
HAKOMI AND THE HUNT SEAT EQUESTRIAN

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CADY ERICKSON IS AN ACCOMPLISHED EQUESTRIAN WHO HAS RIDDEN IN MANY SHOWING AND HUNTER COMPETITIONS IN OREGON. SHE HAS COMPLETED THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE OF HAKOMI TRAINING, AND UTILIZES THE WORK BOTH IN HER CASEWORK WITH SENIOR AND DISABLED PERSONS, AND IN HER MASSAGE PRACTICE AT INTEGRATIVE THERAPIES IN EUGENE, OREGON.

The principles, data base, and techniques of Hakomi can fit not only a therapeutic model, but non-therapeutic models as well. In this paper, it will be demonstrated how Hakomi overlaps specifically with the equestrian model. Techniques common to Hakomi include tracking, safety, contact, probes, and deepening. Let's take these techniques on a trip to the stables and see what we find.

From the very moment you first approach your horse, you begin to track. You check his overall attitude (nervous, sullen, etc.), his stance, his body movements, and such details as appearance, reflected, for example, in his coat or hooves. You continue tracking as you begin to establish safety with your horse. Soft words, a slow, non-violent approach, and perhaps an outstretched palm for sniffing. If your horse feels safe enough, you will move right into contact.

Slowly touching your horse (tracking all the while), gives you a sense of what is up for him in the moment. Is there muscle soreness or any bruising? Is he alert and oriented, or unresponsive, or skitterish? If safety has not been established at this point, you will know by the response of your horse when you make contact--does he flinch, is he curious, or does he whirl and kick?

Tracking, contact, and safety continue throughout the process of saddling your horse in preparation to ride. Once you are in the saddle, you do what equestrians call "picking up the contact," i.e., you take the reins into your hands.

It is at this time that the equestrian experience can begin to deepen. As you pick

up your contact, you track the response. Your first probe will be based upon this response and the other information that you have gathered so far. Imagine that as you mount your horse, he sidesteps away from you. Your probe, based upon this response, might then be specific distribution of your weight in the saddle, accompanied by a slight pressure from your right leg. You would then track to see how he reorganizes around this new information. As with any probe, you first ask your horse to prepare, put out the probe, then track and make contact with the response.

True to Hakomi, the experience with your horse continues to deepen throughout your work together. The level of consciousness begins to change from one of ordinary consciousness to mindfulness. Usual thoughts, habitual patterns, and distractions all fade, as concentration and inner focus, the hallmarks of the deepening process, increases. You and your horse become an integral team. As you proceed together, from walking, to trotting, to cantering, you're deepening the combined experience. You might further deepen by including an indirect outside rein, some lateral flexion, a two-track ("tracking" also being an equestrian term), and perhaps a fence--first one, then two, continuing to deepen in height and/or complexity. Distinctions being the two of you are transcended as you become compassionate spirits, working together on your potential for growth and learning.

The process described above highlights the Hakomi perspective of "parts into whole". All of the separate parts of your work with the horse fit into one experience. Work "on the flat," striding, impulsion, bending,

etc., all begin to flow into an integrated whole that spells harmony and communication.

However, for you and your horse to move into this functioning unit, your focus must remain relaxed. If you start to become tense about where the process is going, or feel that you have to do it for the horse, or to the horse, you may go blank, misjudge a probe, or have a breakdown in communication. The results could merely increase ineffectiveness, or they could spell disaster. You need to remind yourself to keep a wide focus, to remain calm and open, and to know that it is alright to become stuck. If you feel the need for a new track, or the need to clear up some confusion, you can always jump out of the system, or do housekeeping. This might mean returning to an earlier probe, or simply remembering to make contact and track the response. Work with your horse (or client), as a team member, and you both will have success.

Thus far, it has been mostly the techniques of Hakomi that have been presented. Let us take a look now at how the principles of Hakomi apply to the equestrian.

The unity principle and its implications to the equestrian were presented in the discussion of parts into wholes--"all aspects and components are inseparable from the whole and do not exist in isolation" (as stated in the Hakomi Manual). Mindfulness is reflected in one's constant attention to present experience. You and the horse must both be in the moment--you cannot be thinking about what is for dinner with a four-foot fence two strides ahead!

Nonviolence is reflected by the equestrian in a gentle style which produces the best results. You ease into the saddle when mounting, you never slap down on your horse's back after a jump, you avoid jabbing him in the mouth with the reins, you keep a loose lower back that moves with him when he moves, etc.

If you happen to meet with resistance and try to fight it, instead of accepting what is, you will only encounter his defense barrier and create more resistance. For

example, imagine that your horse starts to back up whenever you want to trot forward. If your response is to dig your spurs into his side in anger, you will likely create, and thus meet, resistance in the form of a buck, flattened ears, or perhaps a quick "360." However, if you take over the motion, support the defense system, and back up with your contact, your horse will become aware of how he is organizing and, therefore, you will have a likelier chance to break his habitual pattern. He will tire of backing up, realize the ineffectiveness of his response, and reorganize around that new information. In this manner, the principle of organicity is exemplified, i.e., the horse is another living system that is capable of transcending itself in the face of changing information.

Lastly, the principle of mind-body holism is evident throughout your time with your horse in your focus of attention as to how probes (both verbal and nonverbal) are experienced on a body level in your horse.

The sensitivity cycle is another facet of Hakomi that is easily accessed by the equestrian. Let's take a quick run through the cycle, beginning with the first phase of insight. You are approaching a 3'4" vertical fence. You remember to remain calm with the "background noise" lowered. You experience clarity regarding angle, distance, organization, and collection. Once you have gathered enough information to act, you move into the response phase. You implement your ideas by jumping the fence. Having jumped the fence safely, precisely, and effectively, you feel pleased with doing such a good job, and thus you pass into the satisfaction phase of the cycle. You then feel done with that particular fence and thus finish the cycle with the completion phase. At this point, you look ahead to the next fence and the cycle repeats. Note that this same cycle can happen on a larger scale also; for example, one could consider a course of fences in its entirety.

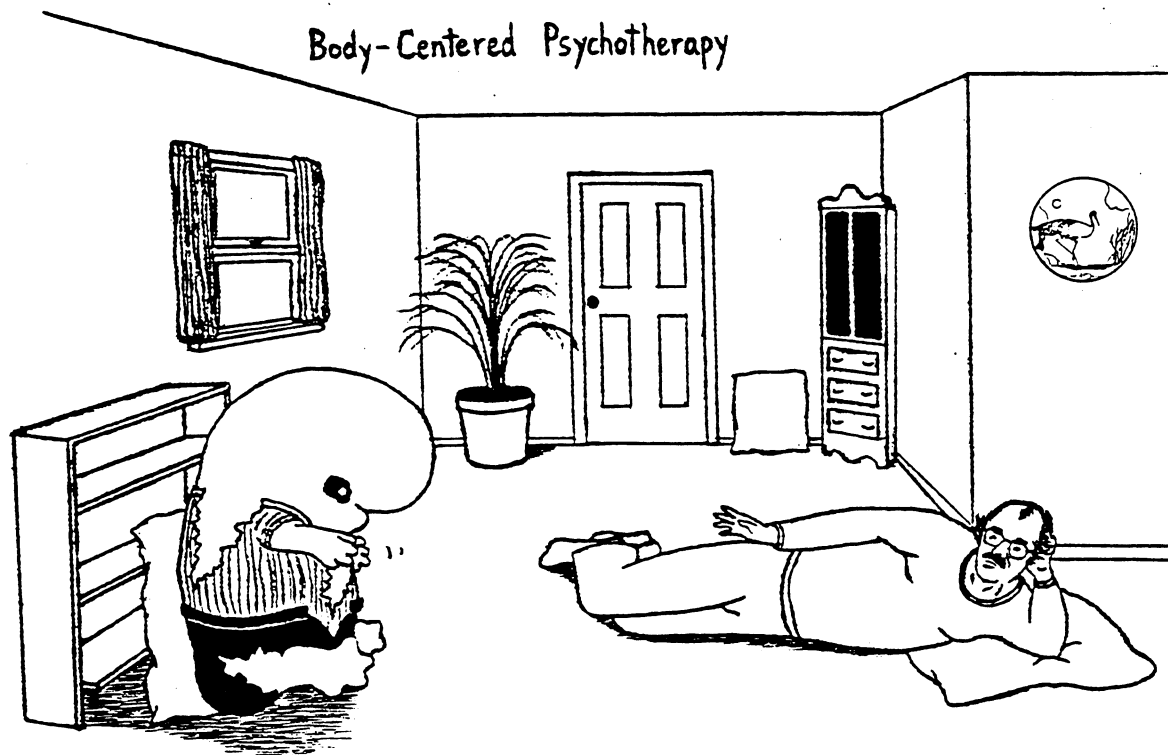
Before we end our journey, and leave the stables behind, let us briefly consider the Hakomi character types. It is a largely unresearched, unsubstantiated assertion, but

it would seem that horses assume character types as well as people. The form of a horse can reflect personality as much as does the body of a person. As a general rule of thumb, and so as not to box a horse into any specific category, some correlations might run as follows: Thoroughbreds are Expressive/Clinging; Draft horses are Tough/Generous; Ponies are Dependent/Endearing; Arabians are Sensitive/Creative; Wild Mustangs are Self Reliant; and Quarterhorses are Burdened/Enduring.

In sum, human systems function similarly to animal systems--they select information from their environment that they then assimilate and organize in a particular manner. And it is in this way that any two self-organizing systems can both learn from, and grow with, one another in a therapeutic atmosphere.

WHAT WE OBSERVE IS NOT NATURE ITSELF,
BUT NATURE EXPOSED TO OUR METHOD OF
QUESTIONING.

W. HEISENBERG
"PHYSICS AND PHILOSOPHY"



"I think you've gone deep enough now, George George?"

A small signature or scribble.