

Craig Stevens Clinic Hampsley Hollow Wiltshire UK

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Thoughts on Balance, Geometry and Seat Training by Jules McInnes

Two more packed days with Craig, and for the first time I was organising the whole thing with help from my dear friends. The preparation work was fairly gruelling but the upside was I got time to chew the fat with Craig in between times and we were able to discuss issues that were orbiting my head, which gave me a focus on balance and the seat and the criticisms that arose from some observers who seemed to be expecting a certain physical pattern from the riders present.

My second lesson turned out to be mostly a passenger lesson, where I *just* had to sit and relax while Craig worked in hand with my horse towards suppling the neck both in both the vertical and horizontal planes. While I was trying to stay relaxed as my horse figured out what was required of him, my mind went to the phrase 'stay in line with the centre of the earth' to make it easier for Jones. The thoughts that have arisen from this phrase is that it is not just a physical thing, although we humans can understand the physical requirement reasonably easily I think, it is a matter of mind and spirit *and* the physical..in fact everything that is *me* has to have the vision of the centre of the earth and full alignment with it, then the horse stops having to compensate for me in anyway and I approach that '0' effect on the horse that Craig asks us to aspire to (zero impact of the rider on the horse through weight and force).

The point about it being more than physical is so critical because the '0' place is only attainable when we let go of all our negative patterns such as fear - fear of falling, fear of humiliation, fear of being deceived and anticipatory fear of what will happen next or 'catastrophe thinking'... 'what if' type thoughts - all these manifestations cause a myriad of tensions in a physical body, some tiny, like breath changes, some big like white knuckles and tight bums!.

The spirit is charged in this situation with allowing and trusting and there is so much at stake- allowing another human being to take complete control, (argh..what can we do with our hands?!) trusting the horse will comply favourably, letting the universe guide and take care of us, believing in our own ability and acknowledging that 'tension' is in fact futile. So then, this is what we must work towards when we engage with the horse and develop our seat, we must get out of the physical and into total, all encompassing balance, where balance is the alignment of our body and our total being with the centre of the earth, it matters not externally what this manifests as or looks like and for each of us this will be so different, when we watch our fellow humans ride we must not *look* for symmetry and balance through position but touch our own spirit so that we might sense the balance of body and spirit in others. This is the sense of calm and relaxation we know lives within some human beings we meet and many animals, this is the ego-less surrender of all our terrors so that we might be centaurs and leave our own agendas behind in order to meld with the spirit and body of the horse.

Of course with this sacred alignment carried fully into all aspects of our lives, we could generate our own health and happiness and have excess then to help others. When we touch this place we crave it and seek it until it can be maintained, this is one part of the discipline of riding and a great gift of the horse to us.

Working dynamically with the seat, on the lunge, in other words, playing with the physical body on the edge of our comfort zone allows us to begin to peel away the terrors of the mind and emotions, releasing the spirit to flow 'to and from' the centre of the earth out into the universe and back again.

During my lesson with Craig I went in and out of the glorious state I seek and there were no demons to spoil it, did I have a perfect seat?..Visually I am sure the answer is no...Did I stay at 0? Well it was near enough not to get in the way of the work Craig and Jones were executing and actually I enjoyed the ride! but I guess at this point there will be no rosettes and most judgements on 'seat' tends to be based on a visual approximation of the human idea of what is right, really though I am indifferent to how others see me, 'marks out of ten' are for someone who needs another's approval to be assured of what is right, my horse is the only one who deserves my reverence and Craig, our teacher is our guide through the dark nights.