

Re: Ashlar Evolution, Equine Therapy

As someone who has experienced a lot of therapy before - both personally and within my professional life, I have grown very used to the world of words and using words to help me process what is going on for me in my life. Re-framing and processing my past through story has been part of my journey for a while and it is central to my life. Sometimes though, the words spin and get very fast, I can forget to breathe and just notice how I am and how my body and mind connect to each other. I can forget to feel my feet on the ground. Everything just gets too busy and exhausting.

At times, I become aware of feeling thirsty for the kind of earthy natural connection I had with myself in childhood, but sometimes it is hard to go about experiencing this in the “heady” world I find myself in. I’ve had a pretty heavy upbringing of religion and being a “good girl” which has left its marks... and lots of work challenges came up for me recently too which were distressing and battering. When the opportunity arose to spend some time working with Sarah and the horses and experiencing some equine therapy, I was hopeful of what it might bring – whilst recognising that it would be to risk putting my precious words away for a time. My hope was to enter into an experience of myself that was far less tangible, specific and concrete – but which would both bring me back to myself and a natural/intuitive self, as well as bringing some gifts for me in terms of how I might look to my future.

In my first session I chose to work on the work experiences that had left me feeling raw and wobbly. What happened in the session? Here the wordy me is not quite sure what to say! Practically, at Sarah’s gentle invitation I stood and “felt” the horses. I moved. They moved. Sarah asked how I felt and what I felt I wanted. I desperately wanted to groom one of them. So I did. And it was lovely. And close. And so very tender. My heart rate slowed. I leaned against the horse and the horse leaned back. We sighed deeply together and I could have fallen asleep!! I left in a daze of deep relaxation.

Therapeutically, what happened? Well - all I can say is that, by following what my body said and what I felt I wanted to do with this beautiful, powerful creature, I ended up in an embrace with Jazz that filled me up. I felt utterly relaxed and almost trance-like. It reminded me of being a child again: where your whole small body is somehow being supported and held by someone benign and safe and so much bigger than yourself. You are swallowed up by large, strong arms. It is a somatic feeling that (I realise now) I have held somewhere and craved deeply for such a long time. Just the tonic after all the experience of attack I had felt in my professional life.

In a subsequent session, I decided to “walk through” my life with the other horse Tia. Sarah helped me to set up the paddock with different objects/obstacles laid out on the floor that I chose to allocate: to my childhood, to the process of growing up, as well as something I felt might be “death/ending” and something that felt like the decisions and directions I had ahead of me. Different obstacles were laid in different parts of the paddock and the horse and I were invited to take our time walking through them. What happened in this session? Again, it is hard to describe this in a concrete way... but as I slowly focused on myself and my story, both horses interacted with me in a way that allowed me to make a great deal of meaning, both from my past and the interpretations I could draw from it – but also from the choices I have ahead of me. They were my meanings, but I felt I was nudged exactly where I needed nudging! As I thought things and focussed on my feelings and body, it felt that the horses responded. For example, my claustrophobic box of childhood was literally kicked away by the horse! Later, I was surprised by what happened when (after asking the

question several times) I decided to let go of my own will/volition with my life-question: “Do I do this future quickly or slowly?” and said: “Show me” and relaxed tension on the halter. I let Tia move freely – and she quickly walked away from the place we were working and across to my allocated “death/ending” place. Whoah! This felt goose-bumpy to say the least – as, in that moment, I realised there were things I will need to do FIRST, before I get to following my plans and deciding if I move to a specific future slowly or at a pace. I have to end things properly before I can move forwards. I have to let some things die. That moment shifted a lot of my thinking now in terms of how I approach the things immediately before me.

So what is my appraisal of equine therapy, having experienced it? Despite my upbringing (where pre-destination, the devil and ghosts were all encouraged phenomenon), I do believe my adult self to be a very rational and solid person. I like facts. I like what I can touch. I like to take responsibility for myself and not pass this over to others, deity, animal or otherwise. I still love my words and the telling of my story. However, it is clear to me that the process of being supported by Sarah to look at aspects of myself/my story, with the gentle, graceful and **deeply** nurturing souls of such wonderful equine companions has been something that I am unlikely to forget. I do believe that my thoughts are my thoughts, my feelings my own. But in the eyes of these magnificent creatures, I could feel empathy and gentleness in a place without any dialogue. In what happened, it makes sense to me that they may have felt some of my process, my emotions and my needs and responded to me in that.

More than anything though, I feel deeply blessed to have shared that intimate cuddle and to know that I found such a strong sense of peace and connectedness in a beautiful sigh that a horse and I both breathed together.

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