

## Transcription of Gene Gendlin Theory Video, for Celebrate Gene Month

I plan to start right in and talk theory. And come back later and come back later to what is philosophy, but I can't stand to do it. I'm a philosopher so I have to start by saying all theories are sometimes wrong. Like mothers, of course, too, are sometimes wrong. Perhaps one more thing I need to say is if you really believe a theory, then it's wrong. And we can come back to that. That has to do with how we use theory, what good is it, what good is it not...Lynn really said that already. She said that if you have many and they conflict, then you're in good shape. If the parents disagree then the child is free. All right...the first point I want to make has a name, and the name is Interaction First. So what does that mean? I'll come back to it. The question – the theoretical question is why does therapy work when it works? And that's the question, now, look what I do. First I get very specific about how I would like that question to go before I try to answer it. So, how I would like it to go is, *Why would it help anybody to say, to talk about, to express their trouble?* And this is, of course, what the person who doesn't know anything about therapy would ask you. Oh, whenever I get into those things, I just feel bad, so I go and I pay you to tell you all these things and that's just going to make me feel bad, isn't it? And the usual answer to that would be, *You're a doctor you're a wise guy, you're going to tell me some solutions that I can't think of.* And we all know that isn't quite true. So, the question is if the therapist or the listener, whoever that might be, is not going to give answers to the person's problems, because we don't really know any answers, what is going on such that it sometimes helps to do this. Right? It's probably the first question you have ever thought of. It can't be a question that you haven't thought about. Now, this person's going to come, they're going to tell me all their troubles, they're going to cry, they're going to complain, they're going to be stuck. And then they're going to say, Well, doctor, what do I do and then I'm not going to know what to do and there isn't anybody who's ever practiced who hasn't thought about that. And the question theoretically is, well what is supposed to work here? What is supposed to happen such that this paradox works? Such that going into and feeling all over again all these bad things will make you better. What is that? What happens there? Theoretically, my answer – don't forget that all theories are sometimes wrong—my answer is that a human being is not a box full of content—whether you call them experiences or feelings or dynamic circuits or however you want to think about what I call the content, a human being is not the content. A human being *is* interaction. Notice that I'm violating the grammar by saying that. I'm supposed to say *A human being is in interaction*, because the word interaction is so structured grammatically that there's supposed to be an A and then a B and then they interact. And instead of that I'm saying something strange. I'm saying, now, I think we *are* interactions. I think living bodies are interactions with the air and the ground and the food and other species members. I think we *are* interactions. And from that point of view, if you look at a person, if you're looking at me, you can see that I'm interaction. You can see I've got these eyes and these hands these and feet on the ground and these sexual organs and this inhaling, exhaling and sweating out and taking in – you see it? I *am* interaction. And not just on the physical level. I'm interaction with other people. Nine months with my mother before I was even born. And then everybody else. The people in my so-called head, which really further down than just my head...all those people from the past and my present life and you people here. And then I am also a special kind of interaction with myself. So, while I'm talking, that's going on more below, but when I stop, right

away, I talk to myself. I say, *Hmm, do you think you said it? Do you think that made sense to them? Do they look like they're, you know...so...that, too, is interaction.*

Now, when I think of a person as being interaction, then, of course, it makes sense that in interacting with a new person they're going to *be* different, right? Now, they taught us that we're supposed to be an integrated, individual and that it's really too bad we're so different with different people, but I don't think anybody ever got past there. If you sense yourself in different versions, how different you are with different people. And what different things they would say about you, too, from that difference. It isn't so much that different friends of mine have different perspectives, I'm different with them. They're all telling you more or less some mix of the truth, and their own, of course. So, my job, then, as a therapist is to be the kind of interaction that we would expect to make the person better, do you follow me? Now the puzzle, the paradox, is solved. We understand now that it isn't that the person's going to lay out all their bad things and as a result of that, they'll be better. Rather, the person's going to lay out all their bad things *to me. Or with me. Or at me.* And even if I don't say anything, it's a very different thing to do that with another person. Of course, then next we want to ask what kind of person and so on, and we'll get to that, but with each person, really, it's different. And it's *very* different from doing it alone. In the first way of saying it, it seems like a puzzle – the person's going to say the same thing to you that they've said to themselves and then they'll pay you and go home. What is that? But actually, the content is not the person. The content is different even if it sounds the same. Even if the person says all the same words that they've said to themselves alone in their room, it's different to say them to you. It's a different living process. And that's where the possibility of change exists. And you all know that, but theoretically speaking, I'm doing something important. I'm setting up concepts that are different than the usual concepts. I'm saying a person *is* an interaction, on many levels, physical, interpersonal and with themselves and with you. And I'm saying, secondly, that the content is a different living process even if it sounds the same. And being, myself, a focusing person and having focusing partnerships...I can't get along with less than two of them...a focusing partnership, you probably know, is a certain time on the phone, when we share time. And I get 25 minutes and she gets 25 minutes and that usually comes, for me, rather later in the day, so that I've already done my own focusing by myself. And I do pretty well because focusing is also an interaction and so when I do that, something different happens and I get...if I start in a bad place, I dig myself out...I get better. And then I have my partnership time. And so as a research person I brag about this mysteriously. I say I have a wonderful idea, research project, because I have a research subject who's willing to go to 5,000 trials, which you never can find somebody willing to do, otherwise, you know? And it's also controlled, so it's the same person on the same day in the same temperature, having the same diet in the same season – everything is the same, except that first I have them do it alone and with focusing, even, he knows, and then I have him do it in the partnership and he practically always, not always, but practically always gets further in the partnership because it's a different way of being alive with the same thing and things become possible there that weren't possible when he did it alone. And you all know this, but theoretically it's important to say that from your practice you know that human beings really are not the stuff that most theories tell you. I don't care whether it's Freudian dynamics or Jungian archetypes or behavior circuits or what in the world ever you think a person is, they're not that. Now what I say they are, well they're also not that because it's a theory. I'm saying they're interaction. And why is that valuable? Because then I can say next something that again changes how we think about it. I'm saying the same content is a totally different living process. A totally different physiological process – you can measure it that way if you want to. A totally different process of being alive even though it can, at least in the beginning, have the very same words, the very same context the very same feelings, if you want, so-called, because these feelings happen inside of the interaction and they also, when the person is alone, happen inside the kind of interaction that that person has with themselves. So the type

of interaction that I typically have with myself when I look at certain things is that I blame myself and I feel sort of constricted and I feel like, shame on me, I should have been able to fix this forty years ago. Well, in that kind of attitudinal interaction, I don't usually do very well, right? The content doesn't ... and then if I can get to focusing attitudes and if I can catch myself and say now wait, wait, wait –this is not it at all. You have to stand over here where everything is murky and I wait for something fresh to come out of there. The very attitude of waiting for something fresh gets me out of all that bad interaction with myself ... and something comes and I'm surprised and sort of interested then I can make my interaction with myself be a different kind of living process then the one I typically start with, you following me? And then when I get my focusing partner, then again it's a completely different interaction. And once in a while she's too quiet and I say *Wait I'm losing you say something. Tell me, what's the weather over there?* (She lives in a different city.) I need to be different in the interaction. And I have a tendency, if I don't hear back and forth, I have a tendency to get autistic again like there's nobody there. On the other hand, if she says too much about the content, then we have what I call transference, which is that I get mad or I get upset or I get stuck or I do something or other and then we have to work on that side of it. Go in and see what happened there to me. So, I don't want her to say much but I need her to say something pretty regularly so that I don't lose track. All this is familiar to you. I know. But theoretically my two points might not be so familiar. A human being *is* an interaction, not the content. Secondly, this same content is a completely different psychological and psychological and personal and electrical and every other thing we are living process – a different living process because it is a different interaction. So, for example, in recent years it's become understood that just repeating your trauma is retraumatizing. Not everybody knows this yet, but a lot of people are nodding. It's necessary to be sure if we're going to relive the trauma, that we're reliving it in a wider, thicker present inter—as, not in—as a wider, thicker present interaction. That's when it's going to heal. If it's just repeating and there is no relational thickness, then it's retraumatizing. That's the same point which I'm theoretically explaining. And incidentally I'm saying *What is theory good for?* Well, theory is very good—what you said too, to support you in what you're doing...but what marks theory for me is that when I lay it out, in front of me in these terms, then I get to say *OH! That explains it!* And that's what I'm trying to say. And you know this, but I'm explaining it and that has a certain value, in fact has five or six values, because then you can go on from there and you can explain other things and you can do things and build things in the world. Theory is very precious. I'm explaining it. At the same time I've said all theories are at least partly wrong so the very experience of explaining, you need to have with you...yeah, but probably doesn't explain everything. Or probably the minute I have another thought or two I'll see that it didn't explain that or something like that. But the explaining is valuable. This is good for me to emphasize. If you're looking for me to tell you something new about practice, I'm not doing that. I know you know this (what I said). But I'm explaining what you already knew. I'm explaining by saying human beings *are* interaction and furthermore, the same content as a different interaction is a different happening. It's a different existence. It's a different life happening. And therefore a person can change when they are being a new interaction. Now I'm going to make a third point. I'm going to say, when two people are interacting in a room together, or otherwise, there is only one interaction, even though there are two people. Because the interaction is first. And the people can be derived from the interaction. So if you say, well, who or what will you being there with this person. Say my client goes home and I'm sort of not satisfied and I'm investigating what happened and I'm saying, *Well, who were you? And what were you?* I was whatever I was in that interaction. And so was my client. We are derivable – of course not in every way and not in my past and all the kinds of things...but we are derivable from the interaction...there's only one interaction and two people. So if you interview the two people, they'll tell you violently different things, but they're talking *from* the same interaction. There's

only one interaction. So when Carl Rogers put up his theory of 3 conditions: empathy, genuineness and positive regard, he added a condition, he said, the client must perceive those conditions. And I was in therapy at the time and I argued with him. I said that's not true, the client does not have to perceive the conditions. The client can be absolutely clear that the therapist is not positive about the client and does not care about him and is not genuine and still the therapy will work if the therapist is actually positively attuned and genuine and empathetic. And at that time I didn't have the theory. I only had—but it took me a year and a half before I ever perceived these conditions. How did I get there in my therapy? I was absolutely sure that this nice middle class mid-century lovely man couldn't possibly understand me...this monstrous thing that I was. So if you'd interviewed me then I would have said no, none of these conditions obtained. In retrospect I know they were there. There has to be a way for somebody to get from, too. I'm saying the interaction is much more basic than the perception the two people have of each other. If you want to know what the interaction is, you have to sense it. You have to feel it. You have to say to yourself, *What's going on with me here, now?* Then you can feel it and then if it's unsound you can find where it's unsound. *Oh, I'm getting all tight, oh, I'm withdrawing, oh, I wish I weren't here.* Well, that's not the kind of interaction that's going to help anybody. Oh, so well, why do you wish you weren't here? You know, what's happening? Oh, you're scared. Oh, this or that...we all do that again. And that's interacting with ourselves to get whole so we can ... so I'm asserting that *if* you can make the kind of interaction that's going on, the kind from which you can expect that somebody would be better, then you're doing the job. Okay, then on the practice we can talk later, but you're all sophisticated about this.

Now I want to make a second theoretical point. I thought I would have questions in between but now I think I'll got through because otherwise it'll take too long. My second point is that experience is a carrying forward. The first point was called Interaction First. My second point is called Carrying Forward. Now, Carrying Forward is a theoretical term that I made up, which turns out to be extremely useful. Almost everybody that ever hears it starts using it because almost everything in life is neither the same, the same, the same, the same, the same nor exactly different. Most things have to do with carrying forward and how the carrying forward works. I use carrying forward for when life moves forward. So if I say to myself, *Well—and this is what I am doing—I say to myself, okay, you wanted to tell them about carrying forward, now did you do that?* Then I get a distinct sense that yes, as far as it's gone, it carries forward about, it carries your feeling about Carrying Forward, forward. Do you follow me? Because I started to talk and when we speak, except in very rare times when we write out what we're going to say, when we speak, we speak directly from the body, have you noticed that? You open your mouth and the words come out. And if they don't come, you're stuck because we speak directly. So I'm speaking directly from my sense that, *Oh, I'm going to tell them about carrying forward.* Yeah, I've done this many times before so I can rely on...that something will come. But then when I hear myself say it, then I say, *Do you think you told them?* And it says hmmm...up to here it's okay but the point isn't through yet. Okay, so I come back and I say, alright now, the point...but see, I don't know that it's coming. I have to let it come. The point is that what will carry something forward that you feel or think or are or live – what will carry it forward is not really known in advance. And since we know a lot about ourselves, we often think we do know. So, for instance, last week one of my clients said, "I'm afraid to call him" she wants a date with him, but he didn't call her back, I'm afraid to call him and I don't know why, because, you know, I say to myself, *What would you lose if you call him?* And of course, it's true: she wouldn't lose anything if she called him. But I said, well, that's what you and I think because I do, too. I always put myself in there, if it's true. I said, well you and I think you wouldn't lose anything if you called him, but let's use the same ... quietly and come here and say again, *What would you lose if you called him?* And then it didn't take very long and she said, "It would hurt my pride."

That's the difference. To say you wouldn't lose anything does not carry forward. It looks like it would. You know, it's a reasonable thing. It's like, look here, you know, you're betting a dollar, you're going to get a dollar back, you don't lose anything – come on, let's go...no, down here it's different. Carrying forward—and again, you know this—I'm giving you a concept for it. You know when you've said something back to your client that you've carried them forward, or when you say something to your client and you know that you didn't, right? Now, you can still be right, you can try again, you can say it three times but if it never carries forward, don't. Instead of that, say, *Well what do you have there, where I'm pointing?* Because so often we say very useful, very good things to people and they're totally useless and wrong because we don't invite them to go there, where we're pointing, and say, *Well what do you have there?* Because what is always there is a texture, or whatever you want to call it, a massive experience, an ongoing, living process that is always more and more ordered and more complicated than anything you can ever say or think. So if you say something that's absolutely right, it may still take five or six (what I call) Carrying Forward steps and then the person may be able to use what you've said, but it'll still be really different. Because after five or steps in there, the most you're going to feel is, *Oh, I was in the right direction. Oh, yeah, I knew it would have to be something like that.* But what comes will be so much more specific and have their taste to it and it'll be all different and nothing that you could have ever said yourself and yet you can often have the satisfaction, *Oh, I was looking in the right direction.* Or the other half of the time you're all wrong totally. The world turns and turns again and you're in this totally different place, but Carrying Forward steps is what I want to make a concept for. And these are life process steps. Carrying forward is life moving forward. And you can feel that. It's like exhaling when you're holding your breath or it's like inhaling when you haven't breathed. It's like eating when you're hungry. It's like going to the bathroom when you need to. It has continuity to it that you don't make up. And we all know this. Everyone knows this but in the territory of situations and other people and ourselves and all our trouble there, we don't seem to know this, you know? Nobody ever says to themselves, *Well, this is healthy food so I think today I'll just eat instead of going to the bathroom.* It doesn't occur to anybody. Because we know that this carries forward this way and that carries forward that way and ... right? Okay, now there are many subtleties to look in there ... but you know all this. I am making a theoretical concept to say life is not just static. It carries forward. And when it gets stuck, it wants to carry forward. I call it implies a Carrying Forward step that hasn't happened yet. And maybe it'll never happen, but it pushes for it, wants it, implies it, hints at it. It makes you all kinds of messes because it needs some kind of Carrying Forward there and that hasn't come...because when I'm focusing with myself, I get to a certain place—I'm all clear, okay, now I can work, goodbye. But my time with my partner is 25 minutes and I get there in 10 minutes. What am I going to do with all this time? And it always makes me laugh. It's like, well that's the biggest function of a therapist is to keep the person stuck there for the whole 50 minutes when they would otherwise go away, you know? And so then there, being there and not knowing what to say and after a while you sort of—at least with me people get used to the fact that it's okay, you know, and I say you're there and you don't know what to say and I'm here and that's very important that you're there and I'm here and that's wonderful that you don't know what to say. I know you might be very uncomfortable but that's still ...they'll get used to it. Then they can be there and then the edge where it needs to carry forward is here. And they speak from there and they get stuck. And then I very often make my wonderful suggestion or proposal or whatever it is which comes from good experience and I know it's a real thing and once in a while things actually move from it. Usually their face tightens up and I say, *Well, yeah, that's what I think but what do you actually have there?* And then we make room for that and it breathes and then these Carrying Forward steps come. And in the beginning they're very characteristic in that they don't usually—it wouldn't make a good Hollywood film—they don't usually come—*Oh, this is the solution!* It comes as, Oh, it's a little different than what I said, I

don't think I'm exactly ashamed, I think I'm like that, I don't have a word for it, but it's more like...or a little transference steps come there that you don't really understand, or whatever—funny steps that you don't brag about, about five or six of those and then finally something comes that you could write an article about. Oh, that's how it really is, oh yeah, yeah. Oh, that's, you know, and I'm happy and the person still looks completely sunk and so I say, Oh, that doesn't help enough or something, yeah, that's right, I'm...and you know all this, too. But those are Carrying Forward steps. And so what is a person? A person is an interaction on many levels and a person is a Carrying Forward process. A life process. And that's what life is. And everything I'm saying about Carrying Forward applies to dogs and cats and horses and plants and every living thing carries itself forward and if it gets stuck, it's right there. And if you can water the damn plant within three months it'll still come because it's right there. It's ready to go. And that's what human organisms are.

And my third theoretical point is what I call Implicit Intricacy. Some people have to have Latin terms for these things. These are very important because nobody believes you in the theoretical world unless you have arcane terms. So please learn Carrying Forward and Implicit Intricacy and Interaction First. Because those words right away don't make any sense so people can say *What is that?* But, again, you know...there may be something I have to add a little there...but the living process, the experiencing process is, even in plants and animals, is an Implicit Intricacy. Anything we say or think about it, any scientific theory about it, any theory, anything we ever say is wrong, if you think that that's what it is. If you think that it may be helpful to think about it this way then the theory can be right and can help a lot. If you think that living is actually made up out of these verbal conceptual units, then you're wrong before you ever even start to say what the theory is. Are you following me? Well, we all know that, too because we've all experienced with yourself and other people that sometimes a theory is really wonderful and helps and then the next minute it's all wrong and...because life is not made up of theoretical units. It's not made up of any units, actually. It's a carrying forward interaction. And so it's always implicitly more intricate, implicitly more complex, implicitly more interesting.

Sometimes I beg my client, *Let's be interested in you, you know. I know the situation is urgent. I know you've got to stop this and find another way...I understand, but let's be interested in you, too, at least.* So that we can have some joy in finding how interesting and intricate and complicated and unexpected and surprising and unpredictable this really is once it opens up. I don't think I would say all that to a client ... maybe I would. But I hope that we can be interested because even though right now it looks exactly like type A diagnostic this and that, if it's going to be allowed to breathe, within five minutes it's going to be different. It's going to be more complicated...yeah, that's true, but...and it's going to have all these shades ... you know all that...I call that an Implicit Intricacy.

If you theoretically assert that that's what human beings are, that's what pathology is, that's what all the dynamics are, that's what the archetypes are, that's what the behavior circuits are, I don't care what you name it, underneath it's an Implicit Intricacy. And if you theoretically assert this, then all your practice will have a support to it. This way most people have a theory here then when you go to practice if you tape record them, there's hardly any relationship. Did you know that? Yeah, you do know that because you surely know at least one theory and God knows you're not this machine that does that theory. Right? Once in a while, the theory will help. So, my third part wants to be...what life—a person, a living thing—all these words really refer to, what's really going on is an implicit intricacy. But don't forget it's an Implicit Intricacy that *wants* to be carried forward. It's an Implicit Intricacy that *wants* to be carried forward and it is already an interaction. It's at least partly and most importantly an interaction with you if you're working with, well, either way. If you're working with yourself or if you're working with other people, you need to look at what is the interaction that is going on. How am I treating myself (if

you're working on something)? Who is this person focusing, this spider in the middle of this spider web focusing, saying, *Well wait a minute, that's not going to get me any different.* Let me first go in there where it isn't just that, you know, where I can be in touch with the murky ongoingness. And, of course, if I'm working with somebody...*Is this the right kind of interaction?* And half the time it's not, but it allows me to then move in that direction. Oh, I say, I see. I forgot again. Or, oh, I see ... the person is still answering what I said—here I thought I got them back on their own track but they're still explaining to me why I'm not right five minutes ago. Oh, God, we don't want that, you know? Don't want my person spending all that time answering something that I already know wasn't helpful. So then I come back and I say, now wait, wait, you're still answering me. I know that wasn't right – what do you actually have there? Why they think the interaction is important...you're still telling me I was wrong when I know I was all right. Because so often it's more important for my client to get strong then to find out whatever it is. So if they're giving me a hard time that's joyful. Because they're getting strong, you know. And, you know, they may give me a hard time that at first I feel terrible. So I used to call this the Oof, Oh phenomenon. When the client first attacks you, you say Oof! And then you slowly recover and come out and say, oh my client is getting stronger. I must be doing something right! Then you can respond. And the fact that you first oof, oh that's fine. That's your private ... that's okay. So those are my three points. My three points are Interaction First—that that's what we really are on all these levels. And secondly that we're a Carrying Forward process. Life wants to move forward. And you can rely there on that's why positive steps come. That's why they come. I'm explaining why they come. They come because life is like that. Life is a forward moving living process. So you cut yourself, you clean it, you put disinfectant on it, you put a bandage on it, but *it* heals. In there are all these weird little intricate, implicitly intricate capillaries and it knows how to hook the right capillary up to the right capillary and make a new one and do all that...we don't know how to do that. It does that. We might have to hold it together so it can do that or we might have to clean it at least or whatever. But, living things tend to stay alive. So this is ... abstract principle of self-preservation or something but no, it's not an abstract principle. It's what is actually happening. We're actually inhaling and exhaling. When the pressure on your butt gets too bad with these bad chairs you shift a little so the blood can go. That's all happening without you even paying attention to it. So, that's what life is. And that's why when we provide a certain kind of interaction, the person gets different in the interaction, but not just different—my second point is—they get better. Life can move again. And we can then use this framework to put details in there. We can say ... we don't know where exactly the person is stuck but if we can provide a certain kind of interaction, it will exactly provide the carrying forward, even though we don't know what it is. Because it's a life carrying forward interaction. It's, oh, I see you, that's good and oh, and then if I ...but you know all that. Okay. Now, I think, all I want to add to that is that was theory.