

Dani's Magical Mystery Tour

by
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*“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field.
I will meet you there. When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language,
even the phrase each other doesn't make any sense.”*

Rumi

Horses are flight animals embodying power, freedom, and wisdom. When humans first climbed onto horses, they became free of their earthbound lives and were able to travel vast distances into new territories. Those who share a special bond with horses know how deeply they expand a life's journey. To Native Americans and other indigenous cultures, horses enable shamans to fly into the darkness of the great void and find the light. My connection with horses was forever changed when I met Dani, a beautiful Morgan mare in Santa Cruz, California, two years ago.

I was at a riding stable in Santa Cruz doing acupuncture sessions with horses. The ride I took with Dani was not on her back, but on what keeps unfolding as a magical mystery tour of healing energy. There have been times in the last two years when I've told this story and thought I knew what happened. Yet in the days that I've been getting ready to write it down, I realize that I don't really know anything for sure, anything we could say is “knowing.” What I do know is that I was given a gift that day about the nature of healing work, about our deep connection to and the compassion of animals, and about letting go of our need to know.

It was near the end of the afternoon, and I had just finished my last acupuncture session with a spirited Arabian named Ramul. As I was walking through the stable, one of the horse trainers asked if I might look in on Dani, who had an abscess on her flank. When I got to her stall, I stood in awe of her beauty. She was a rich brown, exquisite Morgan standing 14 hands in flawless confirmation, silky hair and mane, muscular body, straight clear-boned legs, lovely head, and an intelligent and gentle demeanor. Only the bright, radiant eyes of the spirited Morgan horse were absent, as she was clearly in pain.

After approaching and sensing that I had her permission to work with her, I lightly stroked her Bladder and Gall Bladder meridians and worked the Ting Points on the coronary bands of her legs to harmonize all of the meridians. Given the pain she was in, I wanted to keep the session brief. I worked with acupuncture points for calming, including Governing Vessel 20 (“Hundred Meeting Place”), Governing Vessel 24 (“Spirit Court”), Pericardium 6 (“Inner Pass”), and Heart 7 (“Spirit Gate”). For shock, I brought my attention to Governing Vessel 26 (“Human Center”), the tips of her ears, and the San

Jiao around the base of her ears. For pain relief, I attended to Large Intestine 4 and 11 (“Hoku Point” and “Crooked Pond”) and Liver 3 (“Great Rushing”). I concluded by placing one hand lightly on her heart and holding my other hand off-the-body over the abscess on her flank, bringing my attention to working with Qigong. My hope was that I had given her all the best of what I knew.

I spent my time off over the weekend on the Big Sur coast enjoying the sun and ocean. During that time, my thoughts often turned to Dani, especially to how she held herself. She exuded such dignity and nobility, a proud spirit even in pain. When I returned to the stables on Monday afternoon, I was told that Dani's abscess had been scraped and cleaned out. When I got to her stall, she was standing in the back, and I could see the bandages on her flank. She surprised me by walking up to the front of the stall and putting her head out over the webbed gate to greet me. Little did I know that she was going to take me for a ride into the mystery.

When I reached out to touch the side of her neck, she shook her head violently. Perhaps the invasiveness of scraping out the abscess had made her sensitive to being touched in any way. That's alright, I thought, I can just bring my hand close, off-the-body, to impart some energy. She shook me away again. Yet it seemed clear that she wanted me to be there with her. So I quietly stood there beside her as she leaned over the gate. Then it came to me that I didn't have to use my hands at all, that I could simply emanate energy to her. When I started she shook again, even though I had not moved a muscle. It was evident that she felt everything I was doing. I was amazed. So...she didn't want me to touch her, didn't want me to work off the body, or impart energy in any way—but she liked me standing there with her. Okay, Dani, I'm snug with that!

To be sure I was playing the good boy, I put my hands in my front pants pockets and stood very still. After a few minutes, Dani started doing what horses do when releasing energy. First, the lips start to quiver, then the head starts a little shaking back and forth, and then the head starts lowering toward the ground where there's a lot of releasing. I've been taught not to look while this releasing is going on, because horses are such proud animals. I stood there while she did her “work,” as it were, for over an hour. Every ten or 15 minutes she would do another release. I kept mindful of staying out of it, hands firmly tucked away in my pockets, only being there with her. Ah, yes, that's what she wanted: only my presence, no fixing. That's so wonderful, I thought. It validates that all the technique in the world is not as important as your stillness and presence as another being's healing process unfolds. What a great teaching she was giving me. And there was more to come.

At one point I noticed that I could feel a lot of heat in the area below my navel, in the lower dantian—but I was trying not to pay attention to anything. Then Dani leaned her head toward me and put her nose against me where the heat was. And it dissipated. Then we were back to her process, with me standing in presence again. At another point, I could feel heat, lots of it, around my heart. And, again, Dani brought her head over and leaned it against my chest. Again, when she pulled away, the heat was gone. You have to know here that in my attitude of non-doing, I was adamant about not

thinking or interpreting. My part of the bargain was to stay out of it as far as I could. All I gave myself was, “Well, that’s really amazing, but don’t go anywhere with that thought.”

What I didn’t know is that we were moving together toward a crescendo. Near the end of our time together, I slowly became aware that my pocketed hands were really hot—that fiery, Reiki-hands feeling. But again, the bargain was to stay out. So I told myself to let the hands alone. Do not under any circumstance take them out of their pockets. Then I realized that my hands were already in the act of taking themselves out. Feeling how hot they were, I said to myself, “Don’t do anything with your hands. Just hold them against your pants, and don’t, for God’s sake, even contemplate turning the palms toward Dani.”

The next thing I knew, I was looking down at my hands as the palms were turning outward and moving toward Dani. Now I was simply watching. I sensed that this was supposed to happen. My hands, palms up, reached over the webbing and went under Dani’s chest toward her heart, though not touching her. And then it happened. Dani’s whole body jumped off the ground, flew backward the length of her body. I watched as she put her head down and shook her head furiously, as if releasing. When she was done, she walked slowly but deliberately back to the gate, and leaned her forehead toward my head. The light was back in her eyes. I brought my forehead to hers, felt her warmth; and then she slowly pulled away and walked to the back of her stall. Whatever happened was complete. I sensed that it was time to walk away as well.

Here’s the short version of the experience I’ve had until now: That I got a real lesson in doing energy work. That sometimes it’s about being active, as in my first encounter with Dani. It was all good. At other times it’s about not being active at all, not even off-the-body or emitting energy as in Qigong or Reiki distance healing. That sometimes it’s simply about being present, a witness, while the animal or person does his or her work. To simply be there with them, that’s all that is asked for. Dani was doing her work, doing whatever needed to be done.

As I said, that explanation worked for most of the two years since I was with Dani. Yet as I ruminated on the experience in preparation for writing about it, I started to question my knowing of what really happened. When you write, you want to pin down the truth. And now I distrust my explanation. My official story doesn’t ring all that true anymore. The way I had it was that I was the acupressure guy and Dani was the “client.” In that interpretation, it was all about her doing her work and my role was to hold a space for her. Maybe on one level all of that is true. But my sense now is that there was more, something bigger happened in the experience—and that we were in it deeply together. What was the heat in my lower abdomen and around my heart all about? Was I in sympathy with her energy or was it the other way around? Is compassion—suffering with another—ever one-sided? Who was healing whom? Was the first session about me working with Dani, and the second session her working with me? Can we ever truly be separate from another being? Maybe this is the reason the ancient healing masters didn’t accept “why” questions. Maybe at the level of the mind we don’t get to know what happens on deeper, shamanic levels. Maybe there is only the experience of it.

The truth is that I don't care about knowing what really happened in a cognitive sense or about the mind's relentless search for meaning. As Rumi said, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I will meet you there." What I feel is that Dani and I met in the field, and our lives were intertwined for a precious moment in that stable. That's enough to know. And enough to know that the mystery of it is beautiful.

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