

THE LEARNING CIRCLE: NOTES, THOUGHTS & PROJECTS

I. Nunces of the trot

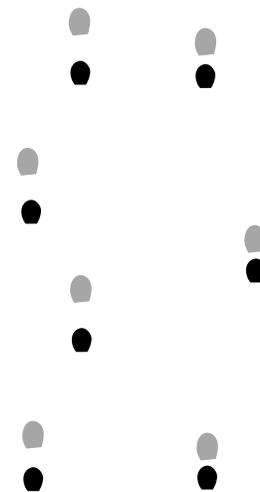
In learning gaits, the advancing tracking student needs to look at nuances in the track pattern as well as soil movement (pressure releases, scuffing, plumes, etc.). A wonderful study subject is the horse. You will find differences not only among similar speeds of the same gait (slow, medium or fast trot for example), but also among varying “personalities” or postures within one speed.

Consider a slow trot. Diagram A shows the placement of tracks in a slow trot, almost the same pattern as a relaxed, “peppy” trot with the same horse illustrated in B, a slightly faster speed. While the placement of hind vs. front tracks is the same, the stride length is much different. (With this particular horse, the right stride was always 2-8% longer than the left stride, no matter what speed of walk or trot.) In our Animal Movement workshop, we discovered the appearance of the tracks as well as the track pattern varied with a ridden vs. riderless horse, and with posture (head up and weight back vs. relaxed and extended, for example), among other factors. You need to do your own dirt time for this: find an equestrian center or ranch where you can watch horses being trained or exercised.

Take a look at this short video from our last Animal Movement workshop, a slow trot. Study the horse’s posture and notice how the tracks would look. You’re on your way to visualize nuances in the trot!

An excellent reference for understanding gaits is Susan Harris, *Horse Gaits, Balance and Movement*. New York, Macmillan, 1993.

***Our next Animal Movement workshop is May -15, 2011, and is open to Basic Tracking graduates or those with similar training.***



*A (left): slow trot , left stride 27.75 in.  
B (right): relaxed peppy trot, left stride 40.25 in.  
Hind tracks are darker*



***Download slow trot video  
(about 3-4 minutes)***

## II. The Dance of Purpose (Reprinted from *Dirt Times*, Spring 1996)

When I was about eight, I fantasized about being Superman like most every boy in those times. Past the time I played cowboy with a two-capgun holster, and before I became mature enough to play U.S. Marine with paraphernalia from the surplus store, Superman was the hero of choice. Everyone needs a superhero at that age, boys at least.

Superman filled a great emotional need. I can still recall the surge of power I felt when I watched the TV introduction about defending truth, justice, faster than a speeding bullet and all that. For a little boy, the taste of fantasized power is part of growing up. And what a won□  
are.

But without a purpose, what good is the zap-pow-bang power? To a kinetically charged kid, power without something to use it on is very frustrating. So the other great thing about Superman was that he was always right. There were always enemies to be found and never a question about who was right and wrong.

So I grew up with a kid's ultimate shallow fantasy: to have power and purpose without responsibility or awareness. I daresay many other boys had the same.

At some point, were we in a tribal culture still, we boys would have been initiated into the awareness that power and purpose are deeper and more involved concepts and that they have some connection to personal responsibility and sacrifice for the family, and the people.

But having none of that except what might accidentally filter down from role models around us, I, like many others, floundered for years trying to discover what the "P" words really were. I believe that all of us inherently seek power, that is, a feeling of strength, accomplishment, competence or whatever you want to call it (not the "power" over others, which is a distortion). If we're lucky we stumble onto some things we do pretty well, even get a job doing them if we are very lucky. At least get the feeling now and then that we are good at something: manifesting our very individual power.

And I believe we also inherently seek purpose, but this is a harder nut to crack. Once we start the job and family grind, our busy life seems to be purpose enough! Let me put it this way. Here I am, an adult out looking for my Purpose and a voice inside me says, "Hey, a purpose! Thanks for the idea! Let me just get back to you on that. As soon as I finish this little project I have going right now - my life. Seriously, let me just pay a few bills, deal with this family crisis, change careers, feed the cat, and I'll have plenty of free time. Oh, let me get to next year's Christmas shopping. Then I would be just overjoyed to take on a Purpose."



*Gray fox skull*

Yet many people intuitively know that what we do in our sphere of activity with family and job, all-consuming as it is, nevertheless leaves something missing. We see this questioning often among our students. Maybe it's because, in this technological age, we are reminded each day that it is impossible to *really* escape from global churning. It's hard to accept that the ugly things occurring around us are part of our lives, but they are and we want to do something about them. And so we are nudged toward responding in some way between doing nothing and taking on everything. What this middle place is, is your individual purpose.

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would seem the purpose-question wouldn't have been a big deal. But it was. What if I had chosen something to do which wasn't right? Would I have to change jobs? Would I have to take on extra burdens? If so where on Earth could I find the time and energy?

I chose to seek answers in a Vision Quest a number of years ago, found some of them there and more of them just being aware what my gut told me. The specific process isn't so important and each person can find the right time and way to seek the answer to the big P-question. However I do think that it's important to do it in the context of solitude in nature. In a social context there are plenty of

voices which say do what's right for someone else, or don't do anything. To hear the do-what's-right-for-you voice you need to get away, by yourself in a place where voices are strong and clear. And it doesn't matter one bit whose voices you believe they are.

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purpose beyond the self isn't an extra burden, it is just discovering your own true gifts. What a relief! Second, one's purpose does not necessarily have anything to do with one's job! Third, if your purpose is true, you discover you are not alone in carrying it out. And finally, once discovered, your purpose grows and changes as you carry it out, in a dance of learning and doing. -- J.L.

***We have several related programs upcoming in this vein: Intuitive and Personal Skills workshop June 3-5, and the Solo Spiritual Quest July 31-August 6. Quest applications are due June 15, 2011. Contact us for details.***