiences, and then to cultivate in them the ability to generate consistently a new set of preferred experiences.

To do this, clients need to identify their experiences as they happen, to immerse in the experiences fully enough to grasp their nuances, to follow the experiences back to their unconscious origins, and then to reorganize their core structure so as to create a different source of new and preferred experiences. We call this process of studying present experience in order to embrace and transform their origins ACCESSING. We study present experience, in order to discover and transform – to access – the *organizers* of experience.

In doing so, a session typically flows from a client's ordinary, verbal presentation of their concerns to a deep, state-altered exploration of their core unconscious structures. On the one hand, we are moving "down" from ordinary conversational consciousness, marked by habit and external focus, into extraordinary self-reflective states, including mindfulness and regressed formative states like Child Consciousness. On the other hand, we are allowing hidden, unconsciously held information to "rise up" into everyday awareness. Like side by side Up and Down escalators, accessing allows this dual and simultaneous flow of states and core information: unconscious information is made conscious, habitual states yield to unrestricted ones.

All accessing in Hakomi follows a basic 4-Step formula:

1. contact experience
2. assure mindfulness is present
3. immerse fully in the experience
4. study the nuances of the experience and/or allow the experience to summon other related experiences

The information or summoned experience from 4th step then becomes the subject of the next 1st step contact statement, and the sequence repeats. Each round reveals wider and deeper elements of the clients experiential system, all the way down, eventually, to the core organizing material from which the experiences arise.

And while we may, for the sake of conceptual simplicity, describe the process in metaphoric terms of up and down, in fact it is essential to hold the more accurate perspective that the client's organization is actually holographic. More an interactive sphere than a ladder, our psychological/neural/somatic/emotional Selves are held and therefore accessed using these four steps in a serpentine meander through an otherwise subconscious labyrinth.

Let's clarify each step.

1st Step: Contact Experience

Described previously, contacting during accessing has three main purposes. First, we want to demonstrate to the client that we understand they are having their current experience. Such demonstration provides both acknowledgment and acceptance. *So you tighten your shoulders as you say that...* let's the client know both that we grasp that this is happening, and, by virtue of our embracing tone, that we are interested in and not judging it.

Secondly, contacting the client's present experience spotlights the experience, and focuses awareness on this particular experiential location. By naming the tight shoulders, it supports the client tuning in more deeply on the nuances of that experience.

And thirdly, we can use a contact statement to steer the flow of the session in some seemingly useful direction. There may be several events occurring, with some seeming more closely aligned with the client's present or longed-for need, and we may work more efficiently by directing the client towards some less aware or more charged aspect of their world. For example, the client may be talking about and focused on a complaint about his or her relationship, and we notice that the shoulders are tightening. By contacting the shoulders, we steer the client away from the exclusivity of their verbal focus to include a somatic element they may not otherwise have noticed.

Even more strategically, we may steer the flow of the session by contacting some element we as clinicians can assume or guess about. *There's probably something familiar about this tension*, we might offer, or, guessing at the underlying meaning of their story, lead the client towards their deeper need by stating, *So what you really want is to be respected...* Like a good tennis player placing the ball in a particular part of the court, a skilled therapist can use contact to direct the session and the client's awareness towards deeper or more inclusive aspects of their process.

Of course, as always in Hakomi, we are careful to track diligently as to the impact of our attempts to suggest and steer. We are hoping our attempt at guidance flips on some light bulb of awareness or curiosity in the client, but we are fully prepared to back off and investigate if we get hesitant responses to our suggested direction.

Most of the time, more than one kind of experience is present. In the above example, we are tracking both the verbal and the somatic: the complaint story and the tightening

shoulders. We may also be aware of affect (they seem cranky) or breath (shallow and rapid) or facial expression (determination) or any other number of emergent events. As practitioners, any or all of this may be the best to focus on, including umbrella statements, such as the simple, *So there's a lot going on...* As a part of accessing, we need to develop the skill of juggling where the energy seems to be, the complexity of experience, and the need to somehow keep things simple enough so that the client can proceed without distraction.

2nd Step: Assure Mindfulness

As discussed previously, mindfulness is central to Hakomi, which has pioneered its use in psychotherapy for over 35 years. If we are to assist clients to study their experiences, so as to notice the internal sources of those experiences, then awareness will be absolutely essential. When we are accessing, once we have directed and met the client in some present experience, we need to be certain that they are in the proper state of awareness that will allow the careful investigation and revelation of all that is actually happening. Just as it would be fruitless to enter a dark cave without a flashlight, so engaging experience without awareness typically yields only superficial or rote insight into its qualities and origins, and tends to reinforce its habituated nature.

So, as our second step of accessing, we want to be sure the client is sufficiently embodied in the state and skill of mindful self-observation. We do this by tracking for signs of self-attention, verbal quality and content, and a sense of energetic settling (however simultaneously activated the presenting experience may be). If we are not satisfied that mindfulness is present, and sufficiently deep enough to examine experience carefully, it is our job to see to it that the client gets induced fully into mindfulness. There is no point in proceeding towards accessing the core if the client is not able to observe their organization.

This assurance of mindfulness is an ongoing task during accessing. A client may be fully mindful one moment, and then pop out for any number of reasons: they are more comfortable reporting in conversational mode, they got distracted, they became anxious about what they are finding, and so on. So we need to stay diligent about tracking the level of mindfulness present in the client at any moment, and attend to maintaining a suitable depth of awareness as the session proceeds.

3rd Step: Immerse Fully In The Experience

The third step in the accessing formula is to have the client be completely immersed in whatever experience will be pursued and studied. We want them to embody fully the richness and nuance of the experience or experiences that have been contacted. If it is tight shoulders, then we want her entire world at the moment to be anchored by the sensations, movements and details of holding tension in those shoulders. If the client is sad, we want him to feel that grief deeply, purely, thoroughly... We're about to study that field of experience with great care, and so we want the person fully *in* the field, not on the edge, not looking from above, but so fully grounded in that field that every blade of experiential grass, every breeze that shakes that grass, the size and smell and sounds in that field are all immediately available for recognition and investigation. Imagine the difference between trying to describe the taste of chocolate right now, and how much more specific and

nuanced that description would be if you put a piece of chocolate in your mouth and then articulated its specific subtleties while letting it dissolve in there...

The immersion into an experience is achieved by the use of what we call accessing directives. Accessing directives are suggestions and commands that lead a person toward a specific activity, focus or event. *Go ahead and turn your attention towards that sadness; Maybe let yourself really feel how that sadness lingers inside of you; or, Take your time, and just let this sadness be here, let yourself really sink into this feeling...* are all examples of accessing directives.

Because we are directing the client towards an experience they hope to deal with or learn more about, such commands and suggestions are usually met with compliance. They tend not to be felt as violent control of the client's will, because we are actually supporting their own organic wish to do the work. If I hold out a glass of water to a person crawling out of the desert, and say, *Here, drink this!*, they won't reply, *Don't tell me what to do!* because their need and the directive to drink are well aligned. Of course, if I tell a client to do something that is not in their interest, or that feels like a promotion of my agenda as opposed to an interface with theirs, then I will likely get resistance or tense compliance.

One time when I myself was client and exploring my anger, my therapist held out a phone book and told me to tear it apart, to release my bound emotions. It seemed forced and artificial, and I refused. His reply was, *Well, try it anyway...* This sort of commanding feels violent, and does not respect the organicity of the client. We want to use the Unity Principle to contribute to the client's process, but that will only work if our offerings match the client's will.

Immersion in experience is not a familiar construct in our western culture. Our expressions of experience are not typically met with invitations to plunge into and marinate in them. *I'm scared, mommy* is more likely to be met with *Come here and let me hold you*, than it is with, *Oh, that must feel yucky, go ahead and be scared and notice what your body starts to do...* As a result, there is usually a learning curve for practitioners to develop the habit of immersing clients fully into their experiences before invoking the more seemingly glamorous interventions of inquiry and problem solving. *I'm sad* will likely evoke something such as *What are you sad about?* A reasonable question, but, in our framework, much better asked *after* the client has been invited to feel their sadness fully. That way, the client will be responding from full access to the exactness of the sadness, and not from some possibly abstracted or less specific place. They will be reporting about their sadness from within the sadness itself, just as the actual eating of the chocolate will yield a greater source for its description.

4th Step: Study The Experience

After contacting, assuring mindfulness and immersing the client in her or his experience, the final step is to have them mine the experience for its connections within the person, either to relevant information, or to linked experiences that are summoned by association.

Any experience that is personally or psychologically significant will be laden with details, nuances and meanings. An obsessive thought, for example, will cycle at a particular speed,

may seem to be happening on the right or left side of your head, or may, upon examination, reveal itself to be in the voice your 3rd grade teacher. If your palm is sitting face up on your leg, study may clarify whether it is reaching out to give, or waiting to receive something. Focusing on your excitement about a new job may surprise you by the way it stops abruptly at your belly, below which there is a kind of dark emptiness...

One function of this fourth accessing step is to bring such information into awareness. Not only is it an integral, if often unrealized, aspect of your experiences, but it begins to complete the picture of the world in which you live and operate. Something from 3rd grade is still shaping your current life. On a subtle level, you are hoping that someone will give you something important, even though you don't trust that can happen. You can't just celebrate life, for some murky void undermines your joy. Through accessing, the contact statement steered you towards this experience, the mindfulness gave you the inner frame to discern it, the immersion took you fully into the experience's file, and now the study phase lets you read what time has written and stored in those archives.

Again, some of the information may be *details* about the nuances of how you are organized: the *specific* location of somatic events (*it's on my right side, just below my shoulder...*); the subtle flavor of your sadness (*it's more wistful than grieving...*); or the intensity of an impulse (*it's like just the tiniest pulling back from you..*), to name just a few examples.

Equally necessary, some of the discovered information may be about *meanings*: the subjective, psychological significance an experience holds or expresses, its importance or relevance, the *why* beneath the *what*. You're keep your right hand on top of your left hand, because you need to hold your anger back. You don't finish your sentences while speaking, because you don't believe anyone is listening. You're anxious all the time, because your family was reckless and insensitive, and you need to stay alert to avoid otherwise inevitable disaster. Or that shallow breathing? Protection from letting in love and losing your freedom...

It's crucial to note that Hakomi's pursuit of meaning seeks natural revelations from *within* the immersed study of experience, and not from analytical inquiries *about* the experience. We don't typically ask the client, in conversational form, *Why do you think you're anxious?*, or *How come you breathe so shallowly?* The aspect of Self that might answer those questions is likely to be somewhat removed from or lacking access to the full psychological significance of the event. Such questions, in the abstract, often lead to guesses: *I think it's because...*; *Well, my astrologer says...*; or to partial understandings: *I don't want anyone to know ...* (while lurking underneath, we'll later discover, is, *I really need help...*).

As we work with a client, we typically move back and forth across what we call the Meaning/Experience Interface. We'll study a present or evoked experience for its details (*Notice exactly where that tension starts and stops... ; Is that voice angry or stern or just determined?*) and then shift over to evoking the experience's meaning (*From inside that tension, notice what it's doing for you...; As you hear that voice, how does it feel about you that makes it need to tell you this all the time?*). We then deliberately return to studying the experience itself, so that the work remains a continuous exploration of the experiential rather than just the interpretive realm: *Oh, so the tension is creating a wall between you and others. So take your time, really be mindful, really feel the tension and the need to have a*

wall, and let yourself notice if this wall is completely solid, or can you find places where something can get through?

If you examine the above examples, you'll notice that, in terms of technique, there are three main language structures that we use: contact statements, accessing directives, and what we call *accessing questions*. We have previously described contact statements (*You start to smile...*) and accessing directives (*Let that smile be in charge right now...*). Accessing questions are questions that can only be answered by immersing in and studying the present experience. The opposite of abstract analysis, accessing questions require the client to move more deeply into the present constellation of events to discover the embedded information. In fact, we will only pose such a question after we have established mindfulness and immersed the person in the experience. We can ask a miner on the surface where he thinks the gold will be found, but we won't know exactly where it is, or even if it is there at all, until we are down in the dirt, digging slowly and carefully, headlamp turned on bright. Accessing questions are among our most useful shovels, once we are inside the mine.

Here are some examples of accessing questions:

Where exactly in your back does this pain start?

How is your body participating in this sadness right now?

Which of the two feels bigger right now: your fear or your desire to speak?

What impulses show up when you talk about your brother this way?

As you turn your head, are you turning towards something or turning away from something?

All of these questions can only be answered by examining carefully the present experiential circumstances.

As important as gathering such information is to our understanding of our Selves and our Core Organization, the 4th step provides an even more essential function: to summon up related experiences. As we discussed in the chapter on character, experiences happen because a specific collection of brain cells (neurons) fire in concert with each other, activating thoughts, emotions, bodily events and so on. When they fire, a link develops among them, creating a network. Even after the firing ceases, this link, like a kind of channel dug between the cells, remains.

When we immerse in an experience, the links between that experience and others in that network slowly become activated in concert. The more we sink into an experience, the more we fire the neurons that create that experience. As those neurons become saturated, they send messages along those established channels to other linked neurons in the network. It's like pouring water into a system of channels; gradually, the flood moves from the original location to inundate another. The original neural activation begins to flood connected neural structures. As those linked neurons begin to fire, they generate further related but distinct experiences. In the above example, the person complaining about work automatically began to tighten her shoulders. So remaining with a particular experience in mindfulness causes related events to erupt. Staying with the way I point my finger while talking may evoke first a sense of determination, and then gradually a memory of trying to convince my dad about something. Submerging myself in my tendency to sigh may yield a feeling of collapse in my

chest, and then a great sense of hopelessness. One distinct, heavily invested experience, leads to the arousal of another, linked experience.

We call this process *unfolding*. Like a long ribbon of scarves in a magician's pocket, tugging on any one experience in a neural network gradually pulls all of them out – they unfold piece by piece until the entire system is revealed. Unfolding is the ultimate expression of faith in the client's organicity. We trust that keeping the client mindful and immersed in one corner of their being will gradually reveal their entire world. Because present experiences are organized by the core images and beliefs that we hold, a seemingly banal experience on the surface of awareness – your palm, say, turned up in your lap – is actually the gateway to a path that leads down into the deepest psychological wellsprings of your being.

As a 4th step, we promote this unfolding by directing the client deliberately towards allowance and unforced connection. Rather than seeking details (*Where in your body do you feel this? Notice if the voice is coming from inside or outside of you...*) or meanings (*What does turning away like this do for you? Study what's so important about keeping your eyes open?*), unfolding uses directives to encourage the whole network to wake up: *Go ahead and let whatever wants to happen next, just start to happen... Follow that feeling and let it take you where it wants... So as you hang out here, without trying to do anything else, notice whatever starts to come up all by itself...* We are using directives to encourage the awakening of all intertwined elements of the neural network, gradually spiraling from expressed conscious events down into unconscious core material.

In fact, all of the four steps in the 4-Step Accessing process serve this unfolding function. Contact steers you into an experience. Mindfulness lets you dwell upon it, further activating the neurons. Immersion with its intention of summoning the full experience directly seeks neural arousal, and then 4th Step directives to unfold finalize the process by enlisting the client's cooperation to just let the network do its thing.

The overall combination of a) unfolding and b) pursuing details and meanings allows Hakomi to be potent and comprehensive. In a typical sequence, I may patiently invite unfolding (after contacting, assuring mindfulness and immersing), and then explicitly explore details of what has unfolded. I will likely then return to unfolding, excavating, if you will, another corner of the psychic web, followed by more detail work on the new unfolded piece. Here's an example of such accessing:

Cl.: Every time she turns away, it drives me crazy.

Th.: It's really aggravating.

Cl.: Yeah, I just want to... [trails off]

Th.: [noticing fist forms in the left hand] Looks like your left hand has something to say about it.

Cl.: [looking at his fist] Huh, I didn't even realize I was doing that.

Th.: Why don't we pay some attention to it, and see what comes up.

Cl.: Ok...

Th.: Great. So your hand is making a fist. Go ahead and turn your attention inwards, let yourself start to move into that part of yourself that can just notice things... [seeing the deepening] Yeah, that's it, just settle into noticing yourself... and begin to notice your fist, just go ahead and really clamp your hand down like that, press your fingers into your palm, all that tension in your arm, really feel exactly the way all that feels...

Cl.: Hmm, it's really intense...

Th.: Yeah, you're really clamping on it. So just staying really focused, really paying careful attention, still holding your fist like this, really just being in this place where your fist is so tight, go ahead and let yourself notice anything at all that starts to happen here, all by itself – a thought, a feeling, something your hand wants to do, anything at all...

Cl.: [after several seconds] Huh, it's weird. I start to get this sense something bad is happening and I have to fight, I have to fight or I'll die or something. Something like that...

Th.: Yeah, so it gets even more intense, life or death. Urgent.

Cl.: Yeah, *urgent*...

Th.: So let's hang out here. Really staying aware, really focusing, feel into your hand and your arm, and this sense of needing to fight, it's urgent – and study carefully, what is the rest of your body doing?

Cl.: [nodding] Yeah, my jaw is tight, I'm starting to lean forward, just a tiny bit...

Th.: Great! Your jaw and your body are starting to get involved. So just let all that happen, your fist and your jaw and leaning forward, and paying very careful attention, go ahead and scan around in front of you, and see or feel what's out there – is there something, or someone or anything out there with you...

Cl.: [breath stops, slight shudder] Yeah.... something...

Th.: Take your time, feel your body, you know something. Feel into that space in front of you, and just let anything at all that wants to show itself to you just start to show itself...

Cl.: [long pause...] I see my mom. She's walking away... she's getting into the car... [starts to cry]

In this example, the therapist:

- **contacts** the client at each step (*you're really clamping; it gets even more intense*),
- returns several times to keeping the client in a **mindful** state of focus and awareness (*Go ahead and turn your attention inwards; really paying careful attention*)
- consistently directs the client to **immerse** in his experiences (*go ahead and really clamp your hand down; feel into...this sense of needing to fight...*)
- and then uses a combination of accessing directives and questions both to flesh out **details** and **meanings** (*what is the rest of your body doing?*) and also to encourage the **unfolding** of further material (*let anything at all that wants to show itself to you just start to show itself...*).

By following this basic accessing structure, the client moves readily from presenting narrative to core revelation.

In addition to using relatively simple accessing questions and directives by themselves to elicit details, meanings and unfolding in the 4th Step, Hakomi also works *experimentally* to evoke experience and the core in more sophisticated ways. Still using the first three steps precisely, the therapist can also create and offer what we call "little experiments." These provide situationally appropriate, momentary "adventures," through which the client's innate experiential structure will further emerge. Because most of our psychological learning has happened in relationship, and the client's neural networks are wired to respond to corresponding circumstances, the introduction by the therapist of resonant outside engagements and situations will evoke some aspect of the client's organization. In contrast

to basic unfolding, here, our own deliberate, more elaborate contribution helps evoke experience.

For example, if we invite someone who feels shame to notice her reaction to the words *You're a good person*, we can expect the shame to disagree and reply with doubt, argument, contraction, memories, etc. Reaching out a gentle hand to someone who feels alone in the world may elicit skepticism or distrust, may summon deep sobs of isolation and grief, or may engender deep gratitude for someone finally engaging them. Whatever the reaction, we have now evoked further experiences, details and meanings about the person's life and beliefs, and also unfolded additional elements. Little experiments are indeed powerful 4th steps.

Hakomi experiments are grounded in pure scientific method: be curious about the presenting phenomena, apply some variable to a situation, and observe objectively what arises. They require both astute mindfulness and full immersion in the experience. And they are an elaborate form of both accessing directives and accessing questions; you are directing the client to engage in some fabricated interaction, and asking them to notice and study the results. During accessing, the point of such experiments is not to provide nourishment or convince the client that things could be better, but simply to continue unpacking the complexity of the client's inner structure, until we can arrive at the core organizing material.

Such experiments can take many forms. They may be verbal, having the client react to something spoken (*I'll say the words your boss said to you*). They can be physical, supporting, restraining or offering some bodily experience (*Let's see what happens if I move my hand towards your heart*). They may be interactive and elaborate [*Going for a walk and deliberately evaluating for safety all the people we pass*], or they may be simple and internal (*Think about that dog, and see what happens*). Part of the art of Hakomi is to allow your own creativity to surface, in service to providing elegant and effective experiments that allow the client, during the 4th Step, and in this particular moment in this particular way, to unfold and study carefully the expressions of their being.

Some of these originally situationally-specific experiments proved so effective that they were tried again in other situations, were equally effective, and so have evolved into formalized techniques. Just as a variety of objects – rocks and sticks and bones – were at one time used to pound things that needed pounding, but eventually evolved into the now ubiquitous hammer, so a variety of experiments became standardized interventions, applicable to various common client situations.

Among these powerful experiments that have become standardized Hakomi techniques to evoke experience are the following:

- Probes: benign verbal statements or non-verbal actions, offered to the client in mindfulness, with the intention of noticing how they react to these offerings.
- Taking Over: a variety of interventions, physical and verbal, all based on doing something for the client that they are already partly or wholly doing themselves.
- Physicalizing: guiding a client to make physical and act out some cognitive experience.
- Referencing the Neutral: a pair of opposite techniques, individually called *Peace With Gravity* and *Exaggeration*, in which the client is invited to either minimally

enhance or diminish some way they are currently out of alignment with ideal physical or behavioral neutral, such as postural displacements or obsessive actions.

Because both impromptu situational experiments and these more formalized techniques are more complex than simple accessing questions or straightforward directives to unfold, they tend to evoke wider ranges of experiences simultaneously. Taking Over the way somebody physically holds herself back while she focuses on her desire to press forward will likely summon an intense combination of physical effort, strong emotion, verbal expression, the eruption of suppressed memories and clarity about long-held operational beliefs. Details emerge, networks unfold, history erupts. Accessing, in full.

So, to summarize, there are four kinds of 4th Step interventions Hakomi uses to evoke experiences and work towards the core. All use the groundwork of contact, mindfulness and immersion. Each provides essential elements that synergize with each other, both to allow and to pursue, to empower the client's own structure to reveal itself, and to permit the practitioner's wisdom and expertise to impact the process. Again, the four kinds of 4th Steps are:

1. We ask and direct to uncover details and nuances.
2. We search for embedded meanings.
3. We encourage innate, self-generated unfolding through patient self-association within the network.
4. We design and employ little experiments to evoke complex experiential constructs.

By embracing both *allowing* (ie, trust in the client's organicity and neural network self-activation) and *pursuing* (ie, the willingness to take charge, pursue and "pounce" on significant elements), Hakomi accessing maintains a balance between the Organicity and Unity Principles, and between the client's organic wisdom and the therapist's learned expertise.

The basic 4-Step formula and its component techniques yield powerful evocation and exploration of experience. However, simply evoking experiences does not guarantee an efficient path to arriving at the core. Often, simply applying the techniques, even in a skilled way, can lead to a kind of rambling, a serial awakening of related but not transparently connected incidents. A tension leads to an abstract thought, the thought to an image of a field, which in turn summons a different tension. When we add a sense of strategy to our unfoldings and evocations, we minimize the randomness, and optimize the capacity for focus.

Strategically, by understanding the way in which psychological networks are logically structured, we can follow that structure towards its origins. And the basic structure is this: core organizational beliefs and patterns develop around specific developmental tasks, or, in practical terms, around *themes*. These themes describe the life resources needed for a person to thrive: belonging, protection, support, autonomy, respect, inclusion, etc. When one of these fails to lodge fully or successfully enough within a person, we say they have an *issue* around that theme. Issues describe the fragmented relationship a person has to a theme: the skewed perceptual frames we hold, the distorted meanings we have constructed, and the life problems we endure around that theme. If I didn't get enough early support, I'll

have an issue with abandonment or nourishment. If my reasonable requests for help were met with scorn, i may have an issue with alienation or intimacy. And so on.

Issues are what clients typically present, they are feeling the pain of not being well resourced around some (often unrecognized) theme. Because the actual, necessary resources of the developmental learning are missing or incomplete, the person has had to create various experiential adaptations: postures, voice usage, breathing patterns, beliefs, etc. (This process is described in the chapter on character.) And these adaptations are the very experiences with which we work in our sessions.

It follows, then, that if we pursue the *issue* shaping the experiences, it will lead us to the *theme* around which the issue formed. Together, the experiences, issues and themes create a perceptual and behavioral *world* in which the client lives. This world is the some total neural network around which the client operates in distress and for which he or she has sought help. We can track this world back to where theme became issue, back to its core history, woundings, latent resources and needs, and begin the search for evolution, the purpose of the therapy. As such, we call this pursuit of the core via experiences, themes and issues an **Access Route**.

This process of interfacing and untangling experience, issue, theme and world – informed by various maps like character and the Sensitivity Cycle – that is, following an Access Route – provides the basic strategy for efficient accessing. To the power of the 4-Step techniques it adds the wisdom of making informed choices in how to manage the otherwise semi-chaotic evocation of experiences. Instead of just digging all over the place to find the gold, we use sophisticated knowledge of inner geology to focus our combined efforts on a particular path.

We make these choices in four ways:

- being curious about, tracking and deliberately filtering towards issue, theme and world
 - Hmm, she keeps avoiding my input...*
 - What is the pattern emerging here?*
 - What must it be like to have that thought all the time?*
- recognizing them: understanding what are typical issues and themes; having a personal and clinical database about how people are and what they do...
 - Hmm, he said he feels vulnerable...that rings a bell...*
 - Tightening up is often defensive; he must be protecting against something...*
- fishing for them: deliberately steering towards, evoking and naming issues, themes and worlds
 - Let yourself notice what all this tension is doing for you...*
 - Is there something you wish you could do besides protect yourself?*
 - So there's a certain world you live in where all this is necessary...*
- using them as context as you process various evoked experiences, both to keep from rambling and to spiral towards the core.

*Go ahead & protect yourself, have protective thoughts, let the tension in your hands protect you as much as you need to...
So notice what kind of a world you live in, where you need love, but nobody cares about you...*

As we proceed towards establishing a sense of world in which the client operates, we follow a particular sequence, deliberately shifting from level to deeper level: experience to issue to theme to world. For example, the following sequence, using contact statements and omitting all the necessary languaging, immersion and study in between, demonstrates a typical progression:

You haven't been feeling well...

You're noticing this is the third time in just a few months that you've been sick.

It's a real problem being sick a lot.

And yet, as you feel into it, there's something pleasurable about it.

It gets you lots of attention.

You get sad when you think about the issue of attention.

You know you should be loved just for being yourself.

So you live in this world where you have to get sick to get attention, when all you really want is just to be loved.

There's probably something familiar about this...

Yeah, you remember being little and your mom staying home from work when you had a fever...

To make these transitions, we specifically language our contact (in these example) or 4th steps in a focused direction. *It's a real problem being sick a lot* directs the client to the issue level: not just the event or particulars of the illnesses, but the way that having them impacts the client's life negatively; he has an issue with it. Similarly, *You know you should be loved just for being yourself* steers the client to consider the underlying theme of being attended to without having to do anything. And a statement tying them all together evokes the larger frame of a world: *So you live in this world where...* By working all four steps skillfully, we create a solid, mindfully immersed platform for study, on which we can then elegantly evoke, explore and ultimately resolve the issues and developmental themes that have corrupted the client's sense of Self and world.

To do all this, we need to sustain dual frameworks in both time and space as we work. In terms of time, we need to be fully located in the present moment, working carefully and lovingly with exactly what is here right now, and we also need to be scanning ahead, anticipating both where all this might be going, and how to nudge the process carefully and

lovingly in that direction. And all the while maintaining a complete, scientific openness to whatever arises, wherever things lead, in either time zone.

Spatially, we need to be able to access both horizontally and vertically. We need to stay with a present experience, going wide to extract every bit of relevant information, keeping the client carefully and lovingly immersed and involved with what is *here*. And we need to anticipate and then proceed towards other, *related* or *deeper* aspects of the network, sliding from thoughts to sensations, sensations to emotions, emotions to memories, or memories to core beliefs. We are working here now, and we also know there is an entire network, framed around themes and issues, creating an experiential world in which the client lives, and it is our job to evoke, engage and reveal *all* of that.

To access, we do all this. We use contact to focus, we use mindfulness to recognize, we use immersion to stabilize, all so that we may help the client to study experience, and in that study and revelation, to access the client's organizational core. When we have arrived at the core, our accessing is complete, and we move to the next stage of the Hakomi Method: Processing.