

MEL *Leming*
CONNECTING with HORSES
& riding with *Synchronicity*



RIDING WITH *Synchronicity*

Ground Work - *having a conversation through your thoughts, tools & body language*

To watch a real horseman play, work with or simply handle a horse on the ground brings to mind words like quietness, flow, politeness, harmony, smoothness, synchronicity, softness and rhythm. I would even go as far to say at times that it can look and feel magical because the connection between horse and human is so close. This doesn't have to take years to develop between a horse and human, it can happen in seconds. I have seen top horsemen walk into a pen with horses that they have never handled before and within minutes or even seconds that horse is 'hooked' on them.

The clearest examples that I have of this are on two occasions of watching Ronnie Willis. Here is one of those occasions. It was with a young yearling that had had very little handling. Ronnie just had a piece of string, quite a long piece of cotton twine. This string had no strength as such, but would just be a physical connection between him and the horse. The horse had no halter on and the twine was just wrapped around the base of the neck and various other parts of the body. Inside the round pen there was such quietness. A real stillness, this was what made it seem magical and it was as if the whole scene happened in slow motion. Within





Demonstrations like these led me to start looking deeper at what I was doing with horses. I had a chance to have a conversation with Ronnie about this.

He asked me how many “feels” did I think there were with a horse. I wasn’t sure where he was going or what he meant exactly – but I replied “ you could use steady pressure or rhythmic pressure” Now I have to come to a point where I don’t even like to think of them as pressure but as ‘feels’ or

‘communications’. After I replied, Ronnie just sat there looking at me and said “and what else... ? ” I hesitated and then said “well may be there is an energetic feel or a spiritual feel” He smiled and said “Now you’re talkin’, now you and I are on the same page”. I didn’t know what to say or do next but I knew that if a down to earth

a very short time this horse was mentally, emotionally and physically connected to Ronnie. They moved as one. Not doing any fancy tricks, just simply moving around the pen as the young horse got confident and curious about interacting with a human being. There was so much softness in this young horse, not a single ounce of brace in the horse’s mind, emotions or body. As I watched, it was almost like I could see the energetic lines of communication between their beings, between the horse’s mind and the human’s mind, between the horse’s eyes and the human’s eyes.



Photos by Coco

For me it was an unforgettable demonstration of horsemanship. What an amazing experience for this young horse of how good being with a human could feel. I realized that this was what real horsemanship was. It was not about a bunch of tricks or maneuvers but about getting a connection so deep that it was almost beyond the physical. I could see that with a connection like this anything could be possible. It was truly beautiful to watch.

cowboy, rancher and horseman who could ‘get the job done’ so to speak, thought that this spiritual connection was real, then it was. So that was all I needed to know to begin on a path of discovering it. That conversation was no ‘come by chance’ event and it was



only about two weeks later that Ronnie parted from this life. Ronnie continues to be a great mentor.

The qualities of horsemanship described above are all exhibited when a person has 'feel' for a horse. It is the opposite of harshness in movements, harshness in verbal dialogue and harshness in thoughts. It comes from a person's heart and soul.

I discovered the difference in having a quality of feel that horses liked or not was directly related to the conversation you were having in your head.

I am not only talking about communication through mental telepathy although our thoughts and probably even more so our intentions are conveyed energetically and do play a very big role whether we like to recognise it or not. And I must state here that just because horses can know what we want simply through our thoughts, that by no means implies that they should or

will be obedient to what we want for many different reasons. And in many people their thoughts and intentions are so confused and contradictory to each other that horses just ignore them or they listen to the stronger intention which comes from the heart and the body which is opposing what a person thinks they want. For example, a scared rider - in their head they are wanting their horse to go

so they kick, squeeze, flap their reins or whatever, but deep in their bodies and hearts and this could be subconscious, they are too scared to go and the horse picks upon this.

The physical feel is equally as important as the energetic feel. And this physical feel has to be congruent with our thoughts.

Incongruence between our minds, hearts and the physical feel or communication that we use through our bodies and tools confuses, frustrates and leads our horses to mistrust us.





For example, if you had a small child who was afraid of going into the swimming pool scolding them would not build their confidence or desire. They might get in if they were more scared of you than the water but that would lead to the relationship between you being pretty bad. Rather you would encourage and support them, saying “It’s OK. You can do it. Just give it a try. I’ll hold your hand and you could just dip your big toe in and see what it feels like”.

If you had an unconfident horse you would want to have a similar type conversation going through your head as you used your ropes, tools and body language to communicate your idea and encourage that horse.

Your conversation and intention goes through your body, rope and the extension of your arm commonly referred to as a stick or whip however I prefer not to use those words as

they carry a negative feel. Through your conversation you would just ‘feel

and do’ exactly what you needed

to. You wouldn’t even have to

mentally think about what you

were doing, you would stay at

the appropriate phase for the

right length of time and know

when to increase to encourage

more. You would feel exactly how

much energy you needed from the subtlest

lift or wiggle up and down of your tools to

whatever it took to get your message across.

I think you will be surprised when you realize

just how subtle it all can be.

If the horse is not afraid and is not responding how you would like the conversation can be encouraging and supportive by being playful or provocative with your words and of course your body must mirror this: “Let’s move your hindquarters” and you would be signaling with your thoughts, eyes, and body language and if close enough possibly touching the hair with your finger tips. Remember that horses are so sensitive they can feel a fly land on their hair.

When working with horses I like to think about the conversation I am having in my head.

However that conversation goes is how the message will be conveyed through my body language and through my tools physically to the horse whether I am on the ground or riding. I want that conversation to be the politest conversation possible.

I like to think of offering ideas or inviting a horse to do something.

This difference in attitude makes all the difference to us, so why wouldn’t it be the same for the horse. We don’t respond softly and willingly to someone who is abrupt, demanding or commanding.

If we are robotic and mechanical in our heads because we are thinking too much about the techniques and getting them right, instead of feeling the horse and the flow of all the movements, the feel to the horse is abrupt, disjointed and uncoordinated. When the feel is not good for the horse they become resentful, confused, frustrated, resistant or even angry.

I like to think of the increase in the level of ‘feel’, energy used or phases used to get a horse to respond as encouragement and support rather than reinforcement or punishment.

“When working with horses I like to think about the conversation I am having in my head”

If he didn't move the conversation might go to "I asked you to move your hindquarters and if you haven't moved them by the time I have snuck around to your tail I am going to tag you". You would be quietly perhaps almost sneakily arcing around to get in behind his tail. The power of the intention here is strong and stimulates their curiosity and they are going to move because they are physically going to try and keep their eyes on you to keep track of you. Sometimes they think they are pretty clever and they track you with their eyes and ears other times a horse may just ignore you so "Got ya – you were way to slow" and you tag them on the tail or hind legs but so soft that it feels good to them, like a game, not like they are in trouble. If two kids were playing tag and one was a bit of a bully so every time he tagged the other he gave him a shove that knocked him off balance, how long do you think the other kid is going to want to keep playing with the bully?

“This difference in attitude makes all the difference to us, so why wouldn't it be the same for the horse.”

sharply to get their attention but you need to find ways of using your tools that do not lead to resentment like a playful "Got ya" -there is a lot of life in that. It is about creating energy and life to get the feet to move, so this has to be the feel. The opposite of the dull "thwak" that is often heard as a stick hits the ground or a horse – there is no life in that. For my horses using an extension of the arm means 'let's play harder, faster and with more energy'.

To give you more ideas, here are some examples of conversations: For instance we want to ask the horse to back up. He is not close enough to physically touch him to ask him to move so we are going to use energy rhythmically to reinforce the thought we requested. We know that wiggling the rope is a technique that will get horses to back away from us so we can either robotically go through motions and increases in stages of pressure that we have learned or we can use our conversation to guide us.



You can tag a horse so soft that it feels good and playful to them. Often they just need to know that you can touch them. Sometimes there might be occasions to tag them more

In your head you can just talk to the horse like they are a person instead of using one word commands or going through mechanical words in your head. You can use the same technique but have a different conversation in your head and how the techniques feel to the horse will be completely different. The conversation while always being the politest possible needs to be as strong and as sure as it needs to be, to get your message across. So it will vary greatly depending upon the situation. To get a horse to do a simple thing like back up a few steps the conversation could vary from:- "Hey mate (get their attention), I just need you to back up a little bit"- so you would look at them, stand up straighter and then the rope



would be wiggling a little bit as you send this intention down the line. Sending an intention down the line has a very different feel and communication to the horse than aimlessly wiggling the rope.

If you know the horse knows but he chose not to respond the conversation might then go “ Hey, I ‘m talking to you and it is pretty important that you back up” and you would send this stronger energy / intention in waves down the rope. If there is still no response “Come on. You need to move your feet” and you would put whatever energy was necessary into your rope that would match this conversation and upon the horses response you can say “thanks, that’s all I wanted” and completely relax your body and the rope. In the beginning it may help you to have this conversation out loud. Conversations like this will teach you feel. You will know when to increase the phases,

you will know exactly how much energy to use and when. You will be putting intention into your tools rather than mechanically going through techniques.

“You will be putting intention into your tools rather than mechanically going through techniques”

If a horse was acting hysterical and you needed him to stop and backup right now so you could get him to stop and think, your conversation might need to be “Get back. Get back right now” and you need to send that much intention down the rope. Sometimes horses can get so out of control in their emotions that you need to get them physically under control right now. And if that is what needs to be done your conversation needs to be that strong because a horse that is that out of control is dangerous to you and himself in those times.

If a horse was afraid to back up because something is scary behind him the



There are two more points I would like to mention here. I will only talk briefly about them but that by no means indicates that they are not important. The first is about slowing down. Do the techniques you know in slow motion and I mean REALLY slow. You are the one in slow motion not the horse, the horse can just be natural. You will discover feel and smoothness through going very slowly. Everything is slow, raising your arm with the lead rope to lead, move slow and walk slow.

The other point to consider is that horses don't understand why we keep sending them away from us. They want to be interactive and connected to us. For sure you need to be able to get the horse out of your space at times or get him to move away to get him in position to do something like load on a trailer, so just ask them to move away when you need to. Backing them up a lot, loungeing and sending them out on the circle and leaving then out there feels to them like you are continually telling them to go away. So once they know how to do it leave them alone.

conversation might be “ Just feel your way back” and reward him (release) when he ‘thinks’ about stepping back. When you start rewarding horse’s thoughts then you will be starting to impress your horse. They won’t be able to believe that you have actually tuned into their thinking. This is how you will gain their respect. If you are looking for what they are thinking you will easily recognize it in the body through their body posture, eyes, ears and muscle tension etc.

Horses are looking for certainty in us. If you just start talking with them and notice that I didn’t say talk ‘to’ them because a conversation is a two way deal, you will begin to get more sure of what is going on and how to be.

“You will discover feel and smoothness through going very slowly”

If there is a real purpose and importantly that purpose also needs to be meaningful to the horse then doing things on the ground is good.

Some examples of a purpose may be to develop confidence, as physical therapy, teaching them something they need to know or if you are inexperienced or unconfident you may need to do it for yourself to learn communication skills, just don’t over do any of it. Some horses love playing on the ground, some horses prefer being ridden as that can feel more interactive, like you are going somewhere together. So listen to your horse as you have your conversation.



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